



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 31 July 2024

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60th Parliament

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Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

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Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

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

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁶ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 31 July 2024

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

*Bills***Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Ending Political Corruption) Bill 2024***Introduction*

Tim READ (Brunswick) (09:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 in relation to the meaning of 'corrupt conduct' and for other purposes.

I will speak to the motion now. We need to introduce this bill now because the Premier has just referred CFMEU corruption to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. IBAC will be better able to investigate this current referral if we quickly pass this bill, which amends the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, which currently only defines corrupt conduct as a relevant offence defined as an indictable offence under the act: a serious criminal offence as well as common law offences – attempting to pervert the course of justice, bribery of a public official, perverting the course of justice and misconduct in public office. These common law offences are considered to be poorly defined, poorly understood and rarely prosecuted, and that is why we need to attend to this immediately, because this bill removes the requirement for corrupt conduct to constitute a relevant or common law offence, giving IBAC similar powers to the federal national anti-corruption commission.

In August last year this bill was passed by the Legislative Council and subsequently defeated here in the Assembly, so it must be introduced here now because of the recent referral to IBAC from the Premier and the need for IBAC to be able to look beyond the currently narrowly defined offences in its search for corruption.

A number of scandals over the past decade point to the need in Victoria for a commission able to investigate corruption that may fall short of a criminal offence, IBAC's operations Daintree and Clara being just two examples. The allegations regarding the CFMEU that have surfaced recently demonstrate the urgency of this motion to give IBAC the teeth required to reassure Victorians that maladministration and improper use of resources do not extend to public projects.

We know that so much public corruption, misconduct and bad behaviour does not necessarily involve the committing of a criminal offence. We have seen again in the recent CFMEU allegations a lot of appalling conduct that at the same time is not illegal. We need agencies that are able to investigate and call out the sort of corruption that is often labelled 'grey corruption' or 'soft corruption'. Unless this house addresses the issue this week by passing this bill, IBAC will be unable to look at the misuse of power or resources that may be legal but would disappoint Victorians, who expect public funds to be used wisely and to give us the best possible return. Corruption exists when improper influence ensures that this does not occur.

If we look in more detail for example at Operation Daintree, the findings of IBAC were mostly matters of misuse of resources that would not have satisfied the definition of 'corrupt conduct'. We were fortunate that IBAC suspected corrupt conduct before it launched its investigation – in other words, it suspected illegality. In a situation like the current CFMEU allegations a large amount of what has been alleged is not strictly illegal, although all of us would agree it is improper, and that is why now is the right time to introduce this bill to the Legislative Assembly so that we can rectify our mistake of defeating the bill last year and send it back to the upper house, which has already passed the bill.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:37): I rise to oppose this motion and in doing so make reference to a number of statements that have been made over the past couple of weeks, both by the Premier and of course by the government. What we unfortunately see time and time again when we come into this place from the Greens political party, at each and every opportunity, are consistent and persistent stunts. What this government is focused on, both today and for the entirety of the time that we have the great responsibility and indeed the great privilege to be in government, is to ensure that we refer these matters in an appropriate way to the appropriate authorities. What we see is in many ways both disappointing and incredible I think for those Victorians who are rightfully entitled to see the very best of representation –

Katie Hall interjected.

Josh BULL: and the very best, member for Footscray, of democracy. For those over that side of the house to come into this place and effectively play politics time and time again, each and every day, is frankly shameful and disgraceful. What we are focused on as a strong, sound, cohesive unit and team is of course making sure –

A member interjected.

Josh BULL: I am very pleased the member over there is in such a good mood this morning – bright and spritely.

Members interjecting.

Josh BULL: A very cohesive outfit. What we will do, unlike the Greens political party, is ensure that we represent our communities and deal in the practical reality of delivering. For those in that particular party, as was said by a former member of this place, it is always appropriate for us in government to make those announcements to ensure that processes are followed and that integrity bodies that exist for a reason are used, and those matters have been referred to in an entirely appropriate way by the Premier. What we see, whether it is in question time or whether it is within the usual business of the house, is a group of people who would much prefer to operate in the hallways of Instagram or of Facebook – of all these places – but we on this side of the house deal with reality, and the reality is making sure that we make the appropriate decisions at the appropriate time and have the opportunity to represent each and every Victorian who is indeed entitled to representation that deals with reality. Rather than the fight, we are interested in the fix. That of course was not my line.

Katie Hall interjected.

Josh BULL: It was a former member of this house, member for Footscray. We are not interested in the commentary, we are interested in the reality. I know that all members on this side of the house each and every day within their electorates – including on a Friday – make sure that they work incredibly hard to represent their local communities. I know for the member for Macedon, the Leader of the House, often we will be together on a Friday doing various events across both of our electorates. It is important that we work hard for our local communities. The comments, the decisions and the matters that have been referred to by the Premier are an appropriate course of action. Each and every time these matters come before us this government will continue to represent our community and the people of Victoria in a strong, cohesive, sound fashion. We will do that today and every single other day.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:42): I would like to speak to why it is important that this Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Ending Political Corruption) Bill 2024 to bring our anti-corruption bodies up to scratch is important to pass this week specifically, and speak to this motion to bring it on immediately. Victorians have every right to expect that their government and government-funded projects are free from corruption and managed well in the public interest, not in the interests of a few or in the interests of vested interests. As we have seen with quite a number of scandals in Victoria over the last few years, this has not always happened. The CFMEU

issue is just one of a number of scandals which have occurred recently, and it is why the allegations regarding the CFMEU and kickbacks or potentially corrupt and criminal behaviour are very serious and concerning and do warrant investigation. Workers everywhere deserve fair pay and conditions, they deserve fair workplaces and they deserve strong representation and effective, functioning unions, and it is everyday workers who suffer when this does not occur.

I note that the member for Sunbury opposite talked about a number of investigations and inquiries that are underway into this in Victoria. There are referrals, as I understand it, to police and to IBAC, which we are discussing today, and an independent inquiry. I am sure the public, like us, will be watching carefully to see what comes of these, and absolutely no-one should be above the law. But the member for Sunbury talked about wanting the fix, not the fight. Well, if we want to actually fix these scandals at their root, we need to fix our broken anti-corruption systems. That is why this bill is so important to be brought on today.

Integrity was a top concern for people of all ages at the last state election, and it is little wonder – there have been numerous scandals over the last few years in Victoria, whether it is red shirts or developer donations to Labor and Liberal MPs and councillors or the Commonwealth Games.

We have had the North East Link and West Gate toll road create incredible cost overruns, and the fact that we continue to have these scandals says to me that our anti-corruption systems simply are not up to scratch. In fact even the Ombudsman herself said that they are the weakest in the country. It requires structural changes and increased government transparency and accountability, and that is why it is so important that this bill actually is brought on right now – to make sure that we are getting the fix that the government even say that they are interested in achieving.

Our IBAC here in Victoria is not up to the same standard as other jurisdictions. It is not up to the same standard even as the national anti-corruption commission. It is not up to the same standard as the New South Wales anti-corruption commission. I do not see why Victorians deserve a weaker anti-corruption system than other Australians. IBAC currently can only investigate conduct which meets a very high criminal threshold, a very high bar, and that prevents a whole range of other forms of corruption being looked into, whether that is jobs for mates, conflicts of interest or kickbacks. IBAC does not currently have jurisdiction to look into this kind of grey corruption, as the member for Brunswick mentioned.

The chamber might recall that an identical bill to this actually passed the upper house a little while ago, but when it was brought back to this house the Labor government actually voted against it. I think that Victorians would be pretty disappointed to know that their Labor government does not want stronger anti-corruption laws and does not want Victorians to have anti-corruption measures that the rest of Australia actually has access to. The member for Sunbury, a Labor government member, said, 'We want the fix, not the fight.' Well, here is the fix, and not only is this a fix that we could have, it is a fix that we could have right now. Perhaps it could prevent some of these scandals from happening and give Victorians confidence in their government that they are actually taking anti-corruption seriously and that they do want to do something to prevent corruption occurring here in Victoria.

There are of course a number of other measures that need to be fixed when it comes to our anti-corruption and integrity measures in Victoria. We have a system of parliamentary committees where essentially the government marks its own homework, where government committees and the budget estimates process, which are supposed to keep the government of the day in check, are actually controlled by that same government so therefore cannot keep the government in check.

Members interjecting.

Ellen SANDELL: I am the chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee? I think the member opposite, from the government, is a little bit confused about her own parliamentary committees. We do not have the chair of PAEC. In fact it has a government chair and it is a

government-controlled committee. This is just one idea. If the government is interested in the fix, not the fight –

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Melbourne.

Ellen SANDELL: I am simply putting –

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Melbourne.

Ellen SANDELL: Through the Chair, if the government wants the fix, not the fight, we are putting some sensible ideas on the table, and I think they would be wise to support them.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (09:47): If ever there was an example that the Greens do their best work before 10 am – because yesterday you could not see any of them voting or participating in democracy. You could not see any of that contribution at all. They did not vote; they did not participate. When they talk about fronting up and supporting their communities, Parliament goes more than 3 hours in a day, because that is the model of government and that is the work that needs to be done across government and opposition. At least those opposite in the coalition fronted up until 7:30. We genuinely do not know where the Greens go after a certain time. You do not see any of them around the precinct. If you are serious about bringing forward reforms and having that discussion, then come with some sort of engagement into that frame.

A member interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: I was here the whole time.

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate. I appreciate that the government do not have a lot to say on this matter because they want to get out of supporting this bill, but I would ask you to bring the member back to the procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc will come back to the procedural debate.

Tim RICHARDSON: There were a few things that were mentioned by the member for Brunswick that are worth clarification on why this procedural motion and the bill coming forward should not be considered. There is a committee that makes recommendations, the Integrity and Oversight Committee. I find it a little delicate and a little difficult where you are an advocate about a committee as well as the chair of that Parliament committee. It is a bit of a conflicted space, where some of the advocacy that you bring out of that space is delicate. Recommendations and then changes are probably a more appropriate journey.

The other thing as well is when the member for Brunswick was talking about what is legal, that definitional element is really important, because IBAC should be regarded as the pre-eminent anti-corruption authority. It should not be dealing with things that are in the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman or the Auditor-General. The whole remit when IBAC was established was to weed out serious and corrupt conduct. It is what the ICAC in New South Wales does. It has various forms across the nation, and then there is the federal anti-corruption commission as well, which has been led by Labor's federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus. It is a significant contribution to the public.

You do not want them chasing down matters that are in the better frame to be with the Ombudsman, because then you will miss serious corrupt conduct. Half of their work – as we know and the chair should know – is policing, and then the other half is public sector corruption or allegations of corruption. We do not want IBAC to be tied up in bureaucratic issues that are in the better remit of public sector reform or what the Ombudsman would put by in reform. So I think maybe their motion is a bit half-baked because it is a Wednesday and it is more about getting a couple of hits for socials than it is about the actual governance, change and regulation in this place.

If they are serious about coming forward with those issues and the thresholds that they are setting, I really wonder how they and their leader, the member for Melbourne, could stand up when this

government has increased funding substantially to IBAC from where it first started. The member for Prahran and I have sat on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee together, and it has shown time and time again the expansion of funding. It does not require too much on a percentage scale to work out that IBAC has more resources than it has had previously. So the notion that we have not been serious about that is incorrect, and as well we accept recommendations when IBAC brings forward reforms. I am thinking of Operation Sandon, Operation Daintree and Operation Watts. When you see those reforms that come through, the work that they have done and the reforms that that has led to, that is the appropriate setting. So I do not think it is worth some half-baked motion here today, coming into this place to disrupt the work of the Parliament and the government business program that we have got underway. Maybe there is a time down the track where rather than just doing a 24-hour quick smash together of dot points there will be a bit more intellectual rigour to that and a bit more consideration.

I just reflect to the member for Brunswick that when you say something is legal and then you want IBAC to be investigating legal things, that is not the threshold. As chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee I would go back to the remit and the terms of reference of what IBAC is actually set up to do rather than chasing legal things that you suggest might not be good in a public discussion. That is not the responsibility of the highest pre-eminent anti-corruption agency in Victoria. We do not want Victoria Police going after people who are parking illegally and getting council fines, do we. That is the analogy. Yes, it is not great that people are parking over a certain amount of time, but you do not want VicPol being deployed each and every time to issue a parking fine. You want them to be policing serious offences, and that is the exact same thing that we want IBAC to be doing – serious corrupt conduct and not the stuff that has been outlined. I hope that the member for Brunswick reflects on this motion and does a little bit of a better job next time he fronts up.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:52): The coalition will be supporting the member for Brunswick's attempt to introduce the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Ending Political Corruption) Bill 2024. I will make a couple of comments both on principle and on subject matter. In relation to the principle, we have spoken in this place many times about the government blocking the right of non-government members to introduce bills. In fact we saw yesterday the member for Caulfield attempt to introduce an important bill that would have cleaned up illegal behaviour on government worksites – behaviour which is occurring right now – and the government voted against that attempt.

Today we have seen the Greens attempt to move a bill that would help do something with the corruption problem in this state – and there is a corruption problem in this state. The Premier has acknowledged there is a problem with corruption in this state. So on two occasions just this week non-government members have attempted to do something. The member for Sunbury – who has probably gone off to look for a tie – has made the point that the government wanted a fix, but a fix that we have not seen. Right now we know that corruption is occurring on government worksites. I am sure every Victorian finds that abhorrent. To know that the government continually votes against any fix is a disgrace.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

James NEWBURY: I hear across the table, 'We are fixing it.' By doing what, I ask? By thinking, by hoping, by praying? I suspect what has been revealed so far in terms of corruption is only the tip of the iceberg. I am sure there will be more, because more people knew and more people were told. No wonder the government do not want their inquiry to be public or to look at illegality – no wonder. I suspect that we will hear more because there is more, and that is the core of why the government does not want to allow non-government members to try and clean up what is happening in this state.

The Greens should have the right to introduce a bill, on principle, whether we agree with it or not, and the Greens have moved bills before that we have supported where on substance we did not agree with the subject matter, but they have the right to introduce it into this place for this place to have time to

debate it. The way that the government blocks non-government members from doing that is disgraceful and is not something that is done in other parliaments. It is something where this particular government wants to suck the oxygen away from real problems that are occurring that it does not want to solve.

On principle, we support the Greens' right, and on the subject matter, of course there is a corruption problem in this state and of course we need to look at ways to fix it. This bill should be debated in this chamber so that all members can look at the detail. I have not seen the bill yet, but I would certainly appreciate the opportunity to have a debate on this bill so that we can look at the substance and we can all speak to the substance, because doing nothing is not good enough, and that is what is occurring. There is corruption, and we thought, frankly, the last Premier oversaw some abhorrent behaviour under his watch – shameful behaviour. We were all ashamed by what we saw, and we did think and hope that under this Premier we would not see the same. Under these recent revelations they have been exposed.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business knows that this is a narrow procedural debate. He has strayed far from the confines of that debate, and I would ask you to bring him back to speaking succinctly on the procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton will come back to the procedural debate.

James NEWBURY: I understand why the government are upset at being exposed for voting against a bill to clean up corruption in this state, and that is what they are about to do.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (09:58): I too am very pleased to rise to talk on this very narrow procedural debate that has been brought on by the member for Brunswick and spoken to and followed up by the member for Melbourne and their good friend the member for Brighton. We only have to look back on the 2022 election results in Brunswick to know that it was Liberal preferences that meant that the member for Brunswick is in this house.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker: relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Succinct. I appreciate that. The member for Wendouree on the introduction of the bill.

Juliana ADDISON: I just was unsure of your ruling on that, so I do not want to stray from your ruling. What was your ruling, sorry?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The matter at hand is the introduction of the bill from the member for Brunswick, and I would appreciate it if you continued on that matter.

Juliana ADDISON: Terrific. So, the member for Brunswick, who was elected in 2022, has brought this to the house today, and it has been followed up by the member for Melbourne and the member for Brighton.

A member interjected.

Juliana ADDISON: It is an interesting combination. I am very happy to follow on from the excellent contribution of the member for Sunbury and the outstanding contribution from the member for Mordialloc, two people who work so hard, and that is why they have been re-elected so many times. They have gone back to their community, and every single time, they have been re-elected, because they get it. They get what it is about. They know what being a member of Parliament is about. They know what the rights and responsibilities are of being a member of Parliament, and that is what we are about today in this narrow procedural debate.

We had a debate yesterday on the government business program. We voted, as we do every single Tuesday just after 12 o'clock, when we start and have a debate about what we are going to discuss throughout the three days of the sitting. We made it very clear that the order of business, as the notice

paper indicates, today and for the next few days would be about discussing the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and we want to talk about Aboriginal land legislation amendment.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, may I seek clarity? Whether a bill is introduced has nothing to do with the government business program. The motion before the house is about whether a bill can be introduced. It has nothing to do with whether it is debated today or any other day. The motion before the house is about whether the bill is introduced. That is it, full stop.

Tim Richardson: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the relevance is that it is procedural, and the member for Wendouree going to why we should not because of other things on the government business program is absolutely relevant.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order on this occasion.

Juliana ADDISON: We are the party of treaty, we are the party that is working and walking every day with Aboriginal people, and we are very proud of that. We know that –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, they are also the party of secret reviews.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Here we go. That was not a point of order, but the member for Wendouree had started to stray, and I bring her back to the procedural debate.

Juliana ADDISON: I would really, really like to also talk about what else we want to talk about today. We know that the matter of public importance is coming up today, and that is a part of the government business program as well. Our MPI today is on women's health, and it is going to be led by our Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health. Once again, we are the party of women and we are the party of women's health, and we know that when you elect women to this Parliament you get better outcomes. That is what the government business program has decided – that we are going to have an MPI between 4 and 6 o'clock today. But, guess what, because we have got the MPI on the government business program we need time to talk about the bills that have already been introduced, including the State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 and the Youth Justice Bill 2024.

The stunts that are being pulled by the Greens for their Instagram, for their live, are all about them and not about women's health. They are not about Aboriginal land. They are about them putting their own egos up once again in cahoots in the Liberal Party. You rest well together. All the best.

Assembly divided on motion:

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

Noes (50): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, 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, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

*Business of the house***Notices of motion**

The SPEAKER (10:08): General business, notice of motion 20, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing the matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

*Petitions***Yea and District Memorial Hospital**

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) presented a petition bearing 4112 signatures:

We the undersigned people of Yea, the Murrindindi Shire and the State of Victoria are concerned that the Health Services Plan developed on advice from an Expert Advisory Committee will result in the forced amalgamation of health services in regional Victoria, removing the powers, authorities and responsibilities from the current local Yea and District Memorial Hospital (YDMH) board of directors and leading within the Yea community, both to the loss of acute and urgent care services, GP and allied health services and to the eventual entire closure of hospital services.

We respectfully request that the Independent Expert Advisory advice be released to the public, that genuine public consultation is undertaken about any proposed Health Services Plan, that the powers, authorities and responsibilities remain with the local YDMH board of directors and that no amalgamation of YDMH take place.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Lavers Hill-Cobden Road, Simpson

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) presented a petition bearing 251 signatures:

Issue:

Issue: This petition is to draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly that the section of the Lavers Hill-Cobden Rd (C156) poses an immediate risk to the health and safety to those who travel upon it. The section of road north of the Ag Warehouse Simpson and before Coradjil Rd requires resurfacing. There are vehicle crashes and near misses weekly due to the road surface being worn, the aggregate no longer being exposed and the road having a 'shiny' glasslike finish causing vehicles to unexpectedly lose control even at the current reduced speed limits.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government for the immediate resurfacing of this section of road to prevent injury or death.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

*Documents***Documents**

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER ACT OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Results of 2023 Audits: Technical and Further Education Institutes – Ordered to be published.

*Bills***Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024***Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (10:11): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 24, page 24, after line 8 insert –
 - “(4) For the purposes of an assessment of a person’s wealth under this section –
 - (a) property acquired more than 10 years prior to the application date is taken to have been lawfully acquired; and
 - (b) a benefit derived more than 10 years prior to the application date is taken to have been lawfully derived; and
 - (c) a service or advantage obtained more than 10 years prior to the application date is taken to have been lawfully obtained.
 - (5) In this section –

application date, for a person whose wealth is being assessed, means the date on which an application is made for an unexplained wealth order to be made against the person.”.
2. Clause 24, page 24, after line 32 insert –

“Note

A respondent’s wealth is taken to have been lawfully acquired if the wealth was acquired more than 10 years prior to the date on which an application is made for an unexplained wealth order to be made against the respondent – see section 40ZAAC(4).”.
3. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 45 –

‘45A New section 148 inserted

After section 147 of the **Confiscation Act 1997 insert –**

“148 Review of introduction of new unexplained wealth pathway by Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Act 2024

 - (1) The Attorney-General must cause a review to be conducted of the operation of Division 1A of Part 4A of this Act and any provisions of this Act that support the operation of that Division.
 - (2) The review must be commenced no later than 3 years after the commencement of section 24 of the **Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Act 2024**.
 - (3) The review must be completed no later than 12 months after it commences.
 - (4) The Attorney-General must cause a copy of the review to be laid before each House of Parliament as soon as practicable after receiving it.”.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:13): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The Allan Labor government is proud to have introduced into this place the Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024. It has now been debated in the other place. There are some amendments that have been made to the bill which the government is willing and very prepared to support. This is a really important bill, and it goes to our government’s commitment to fighting organised crime at every step of the way and our zero tolerance for organised crime. It is part of our crackdown to ensure that career criminals are targeted and that they are held to account and in fact made to account for their use and enjoyment of any unexplained wealth. We will be seizing that unexplained wealth in order to send a very clear message to the organised crime bosses of Victoria that they will not be tolerated in the state of Victoria under an Allan Labor government. Criminals will be forced to prove how they acquired their wealth through legitimate means or face losing it entirely. On that note I commend the bill as amended to the house.

Michael O’BRIEN (Malvern) (10:14): In terms of these amendments, the opposition supports them, because they were actually our ideas in many ways.

Members interjecting.

Michael O'BRIEN: Well, members opposite might even want to know what they are, because I suspect they have not even read them yet. One of them is to put a three-year statutory review into these changes. Believe me, the government did not come up with that idea to actually review these changes.

Tim Richardson interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: No, you did not, member for Mordialloc; these were opposition amendments. These are important, because for the first time the confiscation of unexplained wealth will not be dependent on a criminal offence having been proven. This bill is very different in that the amendments it makes mean that people can be liable to have to give up wealth even if a crime has not been committed, so because of that it is a very serious move.

We understand that in the efforts to tackle organised crime we need to do things differently, because I do not think the unexplained wealth laws have worked as effectively as we would have liked them to in the past. We understand why the government has introduced this bill, but we do think it is important that, given it is going a step beyond what has happened before – it does not require the proving of a criminal offence having been committed in order for that wealth to be confiscated – a statutory review of how these provisions are operating after three years is absolutely appropriate.

The other change in this bill which we are debating now is the limitation of 10 years on looking back to see wealth. I think that that is a reasonable outcome in the circumstances. I suspect if any member in this chamber was asked to justify something that had been acquired 20 years or 30 years ago, they might struggle a bit. Given the very harsh consequences that the bill provides for where people cannot explain where their wealth came from, I think having a decade limitation is a fair and reasonable balance to make sure that, yes, we can tackle organised crime but there is also an element of fairness in how we go about it.

These are amendments which the opposition supports. We do think that this new bill is worth a go. Whether the government has got it right or not remains to be seen. The government has made plenty of comments in the past and brought in legislation about tackling serious crime and tackling organised crime, and as we know, seeing other legislation the government will be bringing in later this year, it has not worked so far. I genuinely wish this bill success, because none of us want to see organised crime flourish in this state, whether it is in the community, in the drug trade or even on CFMEU building sites.

Motion agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

Motions

Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:17): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) condemns the Labor Party donor John Setka and the CFMEU for bullying, corruption and standover tactics on taxpayer-funded sites;
- (2) notes the Premier has been directly responsible for the Big Build for 10 years; and
- (3) condemns the Premier for letting this happen on her watch.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK: I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes the \$40.4 billion in Victorian infrastructure blowouts;

- (2) notes the Premier has been responsible for the Big Build since 2014;
- (3) condemns the CFMEU bullying and corruption on Victorian worksites; and
- (4) condemns the Premier for lining the CFMEU pockets instead of fighting for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Dissent from Speaker's ruling

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That this house dissents from the Speaker's ruling of 30 July 2024 in relation to an unheard offence raised by a Labor member, noting the contradictory ruling of 28 May 2024 where it was ruled that an unheard objection against a Liberal member should not be withdrawn.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Firewood collection

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (10:19): I am at a loss for words with what the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and Parks Victoria staff are doing in the Barmah forest and the Barmah Island, where they have piled up hundreds of tonnes of fallen and flood-damaged timber – 40 smaller piles and 70 huge piles of this timber. Local residents are desperate for firewood this long cold, winter. A local charcoal maker and even the Yorta Yorta have approached the state department to see if they could access this wood for firewood to help offset soaring heating costs. DEECA and Parks Victoria staff have responded with, 'Sorry, you can't take this timber to burn for heating, because it is mostly in a state park, so we are going to burn it instead.'

True to their word, the 40 smaller piles were burnt on Monday, and locals are still waiting to see what happens with the 70 huge piles of wood. This is not a Monty Python sketch. DEECA and Parks Victoria say the wood has to be burnt in the park, not put to good use to keep people warm. This is not just a leftist, greenie bureaucracy gone mad, this is absolute proof that the Allan government has lost touch with reality.

Regional health services

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (10:20): I was flabbergasted to learn this week that young medical students doing their final placements, which means they are training here in regional Victoria in medical practices, are doing it at their own expense. At a time when regional Victoria is screaming out for more doctors and a time when this incompetent and inept Labor government has spent \$40 billion on cost overruns on projects in Melbourne, it cannot find the funding to assist these doctors-in-waiting to come to regional Victoria and have a positive experience and hopefully come back to live and practise as doctors in the future. Instead, these young students – *(Time expired)*

Michael Browne

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (10:21): I wish to thank Michael Browne for more than 50 years of service to public education in Victoria. After 20 years at Seaford Primary, Michael has retired as school principal. Michael has led this wonderful local school from strength to strength, including overseeing a major redevelopment and transformation of the school in 2020. His care and compassion for the whole school community and his commitment to giving students the extra support they need, including with the language lab, and his remarkable leadership qualities have ensured that Seaford Primary is the most inclusive, welcoming and supportive school environment, where every student and every member of staff feels valued and supported. He leaves Seaford Primary and the local community a tremendous legacy. Thank you, Michael.

Story Dogs

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (10:21): I am so delighted to sponsor a story dog named Honey. Honey belongs to Francine Dudfield, who also happens to be a gold medallist from the 2023 Invictus Games for powerlifting, following service in the Australian Army with deployments in the Middle East and South Pacific. Francine volunteers with Honey as part of the wonderful Story Dogs program at Seaford Park Primary. Students read to Honey and Francine in one-on-one sessions every week, giving them the extra support and attention they need to help improve their reading confidence and develop what will hopefully be a lifelong love of reading. Thank you, Francine and Honey, for caring and for making such a difference; and thank you, Seaford Park Primary, for participating in the Story Dogs program and supporting your students to be the best they can be. I encourage all members in this place to consider sponsoring a story dog in their electorate and supporting their students to be the best they can be.

Health services

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:22): Communities in and around Mansfield, Alexandra and Yea are incredibly worried about the threat of hospital amalgamations and what it will mean for them. The communities got active, with each town holding a rally and arranging a petition. The Alexandra petition has more than 3000 signatures; petitions in Yea collected over 4570; and the Mansfield community did an amazing job, collecting over 7700 signatures. These are small towns with long and historical connections with their hospital. They want health services delivered locally. They want decisions made locally. They want local jobs, and they want their hospitals to survive.

Congratulations to Linda and Ian Davis, along with Caolan O'Connor from the Alexandra traders and tourism association, who drove the rally and the petition. So many small businesses in Marysville, Eildon, Thornton, Buxton and Taggerty did their bit to support the petition. In Yea, Jan and Neil Beer put in an enormous effort holding a rally and getting the petition moving. They were everywhere, making the most of opportunities. Only a handful of the thousands asked elected not to sign the petition. We saw the general practitioners in Mansfield take the bull by the horns. They took out a full-page ad in the *Mansfield Courier* and had more than 2000 people attend an outdoor rally, complete with the MAD Orchestra, and they worked diligently with the community to get signatures.

The Allan Labor government cannot manage money and they cannot manage major projects, and it is Victorians who are paying the price. This money that was lost on CFMEU projects could have been used to help our hospitals.

Preston electorate projects

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:24): I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues and staff for their support during my recent period of parental leave.

Members interjecting.

Nathan LAMBERT: Thank you. There is never a perfect time for these things, and it was a very busy time for the government in Preston and Reservoir. We of course opened the new Keon Park train station, which is a huge milestone for that neighbourhood, and I would like to thank the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and the member for Thomastown for commemorating that milestone and for their ongoing work on that project.

We also announced a new 40-kilometre-per-hour school zone for Coburg High students along Bell Street. I would like to thank the member for Northcote, the member for Pascoe Vale, the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and local residents Dave Hall, Lanie Stockman, Deborah Wyatt and Jose Villadangos for their work on that project.

We announced a new kinder at Reservoir Views Primary in line with our election commitments, and we announced a new building for St Joseph the Worker Primary School to address the issue where

their admin building was very slowly sliding into Edgars Creek. I am pleased that will be addressed and staff and students will get a new building.

I could go on – I think the team were addressing 98 issues while I was away – but I do want to finish by just saying I do think it is important that MPs can take parental leave if we are to have a properly inclusive and representative Parliament, and I look forward to supporting other MPs from all parties, if and when they choose to take parental leave themselves.

Kew future leaders speech competition

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:25): Recently I hosted the Kew future leaders speech competition. Based on the theme ‘My first speech to Parliament’, students were asked to put themselves in the shoes of a newly elected member of Parliament to express their vision for the future of Victoria in a 3-minute speech. The standard was incredibly high, with students choosing issues ranging from housing affordability and cost of living to sports facilities and the environment.

I would like to congratulate the runners-up for each school: Gloria and Stephanie from Camberwell Girls Grammar School; Jake and Joshua from Balwyn High School; Mira and Madeleine from Chatham Primary School; Maya from Fintona Girls School; Isabella and Annaliese from Genazzano; William and Brianna from Greythorn Primary; Emily from Kew High; Sylvie, Ava and Archie from Kew Primary; Sya and Poppy from Our Holy Redeemer Primary School; Eleanor and Elie from St Anne’s Primary; Amelie and Lucas from St Bede’s Primary; Max and Henry from Xavier College; and Massimo and Josh from Trinity Grammar.

I would also like to congratulate the winners of each school, who will progress into the interschool final in the coming weeks: Asha from Balwyn High, Kaylee and Angela from Camberwell Girls Grammar, Elizabeth from Chatham Primary, Ira and Priyanka from Fintona Girls School, Zoe from Genazzano, Jana from Greythorn Primary, Gabriel from Kew High School, Harris from Kew Primary, Betty from Our Holy Redeemer, Michaela from St Anne’s Primary, Liam from St Bede’s, Alex and Liam from Trinity and Blake from Xavier College. Thanks to all the students who participated. You should be very proud of your efforts.

Sikh community

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:27): ‘Chol waheguru, chol waheguru’ is what I repeated as I padded barefoot up and down amongst the Sunday school students at the local gurdwara, who had gathered to learn and participate in their religion and culture. What is so special about that is that in doing that you are calling them God, acknowledging that the server and the servee are both the Guru, and it is a wonderful way to approach life – that we serve others and give them the respect that the Guru deserves. So thank you to Jashanpreet Singh for the kind invitation. We were celebrating the fantastic investment by this government in their infrastructure there, a growing Sikh community in Wallan, who deserve our very best wishes and I certainly give them that.

Whittlesea Primary School breakfast club

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:27): The food was different at Whittlesea Primary School breakfast club the following week, where cheese toasties and milk were the order of the day. Casey Brown and Jenny Towt do a fantastic job leading the volunteers, and they are joined by students who serve their mates. Keagan, Phoebe and Melinda did a fantastic job keeping the hungry students in order. The school’s motto for the coming term is ‘Do your best’, and I think the school already do their best. Congratulations, and we look forward to the expansion across the state.

Shepparton electorate small business

Kim O’KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:28): Shepparton has been named the best entrepreneurial city in the country. Bristax made the announcement after analysing 50 cities across the country. The report states that location is an important factor for hopeful business startup founders and that Shepparton has the highest density of small business compared to the number of residents. We are proud to have

so many successful businesses, industries and manufacturers. This announcement is a testament to the hardworking, dedicated businesses who have done us proud.

It does not stop there. Shepparton's Baking Dough recently won Australia's best pie with their spicy root vegetable pie, also taking out a sweep of awards with award-winning pies, including the parmi pie, cheeseburger pie and the lamb souvlaki pie. Shepparton's North End Bakehouse has also been a recipient of Australia's best vanilla slice and hot cross bun awards and recently opened their second bakery located in Mooroopna.

Mooroopna Primary School

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:29): I wish to congratulate Mooroopna Primary School on celebrating 150 years of education. There were many past students, teachers and families who shared many wonderful memories of their time at the school. Celebrations included the unveiling of an honour board acknowledging all of the past principals of the school. It was wonderful to see the students participating in the celebrations with the school band performing. School captains Psalm and Charlotte had the honour of cutting the cake. I wish the school another 150 years ahead.

Napoleon Road, Lysterfield

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:30): Well, it is a smooth ride out on Napoleon Road now between Kelletts and Glenfern – over 2 kilometres resurfaced by the Allan Labor government. I want to thank my colleague the member for Monbulk as well as members in the other place Michael Galea and Lee Tarlamis. It is a wonderful outcome. Thank you to the community and the locals who caught on, making sure this got done. It is a wonderful thing this government has gotten on and done, and it is one of the many things we are doing to improve road safety and make sure we have got good roads out in Knox.

Knox Infolink

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:30): I also want to thank all of the volunteers and the people at Knox Infolink who provide all the resources and do all the hard work to make sure we run Boronia's community breakfast four days a week, which provides hot meals for people who need them most and referrals to services they need in any given situation and on any given day. They do wonderful work out there. So thank you to Knox Infolink, to all the volunteers from Rotary and to people who give each and every single day. I am really proud that for the last three years this government has provided pretty much full funding to run this program in Boronia and has again for the next year.

Boronia train station

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:31): I also want to say how exciting it is that the Allan Labor government is continuing its planning work on a major upgrade at Boronia station – a huge boon for our local community. It is going to provide a huge upgrade to the station, and it is going to provide lots of local open space. It is going to transform the community. It is the biggest investment in Boronia in a generation, and it is getting done by an Allan Labor government.

Black Rock Football Netball Club

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:31): Recently I met with Andrew and Nick, the president and junior president of the Black Rock Football Netball Club at Donald MacDonald Reserve. While having a kick of the footy around the oval and having a chat to the fellas I learned of the club's success stories but also of their urgent need for upgraded floodlighting, and I give my assurance to Andrew and Nick that I will be following that up with Bayside council and fighting for that outcome.

Hampton Hammers Football Netball Club

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:31): I also joined the Hampton Hammers Football Netball Club to celebrate Darren Harrison's 400th game recently. Well done to Harro. He told me that the key

to his success was avoiding contested tackles, staying off the grog and being generally fit. So congratulations to you, Harro.

St Bede's College

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:32): I recently took my son Charlie to meet with the principal of St Bede's College Deb Frizza, and we had a chat about the incredible work undertaken at my former school. They also invited my daughter Abi and me to attend *Shrek The Musical*, and I did that with her. It was a sensational night – it really, really was – and I would like to congratulate all the talented students, teachers and parents involved.

Paris Olympics

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:32): Finally, I want to congratulate some of our Australian Olympians who grew up in the Sandringham community. Congratulations to Sam Williamson, a graduate of Sandringham college, who competed in the 100-metre breaststroke, and to Amanda Bateman, who grew up in Beaumaris and competed in the semifinals for women's rowing in the double sculls. To both Amanda and Sam, a massive congratulations from our community, your community. Thank you so much.

Cyprus settlement

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:33): This month I joined over 2000 Victorians who gathered at Federation Square in Melbourne to stand together in solidarity for justice, peace and unity in Cyprus. Hundreds travelled from my electorate, where Cypriots and Greeks are strongly represented. The occasion marked 50 years since the military invasion of Cyprus by Türkiye, which resulted in over 170,000 Greek Cypriots being forced from their villages and the ongoing occupation of 37 per cent of the island. Since 1974 a standing Turkish army has remained, and systematic resettlement has changed the island's demographics in contravention of the Geneva conventions. Once splendid communities are now separated by a UN buffer zone. The pain of mass displacement, loss of loved ones and erasure of whole village communities and ways of life going back thousands of years have left a constant yearning for justice that has not dimmed in half a century. Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have a shared history and unique identities, evolving and enduring together, with fates interconnected and deeply rooted in the island. The vast majority want reunification.

It was moving to have Labor MPs from the Victorian and Australian governments, as well as Liberal state and federal MPs, stand up to speak in support of justice for Cyprus. All emphasised the bipartisan, principled and enduring position held by Australia in support of a whole and sovereign republic of Cyprus and denounced the occupation. Fifty years on progress will take all sides showing empathy and humanity and standing against divisive forces that seek permanent annexation. The soul of Cyprus is strong, and I will keep fighting for it to be free and whole.

Mornington Baseball Club

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (10:34): Congratulations to Mornington Baseball Club on celebrating 50 years. It was a pleasure to join their tribute dinner and to see awards to life members, club legends, original founders, players and more, including Ken Hardie, who has played for 50 years since 1975, and to see their quarter-century teams of the year.

Paris Olympics

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (10:34): Also, I want to wish best success for Frankston and peninsula Olympics competitors in Paris. Many individuals from my electorate and beyond, across the peninsula, have worked hard to get there. That includes Eileen Cikamatana in weightlifting; Tyla McDonald and Caitlin Parker from Peninsula Boxing – Caitlin will be on tonight at 8:36 pm; Emily Whitehead in gymnastics; Brock Batty, who is the grandson of Wendy and Stephen Batty from Mount Eliza, who is on the trampoline at 2 am on Saturday; and Stephanie-Elise Catley, who is in the football. Best of luck to each of these competitors.

Birdrock Beach

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (10:35): Lastly, I hosted both the Shadow Treasurer and the Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change, the member for Brighton, recently in my electorate. We went to Birdrock Beach steps, which have been shut down in part because the state Labor government are not contributing to their upkeep, which means that beach is inaccessible to locals, visitors and more. The Shadow Treasurer and I also met with local businesses who are suffering under Labor.

Premier's VCE Awards

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:36): Top honours recognised for exceptional dedication and outstanding achievement in the Premier's VCE Awards: in my electorate excellence awards went to Kira Mascaros from Bass Coast College in the sport and recreation field and Newhaven College's Saffi Campbell-Walker and Will Murphy in music contemporary performance. Massive congratulations and all the very active and sonorous best to you all in your pursuits and studies.

Totoka Lodge

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:36): Totoka Lodge is a gem of a place in Devon Meadows. Adaptive riding, equine therapy and natural horsemanship are their focus. The weekend brought together families, kids, carers and practitioners to celebrate the opening of their allied health and community access hub. Thank you, Paula Scully and your all-heart team, for making our world a better, more inclusive, kind and caring place. To Rie and everyone I met, your generosity of spirit and time was so appreciated. I will be back to also bask in the much talked about glorious sunsets.

Inverloch and Kongwak primary schools

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:37): Deadly doors were the go at Inverloch–Kongwak Primary for NAIDOC Week; 'Keep the Fire Burning' was the theme. The entire school community came together to honour, celebrate and learn about country, culture and history. Each class decorated its classroom door. There were handprints, fire collages, drawings, footprints, sculptures, stories and a lot of cellophane. Captains Emma and Walker showed me around. We chatted all the way in awe and admiration of the creativity, colour and heart that went into each. Thank you to them, Principal Ben, AP Mel, the entire team, all the students, Sonia Weston and everyone – a truly unifying and special day.

Housing

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (10:37): The way things are going at present, it is going to be Christmas before I get a shot at the take-note motion on the 2024–25 Victorian budget, so the plain fact is I wish to take an opportunity to say a couple of things now.

This state has a housing crisis. That crisis is a result of this government's policies and either its ignorance of the consequences or, worse still, its acceptance of them. Where in the budget was the vision for our kids who have been priced out of their dream home? The average price of a home in Wodonga has gone from \$330,000 to \$550,000. In the past five years a unit has increased 66 per cent. Where is the vision for the 850 people on waiting lists for a one-bedroom property in Wodonga? In June some faceless bureaucrat went public on a target of 14,400 houses for Wodonga in the next 25 years. That is 576 homes a year, almost double what was built last year. That is impossible; we all know that, and the government knows that.

What we need here is vision. What we have is land taxes, additional imposts on landlords that add \$50 a week to rent, taxes that deter turning farmland into housing estates and blinkered ideology for electrification that adds \$12,000 to the sale price of a block of land before you get to the appliances, and all this drives investors interstate and reduces homes for sale or rent. This budget failed housing. It should have championed aspiration, not contributed to desperation.

Melbourne Vixens

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (10:39): Congratulations to the strong and talented Vixens, who are heading to Adelaide on Saturday for the Suncorp Super Netball grand final against the Thunderbirds. I am looking forward to the win and the Vixens bringing this prize back to Melbourne under the stewardship of Diamond Creek's own captain Kate Moloney. Go Vixens! You have got this.

Friends of the Aqueduct Trail

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (10:39): Thank you, Nillumbik councillor Frances Eyre, George from Nillumbik, Andrew Bakos and the newly formed Friends of the Aqueduct Trail group, for our fantastic first planting day. The popular 4-kilometre Maroondah Aqueduct Trail links Allendale Road in Eltham to Main Road in Research along the aqueduct and is great for cycling, running and my preferred mode, walking. In an amazing effort we planted around 400 native trees, wildflowers and grasses together, further enhancing this beautiful council area. I have wanted to see this group begin for some time, and I thank her for her ongoing commitment to seeing this friends group begin.

Eltham Library

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (10:40): Congratulations to Eltham Library on celebrating your 30th anniversary in the beautiful and unique Greg Burgess designed mudbrick building. Nestled amongst parklands and cafes, this heritage-listed library is much loved by locals and is a cornerstone of togetherness, storytelling and lifelong learning. This wonderful place could not be possible without the dedicated librarians and staff of Eltham Library and their supportive Yarra Plenty Regional Library board. Thank you also to the many groups supporting this celebration, such as Eltham High School, Eltham District Historical Society, Nillumbik U3A and Brent's Patisserie, helping this wonderful library celebrate its birthday with cakes, story time and music.

And thank you to Charlie, who recently did work experience in my office.

Climate change

Tim READ (Brunswick) (10:40): Sunday 21 July was the world's hottest day ever recorded for all of 24 hours, until an even hotter Monday 22 July smashed the previous day's record. The Olympics are well underway, but when it comes to the climate, breaking world records is not such a good thing. It is bad news for us and worse news for the young people and future generations who will experience the worst of human-induced climate change unless we act fast. So today in the Legislative Council the Greens are introducing a bill to enshrine a legal right to a safe climate in Victoria's human rights charter. This would require the government to consider the climate impacts of their decisions. If the government's rhetoric on climate action is to be believed, this legislation is something they should welcome with open arms. Finally there will be a legal reason for them to just say no to new coal and gas projects, and if for some reason they still decide to burn more fossil fuels in a climate crisis, well, the public will have one more tool to hold them to account. Governments around the world are already passing similar laws, and now that the federal Labor government has rejected a climate duty of care, it is time for Victoria to step up. I call on the Allan Labor government to support the Greens bill and enshrine the right to a safe climate in Victoria's human rights charter.

Penny Williams

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:42): ALP life member Penny Williams sadly passed away on 15 July, turning 85 years old on that day. I admired Penny's strength, her courage and her resilience and appreciated her support. Penny worked on election campaigns dating back to the 1970s. I attended the celebration of Penny's life on Monday, and it was no surprise to see so many people who knew her, including the Girl Guides, the Probus club, workmates and friends. But what struck me most were

the beautiful, heartfelt memories from her husband Ian, children Jo and Elaine and granddaughters Isla, Ava, Lucinda and Ella. Vale, Penny Williams.

Barwon Water

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:42): I want to congratulate Barwon Water and acknowledge the extraordinary work that they are doing in showing what can be achieved when we set 100 per cent renewable electricity use as part of Barwon Water's strategic direction. Barwon Water committed to this target back in 2016 under the leadership of Tracey Slatter, and eight years later has now achieved 100 per cent electricity from renewable sources under the leadership of Shaun Cumming. I am proud to say that Barwon Water is the first urban water corporation in Victoria to reach this target. I also want to acknowledge the Barwon Water board members for their deep listening when setting the strategic direction of the organisation. It clearly makes a difference having Wadawurrung woman and traditional owner Corrina Eccles represented on the board, providing a cultural lens on all decision-making and contributing to strategic direction.

Hastings electorate ministerial visit

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:43): I would like to sincerely thank the Premier for taking time out of her busy schedule to come down to my electorate during the winter break. I was very happy and proud to take her to Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association gathering place to meet with elders, staff from the bush nursery and young leaders. I have spoken about Willum Warrain many times in this place, and I will speak about it many more. It is a very special and spiritual place of healing based in Hastings. When you go there you cannot help but feel the strong spirit emanating from the land and the strong spirit of elders past and present that emanates throughout. It was a terrific visit, and I was very happy to see the Premier genuinely feel and embrace the spirit and peace that is Willum Warrain.

We also visited Somerville Recreation Reserve, which recently received a \$300,000 grant in this year's budget. The grant will be split between four clubs at the reserve: the tennis club, the bowls club, the football club and the cricket club. I would like to thank everyone who came down to meet the Premier and especially club presidents Karyn Dickens from the tennis club, Samantha Merks from the seniors football club, Debbie Demooy from the junior football club, Ron Arnold from the bowls club and Adrian Ridout from the cricket club, and also past presidents of the footy club David Livingstone and Peter Alp. There was much talk and laughter, a snag on bread – with the onion on the top – and the Premier had an impromptu bowls lesson. Thank you, Premier, for your generous time.

Future Footscray

Katie HALL (Footscray) (10:45): Change is coming to my community in Melbourne's inner west, and that change is coming in the form of generational investment from the Allan Labor government. It is changing through the new Footscray Hospital, a \$1.5 billion investment unlike anything else in Victoria; it is changing through the \$146 million invested to create the Footscray learning precinct; it is changing through the construction of the West Gate Tunnel and the truck bans, which will be enforced by cameras delivered by me and the member for Williamstown in this year's budget; and it is changing through the addition of the Metro Tunnel, of which Footscray is the main beneficiary, an upgrade to Footscray Community Arts Centre, new trams and a transformed Whitten Oval, as well as an upgraded Tweddle.

It is because of this generational investment in the inner west that I am establishing Future Footscray, a community-led group that will work together to envision Footscray as the vibrant hub of Melbourne's inner west. It is because of this generational investment that we have an opportunity to capitalise on our community's super diversity, creating opportunities for a sustainable, inclusive and vibrant precinct. Future Footscray will be a long-term project, guiding short-, medium- and long-term investments for this amazing part of Melbourne for a bright future for residents and for businesses in Footscray's CBD.

Frankston Hospital

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:46): I rise to speak about an amazing week we had in Frankston. First, we had the Premier come out and visit the Frankston Hospital redevelopment – \$1.1 billion worth of construction in Frankston. As I have said before, you can see it from the Monash Freeway pretty much, with the lights, the cranes, boots on the ground – it is all happening. It was amazing to see the topping-out ceremony and to meet our builders and our departmental heads, who have done so much work to get this hospital where it needs to be.

Village 21

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:47): We also had the opening of Village 21, which is a housing initiative in Frankston for Aboriginal youth. It is a fantastic initiative. We have seen them successfully built around Victoria, but to have it in Frankston with Kids Under Cover at the helm is something to see. The opening, which was conducted by Aboriginal uncles and aunties but also the minister, Ms Shing in the other place, was a fantastic day. The modular construction of this initiative also shows the innovative design that we can get through that modular construction in Frankston.

Eric Bell Reserve pavilion

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:47): The other great part of this week was the finishing and ribbon cutting of the Eric Bell sporting pavilion for the mighty Pines Football Netball Club and Pines Cricket Club.

Williamstown electorate schools

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) (10:48): It was very welcome news in my electorate this week when it was announced that two schools will receive more than \$5 million in funding for much-needed upgrades. St Mary's Primary School in Altona will receive \$2.4 million to complete stage 1A of the school's master plan to rebuild six learning areas of the school, including collaboration and outdoor learning spaces. Having recently toured the school with the principal Sonia Riccardi, I know just how welcome these upgrades will be.

St Margaret Mary's in Spotswood will also construct new learning areas, student amenities and breakout spaces and refurbish the school entry, staff workplaces and meeting rooms with \$3.6 million thanks to the latest round of funding. This will provide new modern spaces for students and staff to expand the school's capacity for the future.

Paul Hogan

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) (10:48): I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest sympathies to the St Margaret Mary's school community following the passing of their beloved teacher and respected colleague Paul Hogan. To principal Colleen McCambridge, her staff and her students: please know that you have been in our thoughts during this difficult time. We deeply appreciate your ongoing commitment to education despite the loss of a valued member of your community. To Paul's family and his friends: you have the heartfelt support of the entire community during this difficult time. The community has united in support of St Margaret Mary's and will continue to support them into the future. Vale, Paul Hogan.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:50): I rise to make a contribution on the report on the 2023–24 budget estimates, and I particularly want to refer the house to page 88 of the report, which

highlights the state government's capital spend on infrastructure. We know infrastructure is a really important part of the state's job and the government's responsibility, and in fact we have been reminded of that for 10 years under the Allan–Andrews government and particularly from Premier Allan when she was responsible for infrastructure in that time. In fact on many different occasions we have had the issue of ribbon cutting, of celebrating the success, of talking about how wonderful the Big Build has been. But revelations particularly in the last few weeks in terms of the corruption, with the CFMEU embedded in the Big Build, which not just the opposition but many well-respected commentators, including *60 Minutes* reporter and *Age* reporter Nick McKenzie, are calling the big rotten build, have meant that what were once the signature projects of Premier Allan have now become the scandalous projects under Premier Allan. One would certainly hazard a guess on whether the Premier and the Minister for Transport Infrastructure are up to celebrating the success until this is cleaned up.

We have seen that this report, particularly in the discussion around issues in section 6.3 of the report, highlights the West Gate Tunnel as a major component of the spend. It talks about a number of the projects and a number of the costs. If you look at \$100 billion worth of infrastructure spend and we know up until now \$40 billion worth of blowouts in infrastructure, you would attribute much of that infrastructure spend and blowout to the corruption that we have now seen – \$40 billion of taxpayer money out of \$100 billion of investment. That I would consider a massive fail, an absolute fail. To think we cannot build our hospitals, we cannot invest in our schools, we cannot invest in our roads – everything that this government is responsible for now has to take a haircut because the government are more interested in lining the pockets of their CFMEU mates than actually doing their job of ensuring all Victorians get a fair go. I think Victorians are fed up with it – they are absolutely fed up with it.

Looking into this particular committee report, I had year 10 students from Beth Rivkah Perl, Batya and Adi have a look at the CFMEU corruption. These are year 10 students. These year 10 students prior to now actually did not really understand who the CFMEU were, and after they looked into it and particularly a number of the reports they were really concerned about the fact that here are a government that have allowed this to happen under their watch, a government that have been negligent in allowing this to happen under their watch, particularly when it has been raised so many times and dismissed by their Premier. I note that 12 months ago we raised a number of questions in question time to the Premier about infrastructure, about these very projects and the fact that bikie gangs were embedded in these projects, and the Premier dismissed them. Instead of actually answering those questions, the Premier just spoke about the celebration of cutting ribbons on major projects, rather than ensuring the Premier does financial due diligence on these projects and understands what they cost and where the money is going.

Follow the money. Follow the donations from the CFMEU to the Labor Party. Follow the money. If anybody wants an understanding of why, of what the motive is, they only have to follow the money, where you have got the Labor Party's major donor John Setka and the CFMEU giving money to the Labor Party and the Labor Party running a protection racket for the CFMEU and allowing them to be embedded into major projects.

Danny Pearson interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The infrastructure minister says it is why they suspended them from the party. The infrastructure minister needs to know this has been happening for 10 years under their watch. When you have been caught with your hand in the cookie jar, then you act. It is too late when you have been found out. This government has been found out, and this government is not fit to clean up the mess.

Legal and Social Issues Committee*Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors*

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:55): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak once more on the Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee report *Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors*. This week is DonateLife Week, the national week for raising awareness about organ and tissue donation. DonateLife Week is a reminder to all of us to register to become a donor, to check our registration status and make sure it is up to date, to have conversations with our family about our donation wishes and to encourage others to get registered and talk about it with their families.

Here in Victoria raising awareness about becoming a registered donor could not be more important. Eighty-three per cent of Victorians support donation but only 23 per cent of Victorians are registered to be donors, and this pales in comparison to states like South Australia, where registrations are around 70 per cent.

DonateLife does the important work of providing accessible and easy-to-understand information about organ and tissue donation in Australia. They also provide resources and information about organ and tissue donation and encourage education about this subject. This year the DonateLife Week theme is the gift of life, a sentiment which was attested to throughout the committee inquiry and particularly during the committee's public hearings.

Throughout the hearings we heard the lived experiences of those whose families have donated organs and tissues and those who have been recipients of organ and tissue donations themselves. The committee heard from Robert Manning, who is an organ donor recipient. Robert spoke to the committee on his 600th day since coming out of his coma, which was incredibly moving. In March 2021 Robert was told that he had end-stage liver disease and was only given 12 months to live. Robert spoke of the shock of this confronting news, and how despite his prognosis he still felt well. After months of testing without answers, in December Robert was admitted to hospital and placed on life support in intensive care after having multiple organ failure. He woke up on 2 January 2022 after spending two weeks in a coma. Whilst he was in a coma Robert received a liver donation. He said to the committee:

I had a new liver and a new lease on life. From that moment I started wanting to give back.

One of the barriers that the committee found to organ and tissue donation is concern from family members. An individual could have consented to organ donation through their registration as a donor, but it is often the family's direction whether or not this is followed through. And when facing a decision about organ and tissue donation, a decision that no family ever wants to have to make, if your family does not know your wishes, then they may not be able to uphold them. The committee found that conversations about an individual's wishes are critical. In fact those conversations are just as important as registering to become a donor.

Signing up to be an organ donor is a simple process. It only takes a minute, but this minute has the potential to save lives. The committee found that a deceased donor can help up to seven people through organ donation and 200 people through tissue donations.

Along with DonateLife there are many other organisations also doing important work in educating the Victorian community about organ and tissue donation. During the inquiry the committee heard from Zaidee's Rainbow Foundation. Zaidee's Rainbow Foundation was established in 2005 after Allan Turner's daughter Zadie Rose Alexander Turner died suddenly at the age of seven years. Zaidee was the only child in Victoria that year to be an organ and tissue donor under the age of 16. Zaidee saved and improved the lives of seven others with her generous gift of life. Zaidee's Rainbow Foundation has worked to promote organ and tissue donation in major sporting leagues, including the AFL and the NRL, as well as promoting organ and tissue donations in schools and the community, proving that

this is a conversation that can be had with young people. Zaidee's has been a strong voice in the organ donation space for over 15 years, and I would like to thank Allan for his unwavering advocacy and his contributions to the inquiry.

I would like to take this opportunity during DonateLife Week to encourage my colleagues and all Victorians to consider becoming organ and tissue donors, and I encourage Victorians to talk to their families about their wishes about organ and tissue donation. Knowing your family members' wishes is critical when it comes to donation.

Once again I would like to thank the members of Parliament and the committee secretariat who worked on this report as well as those who made submissions to this very important topic of organ and tissue donation.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:59): I rise to make a few comments on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2023–24 budget estimates report. My reference point is page 146, and the reference is to 'Management of public land and forests'. I want to make a couple of points in relation to the active management of our forests. The first one is an issue that we are going to have in the forthcoming years around firewood supply for a number of our people who rely on solid fuel heating. One of the biggest suppliers of domestic firewood was the native timber industry. When I have raised this in the past and I have asked questions on notice in relation to this topic, one of the answers that I have got back from the minister is that we are still going to have public firewood collection. The issue with that is we have a huge cohort within our rural communities of pensioners, the elderly and people with disability who rely on commercial operators to provide them with their firewood. There is a huge amount; it is a very high retirement area, East Gippsland. When I asked this question of where their firewood supply is going to come from, there were a few blank stares initially. I do not think that the government had understood the ramifications on firewood supply when they closed the industry.

Following on from that we had some commentary that the timber that is removed as part of the strategic firebreak program will be made available for commercial firewood. Harvest and haulage contractors that have transitioned over to the government tell me that there is about two to 2½ years work in those strategic firebreaks. So the minister of the day has bought a little bit of time but needs to come up with a solution of how we going to use our state forests to provide domestic firewood supply, because simply opening it for collection suits some but there are a huge cohort that rely on their firewood to be delivered to them. Previously firewood collectors were given coupes. That has now been removed, and consideration needs to be given to providing it back.

While we are talking about the strategic firebreaks, Sydenham Inlet Road is one of those that has been earmarked. It services the town of Bemm River, and a few people might have holidayed at lovely Bemm River. If they have, they will know that there is one road in and one road out. That road has the Croajingolong National Park on either side, and it is heavily forested. They want the road cleared and the firebreak that has been promised on that road put into place. At present we have had a lot of, I guess, discussion over who is going to provide the maintenance of that firebreak, because it is a shire road but it will be a government firebreak. This matter needs to be resolved. That needs to go in prior to this summer to afford that community the protection that it indeed needs.

I also want to talk quickly about our wild dog program. I have spoken about that in this chamber before. There is a decision imminent by this government on whether they are going to continue the wild dog program in the east of the state or whether they will get rid of it or whether they will water it down. It needs to be maintained. The argument is that farmer fencing – boundary fencing – is the solution. It is one tool that is helpful, but when you have got trees falling over fences, and sambar deer, wombats and the like, we need our wild dog trappers in place. We have lost an enormous amount of stock in East Gippsland, even over recent weeks, and you cannot trap dogs on private land in open

paddocks. You need to use the trails and the tracks around the interface with private property to get those dogs.

I urge the minister to make a decision and make the right decision. I have since been told, just today, that in the Bendoc–Bonang area the dogger who controls the wild dogs is on holidays. Everyone deserves a break, but there is no replacement there. Already we have impacts in that area. So I would encourage the government to have a program in place that when a dogger is away for whatever reason, whether it be holidays or ill health, we have that focus remain by having a replacement dogger put in place. It is critically important.

I could go on and on and on about the issues we have about public land management. We need the Cape Conran cabins rebuilt. The fact that that has been held up for 4½ years is a disgrace. But I will end my commentary there.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (11:04): I am pleased to rise and speak about the Electoral Matters Committee report on the inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election, which I tabled yesterday. At the outset I want to thank my fellow committee members along with Dr Chris Gribbin, Chiara De Lazzari, Joel Hallinan and Sarah Catherall for all of the work that they did to make this report happen.

For those of you that do not know, the Electoral Matters Committee was first established by the Bracks Labor government in 2005. It was established to examine the conduct of elections in Victoria and other matters to do with electoral law in this state. This inquiry into the 2022 state election was held over 16 months, holding 27 public hearings and undertaking two surveys and a community forum. The committee found that the election was generally conducted fairly and democratically, and the committee was not presented with any evidence that the election result was not correct. The successful work of the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) in 2022 should be recognised, and the many workers who contributed should be commended. However, this inquiry did identify several areas where the electoral system could be improved to better meet the needs of stakeholders and to better align with community expectations.

I am sure you all read this report overnight, but I will point out that there are four major areas where the committee has recommended changes. These four major areas are (1) adjusting the election timetable, including reducing the early voting centre from 12 to seven days, closing the electoral roll earlier and bringing forward the close of nominations; (2) improving the VEC's training procedures and products to ensure that election officials are familiar with the rules and provide a good experience for voters; (3) reducing inappropriate behaviour by candidates – and I know many of us around this room saw that during the election period – and by campaigners by establishing an enforceable code of conduct, limiting the number of campaigners at a voting centre where necessary and introducing truth in political advertising laws; and (4) eliminating group voting tickets for Victorian upper house voting.

In addition, the committee has identified two important issues which require further investigation: firstly, additional possible reforms to the upper house and their impacts, including the upper house regions and the number of members in the upper house; and the second one, allocating some electoral responsibilities to bodies other than the VEC, such as enforcing electoral law and hosting information for voters about candidates, parties and of course their policies. These matters are all contained in volume 1 of the report. Volume 2 discusses the large quantity of evidence received by the committee through this inquiry and makes additional recommendations designed to ensure that the electoral system is inclusive, trustworthy, transparent and of course fair and that the VEC meets its obligations in delivering the election. Obviously, that is all that we want.

I would especially like to thank all of the members of the public who took the time to make these submissions to the inquiry. We received 114 submissions as well as submissions in person from the public, and that is what democracy looks like. Their contributions were absolutely invaluable to the committee. As the chair of the committee I would like to recognise and warmly thank the many hardworking parliamentary officers who assisted with our inquiry and without whom we simply could not have done the job, including the committee secretariat, the Hansard staff, the community engagement team and the graphic design and publishing team. I especially want to single out our committee's executive officer the diligent Dr Christopher Gribbin for all of his help; he truly went above and beyond. Lastly, I would like to thank all of my parliamentary colleagues who served on the committee with me, my deputy Wayne Farnham, Brad Battin, David Ettershank, Sam Hibbins, Emma Kealy, Nathan Lambert, Lee Tarlamis and Emma Vulin. I appreciate the collegiate approach each and every one of them brought to this report.

The summary of the key recommendations of the inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian election can easily be found – recommendations affecting parties, recommendations affecting independents, recommendations affecting candidates from both houses, recommendations affecting the lower house and recommendations affecting the upper house. If anyone has any questions about them and would like some further information, as the chair of the Electoral Matters Committee I am more than happy to speak to each and every one of you, so come and see me. Thank you.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Tim READ (Brunswick) (11:09): I too will be speaking about the Electoral Matters Committee report into the 2022 state election and specifically its recommendation that the government get rid of our group voting ticket system, which is used in electing our upper house. Victoria is the only place in Australia where if you vote above the line, as 90 per cent of people do, you cannot direct your own preferences. Instead the party you vote for does this using a system known as group voting tickets, meaning parties can make backroom deals and decide who gets your second and third preferences and so on.

You may not have even heard of some of these parties, and you might not like their policies. In 2018 people voting for the Animal Justice Party in some parts of Victoria had their preferences elect gun-loving libertarians. This system allows parties to deal with each other to swap preferences, and they do. Because few voters buck the trend and vote below the line, a band of small parties can trade preferences until one gets elected off a tiny primary vote. So people form all kinds of single-issue parties, some with very few members, just to join in this scheme. This adds to the long list of parties and candidates making the ballot paper the size of a small tablecloth.

One notorious backroom dealer, Glenn Druery, has made a career of signing micro-parties up for preference deals in return for cash. About \$55,000 will get you a seat in Victoria's upper house with this scheme. The 2018 election for the Victorian upper house was labelled a farce by many experts. Eight of the 40 MPs were elected over other candidates who had much larger votes, often 10 times or more larger. The Transport Matters MP, a taxi advocate, was elected with just 2500 votes, or 0.6 per cent of the vote, while the 35,000 people who voted for the Greens candidate, 14 times as many votes, were left unrepresented. The Transport Matters MP was more accountable to the preference whisperer Druery than to the voters in his region, very few of whom had ever heard of him or knew what he stood for. Most of the people whose preferences elected him were voting for another party in Druery's team, and they had never heard of Transport Matters.

Other states and the Commonwealth have scrapped group voting. The last to get rid of it was Western Australia, after it had the astonishing result in 2021 of electing a candidate from the little-known Daylight Savings Party with just 98 votes, or 0.2 per cent, from a region ironically with the highest level of opposition to daylight savings in the state. Druery's manipulation of the group voting system meant that it just did not matter that only one in 500 voters voted for the guy. It does not matter what

you stand for; if you pay your money, you can get elected. Popular support is not an issue. So WA got rid of it.

But after the Victorian farce in 2018, the Victorian Labor government pretended to care but kicked the can down the road. Maybe they preferred a non-representative upper house. In their 2019 inquiry into that election the then Electoral Matters Committee chair, a Labor government MP, told witnesses at public hearings not to talk about upper house voting, because that evidence would be taken at a later date. But that later date never came, despite regular reminders from the Greens. To their credit this Electoral Matters Committee in this term of Parliament has finally recommended an end to this corrupt system. They further recommend adopting the same system used to elect the federal Senate and to 'allow voters to indicate multiple preferences for parties above the line'. Every other state and the Commonwealth have done it. There is now no excuse for Victorian Labor not to do it. Get rid of this corrupt system.

Environment and Planning Committee

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

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (11:13): I rise to speak on the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's report *Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works*. I would like to start by firstly thanking the committee membership, especially the chair the member for Wendouree and the deputy chair the member for Morwell, and also the member for Bass, the member for Monbulk, the member for Nepean, the member for Ripon, the member for Croydon and the member for Warrandyte. Consistent effort and strong commitment have been valuable in making Victoria fairer, and the important work that is done on committees looking into things that need review is really worthwhile. I thank the members for their commitment. I would also like to thank the secretariat – committee manager Igor Dosen, acting committee manager Kieran Crowe, research officer Samantha Leahy and administrative officer Helen Ross-Soden – for their work in crafting this comprehensive report.

Everyone deserves the right to be paid for the work they do. This is a fundamental right, and it is what our society is based on. Fair pay for one's work is also one of the founding principles of the labour movement. All of us here are paid regularly without having to worry if our pay will come in to cover our bills and mortgage. Unfortunately this is not the case for many people who work for themselves, who are reliant on people paying invoices for work they have already completed. The committee investigated this issue, and the report offers 28 recommendations across four key areas: (1) to ensure that subcontractors are paid fairly and promptly for completed work, (2) to strengthen the statutory right to claim payment, (3) to improve adjudication of payment disputes and (4) to address higher-than-standard levels of insolvency in the construction sector.

The construction industry holds a vital position within the Victorian economy. As per data from the Reserve Bank of Australia, the construction sector accounts for 7.3 per cent of Australia's total economic output. According to a submission by Master Builders Victoria, a representative body for the construction sector, the total value of construction work completed in Victoria in 2022 amounted to \$66.89 billion. This figure represents approximately 12.1 per cent of the gross state product, underscoring the significant contribution of the construction sector to Victoria's economic landscape, and subcontractors are a big part of this work. Timely payment is crucial as delays can severely affect small businesses, small contractors and subcontractors, who make up much of the sector.

The committee discovered that subcontractors often struggle to negotiate fair payment terms due to the nature of the construction industry, with subcontractors sitting at the bottom of the food chain. As a result, subcontractors often need to continuously find new projects to maintain their income and cash flow. This urgency to secure jobs in a highly competitive market can put them in a weaker bargaining position. It can see them accepting less favourable payment terms to win contracts, fearing that pushing for better payment conditions could result in losing the job to a competitor willing to accept lower terms. This is why payment terms are so important.

Several submitters pointed out that even though the Victorian security of payment law is designed to ensure prompt payment for completed works, the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 does not currently restrict the payment terms that can be included in a construction contract. The committee heard that many subcontractors in the construction industry face prolonged payment terms. Head contractors often enforce payment terms of 60, 90 or even 120 days on subcontractors, who have little bargaining power. The committee also found that many businesses in the construction industry in Victoria tend to have insufficient funds and poor cash flow. This can lead to poor payment practices and to funds earmarked for the payment of subcontractors being used instead to finance other projects or business operations.

Throughout the inquiry it was suggested that the narrow profit margins of the construction businesses contribute to payment issues in the industry. For example, the Housing Industry Association noted that builders often operate on razor-thin profit margins. Similarly, Master Builders Victoria reported that head contractors are currently facing low or negative profit margins due to fixed-price contracts and challenging economic circumstances. Thin profit margins are problematic because sustained losses can lead to undercapitalisation and cash flow issues for construction businesses.

Aside from poor payment and financial practices, the Victorian construction industry experiences higher levels of business insolvency than other sectors of the economy. An insolvent construction business can result in the non-payment and subsequent insolvency of subcontractors, causing financial hardship to consumers and adversely impacting the economy. While most insolvencies in the construction industry were found to concern small and medium-size businesses, we have witnessed the collapse of multiple large building firms of late. These financial challenges all increase the likelihood of subcontractors not being paid properly.

In my Broadmeadows electorate approximately 20 per cent of the constituents are employed in construction and maintenance, and a large number are subcontractors. I am pleased to see attention being drawn to the payment issues faced by subcontractors and their families. It is crucial that we work towards substantial improvements in payment practices within the construction industry going forward.

Bills

Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (11:19): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024:

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

In my opinion, the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024 (the Bill), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The Bill amends the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (RT Act) to introduce reforms to strengthen consumer protections for site tenants of residential parks. Key reforms include requiring site agreements to be in a standard form, strengthened pre-contract disclosure requirements, and ensuring transparency around the method used by site owners in calculating rent increases. It will be an offence to prepare or authorise the preparation of a site agreement that is not in the prescribed standard form, punishable by a fine of up to 25 penalty units. The Bill will also amend the *Funerals Act 2006* (Funerals Act) to enhance funeral price disclosure requirements. The reforms will bring Victoria into line with other states by requiring funeral service providers to display their goods and services price list on their website and at their business premises, in a

form and with details to be prescribed in regulations. It will be an offence to fail to comply with the price disclosure requirements, punishable by a fine of up to 60 penalty units.

Human rights issues

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- The right to privacy and reputation (section 13);
- The right to freedom of expression (section 15).

Right to privacy and reputation

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully and arbitrarily interfered with and the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked.

Clause 5 of the Bill provides for expanded pre-contractual disclosure of information to a prospective site tenant of a residential park. A site owner will be required disclose a range of information to site tenants to better enable them to make an informed decision to enter into a site agreement. Information to be disclosed may include a range of personal information relating to the site owner or owner of the residential park, including their name, address, and contact details. Non-compliance with the disclosure requirements will be an offence, punishable by a fine of up to 60 penalty units. The Bill may engage the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter to the extent that clause 5 expands the nature and extent of personal information that a site owner must disclose to a prospective site tenant.

Clause 3 of the Bill will also require site agreements to be in a prescribed form. The contents and form of the prescribed form site agreement will be set out in regulations. However, it is intended that the prescribed form site agreement would also require the disclosure of a range of personal information pertaining to both the site owner and the site tenant, including names, current addresses, contact details, Australian Corporations Number (if relevant). The Bill may engage the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter in the unlikely event that clause 3 requires a site owner and a site tenant to disclose more personal information in the prescribed site agreement than is currently required.

However, in my view, any interference with the right to privacy will not be unlawful. The Bill will only require, or enable, the disclosure of limited information in circumstances that are confined by the regulatory framework for residential parks under Part 4A of the RT Act. Any such interference would also not be arbitrary in the sense of resulting from unpredictable, unjust, or unreasonable conduct. Disclosure of personal information under the Bill is fundamental to the equitable transacting between a site tenant and site owner, ensuring site tenants are provided with the necessary information to properly inform in their decision to enter into a site agreement. Accordingly, I consider that the Bill is compatible with the right to privacy.

Right to freedom of expression

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression. This includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds – whether orally, in writing, in print or by way of art or other medium chosen by that person. The right to freedom of expression is generally considered to encompass the right not to impart information.

Clause 3 will require site agreements to be in a prescribed form. This requirement will take effect for all new site agreements that are entered into on and from 1 August 2025. In doing so, the Bill amends section 206F of the RT Act to provide that any other additional term of a site agreement must not be inconsistent with the prescribed form of site agreement. Any such additional term will be void. This may engage the right to freedom of expression enjoyed by both site tenants and site owners by constraining their ability to impart information and ideas through agreed additional terms of a site agreement.

Clause 9 of the Bill will also require funeral service providers to publish on their website and display at their business premises the providers' goods and services price list, and their coffin price list, whether that be in one or two separate lists. Clause 10 will also enable regulations to be made prescribing the form and particulars for the goods and services price list and coffin price list to be published online or physically displayed. Non-compliance with this disclosure requirement will be an offence, punishable by a fine of up to 60 penalty units. Although this reform will not prevent funeral service providers from displaying their price lists through other mechanisms, it may nevertheless engage the right to freedom of expression by compelling funeral service providers to impart information via the specified media of the internet and public display, in a form and including particulars not determined by the funeral service provider.

To the extent that the Bill engages the freedom of expression under section 15(2), I consider that the right is not limited as any such impact of these amendments is necessary to protect the rights of the public, including those in the market as a prospective site tenant as well as consumers of funeral goods and services. The amendments are required to ensure that consumers are not subject to unfair or unclear contract terms included

in addition to the prescribed form of site agreement, and that consumers can make a fully informed decision to acquire funeral goods and services with transparency of relevant costs.

The Hon. Gabrielle Williams MP

Minister for Government Services

Minister for Consumer Affairs

Minister for Public and Active Transport

Second reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (11:20): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

We know the provision of information is critical to Victorians exercising their rights and driving compliance with consumer laws. This Bill includes a package of reforms that ensures Victorians have the appropriate information when making critical decisions about their housing arrangements or when making funeral arrangements following the passing of a loved one.

Enhanced protections for residents of residential parks

The Victorian Government is committed to delivering new protections for Victorians living in residential parks and supporting them to make informed choices about their housing. Residential parks are regulated under Part 4A of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Residential Tenancies Act) and are commonly marketed as a lower cost or alternative accommodation option for Victorians. Residents living in residential parks usually own a moveable dwelling (a small house) and rent the underlying site (land) from the owner, who are often land lease companies. With the existing pressure on Victoria's housing market, more and more Victorians are turning to residential parks and there has been a substantial growth in the land lease industry. This pressure presents new risks as the market is not well regulated - information on caravans and moveable dwellings is registered with local councils, but there are few protections for residents who lease land. The Bill will amend the Residential Tenancies Act to strengthen consumer protections and clarify rights and obligations to better support these vulnerable cohorts.

In this Bill we will introduce targeted reforms which address concerns raised by residents and their advocates. These issues were identified as part of the consultation on the Victorian Government's review of the *Retirement Villages Act 1986*. We will amend Part 4A of the RT Act to require site agreements to be in a prescribed standard form, prescribe specified methods for calculating rent increases, and strengthen pre-contract disclosure requirements. Regulations will be made to prescribe the relevant details.

These reforms will improve clarity and transparency for consumers entering residential park contracts, better support residents to make informed choices about entering, living in, and leaving a residential park and will respond to concerns raised by residents and their advocates.

We know that there is more work to do to ensure that the rights of residents are protected; this is the first step in strengthening protections for these Victorians.

Strengthening funeral price transparency

The Victorian Government is also committed to increasing transparency on funeral pricing to support Victorians to make informed choices when they are grieving and vulnerable. *The Funerals Act 2006* does not currently require funeral providers to display their price list online or at their business premises. As a result, consumer advocates have raised concerns about the lack of pricing transparency in Victoria.

To increase transparency, the Bill will require providers to display a price list for all goods and services on their online business website and in a prominent position at their business premises. Funeral providers will also be required to publish and display a coffin price list in the same place. A failure to comply with the display requirements will be an offence.

The Bill will enable regulations to be made that set out the prescribed form for the price list and the particulars that must be displayed online and at the funeral service provider's business premises.

These reforms will bring Victoria into line with the law in other jurisdictions that have already enacted funeral pricing transparency reforms, including New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland, and support consumers to make informed choices at a very difficult time.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (11:20): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 14 August.

Prahran Mechanics' Institute Repeal Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

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) (11:22): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Repeal Bill 2024:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Repeal Bill 2024 (the Bill).

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

Overview

The purpose of the Bill is to repeal the *Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act 1899*, dissolve the Prahran Mechanics' Institution and Circulating Library (PMI Circulating Library) incorporated established by the *Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act 1899* and provide for the transfer of property, rights and liabilities to the Prahran Mechanics' Institute's successor body, the PMI Victorian History Library Inc, which is an incorporated association under the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012*.

Human Rights Issues

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

Right to property

The Bill provides for the repeal of the *Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act 1899* and all property, rights and liabilities held, by the Prahran Mechanics' institute are to be transferred to the PMI Victorian History Library Inc as the successor body.

Additionally, clause 7 of the Bill provides for the employment of persons employed by the PMI Circulating Library, including any accrued entitlements, to be transferred to the PMI Victorian History Library Inc, on the same terms and conditions immediately before the repeal. This transfer does not prevent any of the terms and conditions of a transferred employee from being altered by or under any law, award or agreement after the repeal of the Act.

In this regard, the Bill acts to preserve all existing property, right and liabilities, including the entitlements of employees transferred from the Prahran Mechanics' Institute to its successor body.

I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter because it does not limit any rights under the Charter.

The Hon. Melissa Horne
Minister for Local Government

Second reading

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) (11:22): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Prahran Mechanics' Institute Repeal Bill 2024 will repeal the *Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act 1899*, dissolve the Prahran Mechanics' Institution and Circulating Library incorporated and transfer the property, rights and liabilities held by the Prahran Mechanics' Institute to its successor body, the PMI Victorian History Library Inc.

The Prahran Mechanics' Institute is a community owned and run library, specialising in Victorian history. It is a place for learning, research, knowledge-sharing and community engagement and is a vital source of research materials and education for historians and those with a passion for learning more about our State.

To engage with the local and wider community, the library runs talks, lectures and workshops and holds exhibitions to showcase the remarkable collection and facilitate the study of Victorian history.

The Prahran Mechanics' Institute is also where the collections of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria, the Cinema and Theatre Historical Society and the Victorian Railway History Library are housed.

The Prahran Mechanics' Institute is Victoria's second oldest library, celebrating 170 years in February 2024. It is also the only mechanics' institute in Victoria governed by its own Act of Parliament.

The decision was taken in 1899 to transfer Prahran Mechanics' Institute from the previous trustees to a body established for its proper administration due to concerns about mismanagement, the poor state of the library and buildings and the reduction in membership to only 10 members.

As a result of this history, the *Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act 1899* does not provide the governing committee with the powers to make financial decisions in the best interests of their members. The Act has required amendment each time the committee has sought to purchase or sell land or change the composition of the committee.

A lot has changed since the Act was introduced, and I am pleased to say that the current PMI Library Board has strong ties to the community and robust governance arrangements in place. Last year, over 4,000 people visited the library and over 500 people attended the events or programs the Prahran Mechanics' Institute runs.

What is clear is that it is no longer appropriate or necessary for the Prahran Mechanics' Institute to be bound by legislation that restricts its activities.

Its successor body, the PMI Victorian History Library Inc is an incorporated association under the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012* and has a constitution in place to guide the board going forward.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the current PMI Library Board for the work they are doing:

- Ms Judith Ellis (President)
- Mr Denys Correll (Vice President)
- Mr Michael Tonta (Secretary)
- Mr Ben Quin, CPA
- Dr Michelle Cleary
- Ms Carmel O'Keeffe

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of previous committee members, as well as the staff and volunteers who have worked tirelessly to restore the Prahran Mechanics' Institute to its former glory and ensure that it has an enduring place in our community.

This Bill will ensure that the Prahran Mechanics' Institute can continue to operate as an incorporated association and can continue to fund its operations, modernise and adapt to meet the needs of the community and the historical associations that call the Prahran Mechanics' Institute home.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (11:22): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 14 August.

Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Natalie Hutchins:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (11:23): I rise to make the lead contribution on behalf of the Liberal and National parties on the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. The main purpose of this bill is to amend the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970 and the Aboriginal Lands Act 1991. It will update the management and ownership structure of Indigenous community funds and remove the use of and transfer restrictions for the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck missions cemeteries while retaining restrictions where requested by traditional owners and aims to improve landholder control over their property usage and management.

This bill proposes to change the governance and shareholding structure of Aboriginal trusts created under the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970 and the Aboriginal Lands Act 1991, specifically for the Framlingham and Lake Tyers Aboriginal trusts, and the bill proposes to update the management and ownership structures of community funds and remove certain restrictions on the use and transfer of historic cemeteries whilst maintaining necessary safeguards and change landholders' control over their properties. Key amendments include appointing deputy and acting chairs for governance continuity, an amendment to terminology and an ongoing evaluation to represent stakeholder interest.

The aim is to ensure fair distribution and responsible management. However, there are various components that must be tightened. There are a number of details through the bill that do that, and I might touch on those and then talk more generally about the particular missions that are involved here. What this is about is making sure that there is good accountability back to the stakeholders of the trusts, making sure there is good governance and making sure there is good auditing of what goes on there.

Clause 8 deals with quorum requirements, focusing on the intention to make sure that there are quorums at meetings that are held of these particular trusts to ensure that decisions, especially critical ones, truly reflect the will of the majority. Rather, if there is no restriction or no commitment to quorums, a very small number of people could make decisions on behalf of everyone, so it is important that there are quorums called for meetings and that decisions are made, as I said, to reflect the true majority of the people involved in a particular trust. It provides for comprehensive deliberations when there are more members present and discussions are more comprehensive.

In dealing with the transfer of shares, this bill emphasises the stricter notification rules for transparency and prevention of undisclosed transactions. This is critical because undisclosed share transactions could lead to concentration of power or hidden conflicts of interest. So this is making sure that everyone knows who those shares are being transferred to. For example, if a trust member secretly transferred shares to a family member who then influenced a decision, it could compromise the trust's integrity. My understanding of this is that it is making sure that the majority are represented in any dealings of the trust, and there is no opportunity for one particular group to actually gain control of it by stealth and take away the power of the majority.

New section 13B, which is about the inspection of the register of members, considers highlighting immediate online access to transparency. This is important because it allows members to verify information quickly and easily, so if a member suspects their details have been altered without consent, they can immediately check and report discrepancies, preventing potential fraud. Again, having online access means information is available to everyone, and everyone should be well informed about any transfer of shares within the trust.

New section 15(6A) deals with the disqualification of committee members and consideration of all criminal convictions in order to maintain high standards of leadership and integrity. Again, this is

critical because leaders who have been convicted of criminal offences could damage the trust's reputation and credibility. If a committee member with a fraud conviction – even if not related to dishonesty – is discovered, it could erode public member confidence in the trust's management. If you are serving on a company board or if you are serving on other institutional bodies, then if you have a criminal record that quite often disqualifies you from being on those particular organisations. It should equally apply to the Aboriginal trusts that we are talking about here to make sure that the people that are serving are above reproach. Particularly, as we have seen some historical cases dealing with these issues, this is making sure that it does not erode the general public's confidence in the operation of these trusts.

New section 15(5A) is on the declaration of personal interests and the potential to focus on tightening the rules to close loopholes. This is important because undeclared interests can lead to biased decision-making. If for example a member does not declare their interests, this could lead to an unfair advantage or misuse of trust resources. As with any other place and as with us who come to this chamber to serve the constituencies that send us here, we all have to declare any interests that we have. This makes sure that those that are serving on the trust actually have to make sure all their interests are declared.

New sections 21A and 21B note potential stricter reviews and penalties to ensure consistency and accountability. Importantly this keeps the trusts on track with their stated goals and commitments. If a trust deviates significantly from its approved plan without consequence, this could lead to mismanagement of resources or failure to meet community needs. Again, this is about making sure that all the trust shareholders have the opportunity to make sure that their views are heard and make sure that the people that are appointed to run the trust actually stick to the plan that has been prescribed about what they want to achieve on behalf of all the people that are shareholders in that particular trust.

In relation to new section 22A, 'Exemption from or extension for requirement to hold general meeting', one must consider that there should be no exemptions or extensions to prevent unreliability and incompetency. Regular meetings are essential for timely decision-making and accountability. What you see in lots of organisations is that those that actually are the office bearers in the organisation, if they are not well viewed by the rest of the people in that particular organisation or if they have something they want to hide, they can postpone meetings and put things off into the future.

This makes sure that there are regular meetings so that people are well informed and makes sure that the decisions are, again, being made in an appropriate way for the members of that trust.

New section 23AAB on independent auditor powers provides more power and penalties for obstruction to ensure stronger compliance. This allows for strong financial oversight, again making sure that the money is spent where it was said it was going to be spent. If the trust officials obstruct auditors from accessing certain records, this could hide financial irregularities or misuse of funds. Again, if anyone takes on a role in any organisation, it is important that that organisation is audited. If the people in that organisation are withholding information from the auditors, in some ways that is almost an admission that there is something wrong. But it is important that the auditors have access to all that information to make sure that the funds in those particular trusts are acquitted in a fit and proper manner.

Amended section 23D deals with the appointment of administrators and a mandatory advisory committee to improve necessary oversight. This allows for a quick response to leadership issues while ensuring diverse inputs. If a trust faces a sudden leadership crisis, the ability to quickly appoint new administrators, guided by the advisory committee, could prevent operational discrepancies and ensure continuity of service to the beneficiaries of that particular trust. Again, if there is a failure of leadership and if there is an issue of conflict within the trust, there is the opportunity to bring people in to make sure that it is put back on track. In some ways, this is not dissimilar to what the Minister for Local Government has to deal with with councils. When a council becomes dysfunctional and it is not working, the local government minister can appoint a monitor or appoint administrators to that

particular council. This is no different. If there are failures there, there is the opportunity to put a person in to help administer the trust.

There are compliance exemptions and the potential removal of ministerial exemptions to promote fairness and equity in the application of the law. This prevents political influence or favouritism in any functioning of the trust. For example, if one trust gets an exemption from financial reporting requirements, it could lead to a lack of transparency and unequal treatment between trusts. Again, this is making sure that there is no power there for anyone to exempt any of the trusts from these particular rules and laws, so that it is fair for everyone.

That is the content of the bill that is the key issue for those particular trusts. But when we look at what we are dealing with here, if you go back into the history of the lands that are involved in these trusts and why they are there, it deals with a dark time in the history of relationships between the European settlement and the Aboriginal people. I think some very misguided decisions were made in how Aboriginal people were treated at that time and how they were forced to live on particular lands. This one deals with the Framlingham, Lake Tyers, Ebenezer, Ramahyuck and Coranderrk missions. That was a very dark time and there was a very misguided view by people at that time that affected what they did to the Aboriginal people of Victoria. This obviously is not necessarily dealt with in this bill, but I think this bill is dealing with some of the ramifications of those decisions at that time. I know that in my area Cummeragunja was one of the missions, and the big Cummeragunja walk-off is part of the history of the Aboriginal people. They fought to get rights which they did not have at that time. So we are dealing with what is a very sensitive issue, particularly to the Aboriginal people of Victoria – the Indigenous people of Victoria – but also dealing with the fact that our forefathers made decisions that I do not think were in the best interests of the people at the time. With the benefit of hindsight, it is very easy for us to stand here and say that now. We are dealing with some of those issues, and over time these lands have been handed back to the original custodians of that land. If you go through the list of the ones that are there, there is the Ebenezer mission, which is on the Wimmera River north-west of Horsham. I note when I go and look at the history of Ebenezer the Honourable Jeanette Powell, who was the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in our government from 2010 to 2014, and the local member, Hugh Delahunty, were both involved in making sure that the Ebenezer mission was handed back to the traditional owners in that particular area.

I think that was a good outcome for what was a very misguided view at the time in setting that particular establishment up, and it equally applies to the other missions as we go through those. Ebenezer was set up back in the mid-1800s and closed in the early 1900s and, through various pieces of legislation, stayed in public ownership over that time, but it was handed back at that particular time, back in about 2012, to the traditional owners there to administer.

Framlingham Mission – the member for South-West Coast is sitting beside me, and as I understand it, the member for South-West Coast delivered health services in Framlingham for 15 years, if memory serves me correct, as I have heard her talk about in this place. It is another settlement that was set up on the Hopkins River just outside Warrnambool. I do not believe it was the best thing to do at that particular time, and with the benefit of hindsight we all know it definitely was not the best thing to do for the peoples at that particular time. But that is one of the trusts that this legislation is dealing with, to make sure that it is run appropriately into the future, and I commend the minister for the bill that she has brought before the house to make sure there is fairness and equity in how these trusts work into the future.

Ramahyuck Mission, which is located on Lake Wellington near the Avon River, is another establishment that was set up, in this case by the same missionary people that actually set up Ebenezer, again acting on what they thought was best at the time but as we all know, with the benefit of hindsight, was not in their best interests there. But this deals with the issues around the cemetery and how people can be interred in there in the future.

The Coranderrk Aboriginal Cemetery out at Healesville – we all know the history of Barak here in Melbourne, who is buried at that particular site, and a monument that was here in Melbourne is actually now out in that particular cemetery for someone who years ago was standing up for Aboriginal land rights. That cemetery is there with over 300 interments from the people of the Yarra region, and his monument is to recognise the work that he did as a leader in Aboriginal land rights at that particular time.

The Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust is still going, and that and Framlingham are the two trusts that all the issues in this legislation deal with as far as the administration of trusts goes. That community down in East Gippsland is still a very functioning and active community as well.

I suppose what this legislation does is talk about making sure there is accountability, making sure there is equity between trust holders and making sure that there is good auditing of the process of how these trusts are administered. I think we would all, when we come to this house, aspire for that to happen in any organisation in Victoria, and given that this is under government legislation here in Victoria, to make sure it does happen in these particular trusts.

On our side of the Parliament we would like to see those same principles apply to some other issues that involve Indigenous affairs here in Victoria. There has been a lot of commentary in recent times, over the last 12 months, around the cultural heritage act and the implications and implementation of the cultural heritage act here in Victoria. We on our side of the house would like to make sure that those same principles actually apply when it comes to the implementation of cultural heritage in Victoria – that there is fairness and equity, there is transparency, there is accountability, so that everyone, both the Indigenous people who are doing assessments under cultural heritage and the landholders or developers that want to do developments, actually have the opportunity to have equal rights apply to them.

I think about some of the particular issues that as the shadow minister I have talked to the First Peoples Assembly about. I might talk about a couple of those. Just on the edge of my electorate, actually in the member for Shepparton's electorate, we have the Barmah forest, which is managed by the Yorta Yorta people. Inside the Barmah forest there are cattle yards which are actually National Trust listed. They were used every year for close to a hundred years.

There used to be cattle and horses that ran in the Barmah forest that the local landholders would put in through the winter when they were not using their horses to do the farming. They would put cattle in there to feed through the winter as well. There would be an annual muster that would actually round up all those horses and round up all those cattle, and there would be a huge community event to make sure that they were acquitted back to the properties that actually put them in there. With the cessation of cattle and horses being deliberately put into the forest for that purpose there was still an annual muster that was conducted at the Barmah muster yards where people came together to do camp drafting, to do woodchopping, to do all those sorts of events, and up till about four years ago that was always a great community event in that part of Victoria. But since that time the Yorta Yorta people have said that the community can no longer hold that function in those particular cattle yards, remembering these cattle yards are trust-listed for their value as history of the cattle yards. They are supposed to be maintained, but Parks Victoria is not maintaining them, so they are starting to fall into disrepair, and one of the issues I have raised as we move forward with the treaty discussions is: let us think about how we can have some opportunities for the whole of the community to work together on access to some of these particular parts of Victoria. It would be great if the Barmah muster event could be held back in the cattle yards in the middle of the Barmah forest rather than having to be held on the old racetrack at Barmah. It would I think help protect the heritage of the whole area for both the Aboriginal people and the settlers that have come since that time. These are some of the things where I think we should have some fairness and equity and common sense come back in.

Equally, there is an issue at Rainbow, where there is an off-road rally which is being held up because Parks Victoria in this case have not actually done the cultural heritage work. Parks Victoria rebuilt a

road and did not do the right thing and did not get a cultural heritage study done, and because of that the off-road event that is held two or three times a year there can no longer run, or has been told it cannot run, because Parks Victoria did not get the cultural heritage study done on that particular piece of road. Again, surely some common sense can prevail so that event can be held and to make sure that any other parts of that particular area that are culturally sensitive areas can be protected, but given that Parks Victoria have physically remade a road, it defies logic as to why that event cannot be held in the future.

Then we come to more specific issues with cultural heritage around the timelines and the costs and the registration of people that actually do the cultural heritage studies. If any organisation has monopoly powers to deliver a service under an act of Parliament here in Victoria, as I said, I believe there should be accountability. There should be responsibility for those people that have that monopoly power under legislation to make sure they are acquitting a fair and reasonable service and are not extracting exorbitant fees and are not abusing the monopoly power that they have.

There are concerns from a lot of people who are wanting to do development in Victoria, whether it be farmers or whether it be businesspeople. A tradie in Maryborough I have been dealing with just wants to build a shed, and he is having huge trouble because the shed was on land that had been reformed and remade. If you know any of the history of the goldmining areas, you would know that land was severely turned over in the gold rush days to find gold. He was told there should be no issue here and there was a low probability of any cultural heritage because the land had been so changed over time. He has now spent months and months trying to get permission to build this particular shed so he can use it as part of his trade as a painter. He cannot get it resolved. He has paid out tens of thousands of dollars to a cultural heritage expert to deal with this particular issue, and he is just so frustrated with the process. He is a tradie; he is a painter. He has worked hard all his life to make a living and make a way for his family, and now he is being held up on going to the next part of his business plan and it has cost thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars and in lost opportunity in the time that he has been doing that.

We see examples right around Victoria of this happening. I understand, and I have talked to the First Peoples' Assembly co-chairs. Yes, I agree we need to make sure there is not abuse of the protection of cultural heritage, but we also need to make sure that there is not abuse of the cultural heritage powers – that they are not being used to extract exorbitant amounts of money out of any particular development or put long, restrictive times on those particular projects.

There has been discussion in recent times about the costs that this is putting onto houses in Melbourne. A group of people that I met with out at Doreen a number of months ago were talking about the need for more housing, because we all know about the housing shortage we have in Victoria, and their view was that cultural heritage studies and the work that needed to be done was putting between \$10,000 and \$20,000 on the cost of each housing block that they were selling at that particular time. So how can we find some balance to make sure that cultural heritage is protected but without making it exorbitant for, in this case, people who want to buy a house block or people who want to buy a land and house package? We know how expensive it is at the moment and how much state government charges and taxes are involved in the cost of a house and land package. My understanding from a number of sources is that if a young couple want to buy a land and house package now, nearly 40 per cent of what they pay for that house and land package is state government taxes and charges. Again, we should look at all of those and make sure we do what we can to reduce those for young couples who want to buy a house.

We also need to make sure that, for those people that are developing that land, the costs of doing cultural heritage are not exorbitant and the timeframes are not exorbitant. For a developer who is developing land, the holding cost if they can turn that over and be selling blocks within two years is a lot more economical than if they have to hold it for five or six years, pay the land tax, pay all the taxes on that and pay the interest on their loans to own that particular land. So we want to make sure that

there is some balance brought back into that particular process to make sure that houses are affordable here in Victoria whilst also protecting cultural heritage.

That particular group we spoke to also said that every time they bring a new work crew on the site they have to go through cultural heritage training to ensure that the workers, if they find a particular artefact, can –

Chris Couzens interjected.

Peter WALSH: You might shake your head, but this is what they are telling me. I am just reporting what they are telling me.

Chris Couzens interjected.

Peter WALSH: We are not blaming anyone. We are trying to make sure there is a sensible, civil debate around this, there is accountability, there is transparency and there is fairness for everyone involved in that process.

I understand it is a sensitive issue, but I think it is a discussion that has to be had. One of the challenges we have now in society but particularly in Victoria is that, if someone speaks up against a particular thing or raises a particular concern, they are branded as being a racist or branded as being a bigot or branded as being something else, rather than being able to have a sensible conversation about these particular issues.

All of us in this house have a responsibility when we come into this place to raise issues that are genuine concerns of our constituency. If we do not raise issues that are genuine concerns of our constituency, we actually do not have a democracy. It is important for people to go out into the foyer and look at the tiles – with many voices common sense prevails, but with single voices it does not happen.

We are raising those issues, and on our side of this house we want to constructively work through those issues with the First Peoples' Assembly and any other organisation that is involved in this.

A member interjected.

Peter WALSH: Those on the other side can ridicule it. The Liberals and Nationals will not blindly follow the government on any particular issue no matter what it is, whether it be Aboriginal affairs, whether it be treaty, whether it be legislation around integrity or whether it be legislation around corruption with the CFMEU. We are here to make sure that we have a sensible, informed and responsible debate. It is not about being inflammatory. It is not about trying to stir up any particular side of the debate to make it seem irrational. It is about these genuine issues that are being raised, and we want to make sure that they are dealt with in a sensible way.

We have found out over the last couple of days, following the criticism from the Premier and her government about the position that the Liberals and Nationals have taken on cultural heritage, that the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) are doing their own secret review into –

Chris Couzens interjected.

Peter WALSH: It was reported in the paper that DPC –

Members interjecting.

Peter WALSH: Go and read the comments that the Premier actually made that DPC is doing a review of the cultural heritage act processes. Are you saying the Premier is not telling the truth?

Natalie Suleyman: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it has been a wideranging debate, but unfortunately the Leader of the Nationals should know better, and he has now strayed from the bill

that is before the house. I would ask you to direct the member to speak on the bill that is before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I will direct the member to come back to the bill.

Peter WALSH: In conclusion, our side of the house are not opposing the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I have talked about the history of how we have ended up in this situation, which I do not think any of us are proud of at all, but it is there. This puts some better accountability, some more integrity and some rules around the operation of those Aboriginal trusts, and I will finish my contribution with that.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (11:52): I am pleased to rise to contribute on the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I stand here today on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri peoples, and I acknowledge their ancestors and elders. I acknowledge the many countries across the state, including where I live and work, and those I represent in this place, the Wadawurrung people. I pay my respects to Aboriginal peoples, their culture and their elders past and present. I acknowledge their strength, resilience and continued connection to country, skies and waterways. I also acknowledge all First Peoples who may be here today and those who may be listening online. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

I do also want to recognise that whenever we have these debates that involve Aboriginal communities or legislation involving Aboriginal communities, unfortunately, whether it be in this place or on social media or out in our community, there are racist remarks and misinformation that actually cause real harm to Aboriginal people. I am very mindful of that given that we are debating this bill today, and I think all of us in this chamber should be mindful of that.

This government, the Allan Labor government, is committed to true reconciliation, truth-telling and treaty with First Peoples. We can only do this by empowering and supporting Aboriginal peoples through self-determination, by deep listening and by acknowledging the wrongs of the past. There are significant areas of the journey to reconciliation, truth-telling and treaty, and this bill is part of this journey.

There is a lot of political game playing going on at the expense of First Nations people in our community, and that really concerns me. It concerns me that the Leader of the Nationals, who was on his feet just before me, talked about how during colonisation people were 'misguided'. Well, let me tell you, I do not believe that they were misguided when they stole Aboriginal children, they took Aboriginal language from communities, they massacred entire families and communities and then they stole their land. But Aboriginal people have been resilient and strong over the last more than 200 years. They have been calling for over 200 years for a treaty process and reconciliation – to sit down together and for all of us to deeply listen.

That is why this government have done what we have done, but we did it in a bipartisan way. We had those opposite agreeing with us when it came to treaty. So we introduced legislation to introduce the treaty process. We established the treaty commissioner, who was the amazing Jill Gallagher, who did an extraordinary job. We established the First Peoples' Assembly, then the Yoorrook Justice Commission and the Treaty Authority. And then those on the other side turned their backs on all of that, and the excuse they used – which we heard in the media, mind you; they did not speak to the Aboriginal community, there was no consultation about that – was that they no longer supported the treaty process in Victoria. They said that after the Voice referendum outcome. That was their opportunity to stand with Aboriginal people in Victoria after that outcome, but what they did was they turned their backs on them and they withdrew their support.

The Leader of the Nationals said that some things in the bill will address injustice. That is what treaty is all about, so why aren't they supporting treaty? That is the question I ask. You can say, 'Yes, there have been injustices, and we support this bill.' Well, why aren't you supporting treaty? They are the questions that I ask the opposition. To use cultural heritage as an excuse for not supporting treaty is

outrageous. That is not on. They did not consult the Aboriginal community when they did that. They have not consulted the Aboriginal community about cultural heritage matters at all. To blame the Aboriginal community for the housing crisis – that is outrageous. They should not be blaming the Aboriginal community for anything. In fact they should be blaming all of us for not having dealt with these matters.

When the Leader of the Nationals said we are doing a review – no, we are not. We are not reviewing the cultural heritage laws, but we are looking at whether the cultural heritage management plan system can be strengthened. We work every day with traditional owners and with the Aboriginal community to ensure that they have the resources they need. But they should not be blamed for delays that they have no control over. It is outrageous.

The opposition leader's half-baked policy that he put out on the weekend will not speed up any approvals, with only 1 per cent of developers even needing a cultural heritage plan. So I think for us in Victoria the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 provides the strongest legislative protections for Aboriginal cultural heritage in this country, and we should all be very proud of that. As I said, only 1 per cent of all developments that have a planning permit require a cultural heritage management plan. So when they talk about cultural heritage and that being the reason for withdrawing from supporting treaty, it is absolute rubbish. They need to look at what they are doing in terms of supporting the Aboriginal community, and I hope they will do that as we move forward in the coming months.

The bill will improve the way land is managed at Framlingham and Lake Tyers Aboriginal trusts, in addition to removing restrictions on decisions made about Aboriginal land by Aboriginal communities at Ebenezer and Ramahyuck mission cemeteries. It does this by amending two acts which were enacted in 1970 and 1991. The 1970 act has never substantially been updated, despite being enacted over 50 years ago, with many of the governance and operational requirements being rooted in outdated corporate governance models. When we talk about self-determination, this is a great example of the importance of self-determination – to allow those communities to manage and make decisions about their own lands. That is what is important. These frameworks imposed significant compliance requirements, creating barriers for communities, and that is what we need to remove.

They have made it harder for communities to make decisions about and manage their own lands. At the time of enactment no consideration was given to the role of Aboriginal models of governance and cultural ways of doing business, which causes significant barriers today. As I said, this is about self-determination, and it is about allowing Aboriginal communities to make decisions for their own mobs and for their own communities – that is so important to them.

This bill will amend the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970 to update the shareholding system and governance requirements of the Framlingham Aboriginal Trust and the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust. I will point out that Framlingham is where the Couzens family were on the mission. They moved to Geelong to hide from government, basically, but Framlingham was their home. They moved to Geelong in the late 1960s because children were still being removed from their community. So this has real significance for the Couzens family and for all the mob from Framlingham, and I am sure they are very excited and will welcome this piece of legislation.

In concluding my remarks, I think we all have some serious lessons to learn when it comes to self-determination and what really matters to First Peoples of this state. The contribution they make to this state is something that we, the Allan government, do recognise. We want to sit at the table with them, and we have sat at the table with them for many years now. It has been an eight-year journey to get to the point we are now where we have the Treaty Authority ready to roll on treaty, which we are very excited about. I commend the bill to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:02): I rise to speak on the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 and its proposed changes to the governance and shareholding structures of Aboriginal trusts created under the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970 and Aboriginal Lands Act 1991. This

administrative bill has risen largely out of the challenges that have plagued the Aboriginal communities and will assist in ensuring that the issues surrounding transparency and accountability are addressed in the decision-making process of trusts like Framlingham Aboriginal Trust. I will particularly focus my contribution on the Framlingham trust aspect of this bill. I do this as someone who worked at Framlingham for 15 years, so I do have a considered firsthand understanding of the issues surrounding the trust and how they did cause angst among the community for many years, much of which stemmed from the lack of fairness of the shareholding distribution of the trust.

In my role as a registered nurse I had the great privilege of running Kirrae Health Service, which was an Aboriginal community controlled health organisation within the trust precinct. So I actually worked within the model of Aboriginal community control, or ACCHO as it is known, and I know firsthand just how important self-determination is, or more specifically getting outcomes that really make a difference.

During that time I got to know very well the different clans and the relationships that are interwoven between the different family groups: the Clarkes with an 'e' and the Clarks without an 'e', the Austins, the Harradines, the Chatfields, the Couzens, the Harrisons, the Litsters, the Proctors, the Edwards and all the different family clans – I could go on through a lot more names. But I got to know the connections and the interconnections that existed between the Framlingham Aboriginal Trust community and the wider Gunditjmarra community and right across the region.

I was also asked by the Aboriginal people to represent the Framlingham community at a VACCHO, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, level, so I got to know many of the clans right across Victoria from Rumbalara to Winda-Mara, Dja Dja Wurrung and Wathaurong and many more. Being there for so long, I had the pleasure of really getting to know the families and watching the next generation being born, and now I see many of them grown and in leadership roles right across the state: people like Marcus Clarke, the Eastern Maar CEO; Troy Litster, a volunteer at the SES; Louise, who recently received an award with NAIDOC Week; Danny, the CEO at Gunditjmarra; Mackie Chatfield, who is the CEO at the Aboriginal trust. Many of them were young kids that I have watched grow up, and there are leaders like Corey Mifsud, who invited me to the Russells Creek NAIDOC celebration last week and the pre-game smoking ceremony. Many of the local community came together and had a wonderful afternoon, even though it was absolutely pouring rain, catching up with many people like Kerry Proctor and Fid Chatfield and their many children who have grown, who I could hardly recognise. They are all looking like young men and women. Craig Edwards and his son Jordy from Geelong – we reminisced about the connections there with family. His children have grown, and we were reminiscing about dear Uncle Bill and Aunty Kath, who I was very close to.

I truly appreciate the values of the Aboriginal community. One of these values is the importance of the next generation and investing in the children for the future. Never have I worked anywhere where children were more respected and cherished. My children were always welcomed, and I was able to mother and work in a family-friendly environment – very ahead of their time as a family-friendly workplace. I have lifelong friendships as a result of my most enjoyable 15 years working in the Aboriginal community. Consequently, I am a little bit concerned about the way this current Labor government talks the big game about caring for and listening to Aboriginal communities, when we are yet to see any real follow-up or outcomes.

What I see commonly is a lack of detail, and I am worried that this bill, like the government usually does, has a focus on spinning a good headline rather than better outcomes as a result of legislative change. This government commonly puts through legislation without working on the detail. Detail is lacking, and that is a hallmark of this government. Look at the public drunkenness laws – have they worked? Changes to bail laws – have they worked? Accessing prescriptions – has anyone actually been able to get a prescription for a UTI despite all the work that has been done in Queensland and overseas? You certainly cannot in my electorate as yet. I do have my doubts that this legislation has been drawn up in a way that will address the issues and provide better transparency and accountability

for those working and living at Framlingham. The trust families should have more say in the trust decisions, and my suspicions are the government will be back making amendments to this legislation.

A bit of history: the legislation that originally formed the trust allowed for only people currently living on the land to receive the shareholding, and even then no-one was really sure who the shareholders were due to the lack of transparency. The design of the trust did not recognise those who had deep connections but who were not actually residing there at the time. An example is Hope Harradine – a Clarke with an ‘e’ before she married Lionel – who was born on the Framlingham mission, as we affectionally call it. Hope was a 17-year-old girl who had moved to Melbourne at the time of the distribution of shares. She married her then lifelong partner Lionel, and after a few short years in Melbourne together they moved back. But she was not issued shares despite having deep connections to the Framlingham land. When I visited the trust a couple of weeks ago, Hope’s son Wayne and I were discussing how illogical that is despite his great-great-grandmother being born at Framlingham. His children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren continue to have a strong involvement with Framlingham, and yet they have no shareholding. So you can understand why when people with deep connections were not given shares they did not feel like it was a representative model for the people who belong there.

This is what the legislation should be addressing, but I do not feel it is likely to happen quite under this government, because what we have here is a Labor government that says things are all right and talks about the importance of listening to Indigenous communities, with little else to show in real terms – meaningful outcomes in the lives of Indigenous Victorians. Have we seen improvements in life expectancy compared to non-Indigenous community members of Victoria? Have Labor done anything to improve cardiac outcomes and reduce asthma, hypertension incidents and otitis media and all the other indicators of health that really have not improved?

Let us examine the treatment of Aboriginal children. Despite failings in child protection as highlighted by the Yoorrook Justice Commission, this government continues to fail Aboriginal children. For example, from 2013 to 2022 the number of children in out-of-home care has increased from 922 to 2595. Victoria’s rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care is the worst in the country. Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child protection system 11 to one. I feel that this government is doing a disservice to the Aboriginal community by claiming to improve health outcomes for the children or the people in general. All the tokenism that this government takes in I find is often patronising and disrespectful; in fact I think it does more damage to the good work the Aboriginal community are doing. Aboriginal people and culture are being embraced by the wider community, which we should all be celebrating. Another example of how this government is taking the cultural divide to a new level is the city-centric way they are managing the cultural heritage process, which is causing much anxiety.

A member interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: The bill is about transparency and accountability, and that is exactly what I am referring to. When we are so short of houses over people’s heads, we need a process in place that ensures fairness and equitable support for the Aboriginal communities who deliver this.

The government should be working to ensure timely and transparent outcomes that respect the Indigenous community’s heritage and do not unnecessarily hinder the planning process. I have had many conversations with Aboriginal communities – as recently as last week with the Edwards family from Geelong – and developers who have close links with the Aboriginal communities in my part of the world. They both tell me it is not the Aboriginal communities that are creating the bottleneck in the cultural heritage overlay assessments that are required for land to be developed. They say it is the white bureaucrats from Melbourne, which is how they describe to me who is causing the problem. What ends up happening in the wider community is that they lump all the Aboriginal communities in one basket, creating the impression that they are the ones holding up the process and charging

ridiculous amounts of money when it is the government who should be putting in place a process that all cultural heritage organisations –

Natalie Hutchins: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I do not believe the member is being relevant to the bill. This bill is not about cultural heritage management.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I will remind the current member on their feet, the member for South-West Coast, to stay on track and talk about the bill that is before the chamber at the moment.

Roma BRITNELL: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the wideranging debate has actually –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I have ruled on the point of order, so if you could please not stray.

Roma BRITNELL: I believe it is an absolute injustice that the backlog created by the Allan Labor government is undermining Aboriginal communities, allowing them to be saddled with the blame for the government's inaction. There is no process in place that ensures things happen in a fair and equitable manner or to support the Aboriginal community to deliver this. Instead the process is fraught with inequities, and that is not helpful to those who I know live in these communities and want to see a fair and equitable process that protects cultural heritage but also gets things done. So whilst I do not oppose this legislation, I doubt there will be an outcome that the Aboriginal families and communities are looking for as a result of this bill to see that the trust is made a fairer and more equitable place for all decision-makers and that Aboriginal people get the respect they deserve from this Allan Labor government.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would ask that the minister at the table withdraw the comments she made near the end of the member's contribution, please.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Will the minister withdraw the comment?

Natalie Hutchins: I withdraw.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:12): I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, and pay my respects to elders past and present and also acknowledge any other First Peoples who may be present with us today. I do want to acknowledge their strength, resilience and continued connection to their country, skies and waterways, and, I should say, we are unequivocally committed to true reconciliation, truth-telling and treaty with First Peoples. I do get a little confused – at best, I should say; there are far deeper emotions that are inspired within me – when the opposition on the one hand claim they are backing in our Aboriginal people but have completely turned their back on the treaty process. Then, within the context of this bill, on the one hand they are acknowledging injustices of the past but then talking about housing affordability for couples and how they are going to afford a house and then associating that with cultural heritage elements as if it is some kind of laborious inconvenience, and in that vein run the risk of diminishing the significance of our wonderful cultural heritage that is of the Aboriginal people and something that we should be extremely proud of.

I think that due care has to be taken in this space for good reason if we look at the context within which this bill comes about and the impetus for the various changes, which were completely repudiated by the previous member of the opposition, that I would say will go a considerable way to rectifying a number of the injustices that have proceeded as a result of the establishment of the missions in the first place. But no-one is suggesting that this bill alone can rectify all of the injustices, and this is why we do have a treaty process well underway. This is why we have truth-telling. This is why it is so important to be very factual in this context and to be very careful baiting with very dangerous narratives which are counterproductive to the purpose upon which we are meeting here today, I would suggest.

On the one hand you say, 'No, no, no, we're not baiting anyone. No, we're just talking about what's right and proper. This is fair. This is reasonable.' Hang on a minute – what are we debating here, and what is the context within which we are operating? I think no-one can be naive about that context, and to suggest as such is actually quite insulting, not least to the Aboriginal people themselves. You are gilding the lily here a bit. I think it is actually disrespectful, and one needs to be very, very careful with the context, the history and the premise of the legislation we are debating here today. What underpins this of course, when we are talking about the process and progressing treaty, is that integral nexus between reconciliation and progressing self-determination. These are very important principles that underpin progression that we are making here and that we are seeking to make here as we speak.

I do want to reference the very damaging impact of these missions, and I am going to actually quote the minister and her statement at the Yoorrook Justice Commission:

... the State's establishment of missions and reserves at Coranderrk, Lake Tyers, Framlingham, Lake Condah, Ramahyuck and Ebenezer was driven by the paternalistic and racist attitudes of the time, including the idea that Christianity was the only means of assisting Aboriginal people. The reserve system aimed to change Aboriginal people and to make them more like white, European people by removing children, discouraging the speaking of Aboriginal languages and the practice of Aboriginal culture.

...

the reserves became less concerned with Aboriginal peoples' welfare –

far from it –

and became places where First Peoples were segregated, monitored, their labour exploited and made to conform to mission life.

You can see when we speak within this context we should be very careful about then going off on tangents about people being able to afford housing because of the protection and the processes surrounding cultural heritage. There is a grave risk with going on those tangents with this context and the sensitivity of this bill. I do not resile from raising that point because I think that we need to be very respectful in this space, bearing in mind the complete disrespect of Aboriginal culture by the colonisers of this nation. I just think that has to be very much acknowledged within the space within which we are discussing this legislation here today.

I also want to acknowledge that the Aboriginal Lands Act was at the time a landmark piece of legislation. It was the first time the Victorian Parliament recognised Aboriginal land rights and the government's first attempt to recognise self-determination, and it was created – and this was perhaps the little light in the tunnel, if you like – in direct response to the Framlingham and Lake Tyers Aboriginal communities' advocacy for land rights. That speaks to that incredible resilience in spite of all that they have been through and continue to suffer and endure. As former mission sites, Framlingham and Lake Tyers represent the state's past racist, segregationist and assimilationist laws which actively sought to deny First Peoples any form of self-determination. However, despite being landmark legislation at that time, this scheme is outdated and remains inadequate at achieving the act's goals in full of promoting self-determination and economic independence for the trusts' shareholders and non-shareholder residents, hence the imperative for the amendments that are being brought about today.

It was, frankly, galling to hear the opposition say, 'Oh, it's not going to do anything; it's not going to help anyone.' Let us just look at specific aspects of this bill. Currently there are unfair administrative requirements of the trusts impacting their ability to comply with the legislation. This includes duplicative financial reporting requirements, issues with the shareholding system and legislative process for share transfers, ineffective accountability and transparency provisions and governance and composition arrangements that are not effective. We need to provide the trusts the powers to carry out business on trust land in a way that works for them and in a way that enables true self-determination.

I will put a caveat on that, because we are not saying that this is the end of the pathway on the journey to reform. It is already fully acknowledged that there will be further reform with regard to the matters

of these trusts, as is due and proper and as is appropriate. Nobody is resiling from or glossing over those issues, contrary to some of the inferences that were suggested opposite, which I think also, again, can be insulting to those who have been consulted directly – those directly impacted by the changes here today – because it suggests that somehow they would not be aware of the matters being discussed here when of course they are; they absolutely are. They are integral, and we know that that is actually what underpins the pathway to self-determination – Aboriginal people controlling their destiny, is it not? This is what underpins that very important progression and evolution of our country. We cannot move forward unless Aboriginal people are able to absolutely have control of their destiny. We know that. We get it on this side of the house. I am not convinced by those opposite. They have completely turned their back on treaty. It is galling, it is shameful and I do not understand it.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, seeking a point of clarification on relevance, the Acting Speaker ruled a number of times that members on this side of the chamber were not being relevant to the bill. The member now is not being anywhere near relevant to the bill, and I would ask the Acting Speaker to bring the member back to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member for Albert Park to come back to the bill.

Nina TAYLOR: I should say that, in addition to progressing the treaty process, the government is also meeting its existing obligations to Aboriginal communities, but that actually is a very strong nexus on the pathway to self-determination.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:22): I am pleased to rise on the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 and say a few words, particularly as it relates to my area of Gippsland and Gippsland South. Unlike others, I do not think this is a bill that we need to take partisan positions on. Those opposite seemed determined to speak about everything except what this bill is.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: The minister at the table says, 'That's convenient.' If the government wants to have a debate on treaty, bring on a debate on treaty. This is a bill about a completely different thing.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: Again, I am not here to talk about that. I am here to talk about the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill. I am not here to score political points, which is what those opposite seem more focused on.

I am going to speak particularly about the second part of the legislation. The first part is amendments to the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970, which particularly relates to the Framlingham and Lake Tyers Aboriginal trusts. The member for South-West Coast is very well placed to speak on that, and I think the member for Gippsland East will be coming up shortly and he will know more and speak more about the Lake Tyers trust. The only comment I will make about that is a little bit of history.

Previous speakers have talked about the racist policies of past governments and the deliberate attempts to diminish and to suppress Aboriginal culture. I was reminded in hearing that of part of my own family's story that I only discovered a few years ago. I am descended from the O'Rourkes of far East Gippsland, who came into the Suggan Buggan–Wulgulmerang area up in the Snowy River valley, virtually at the same time as Melbourne was being settled, if not before – around 1838, so a little bit after technically. The story I only discovered a few years ago was that some of the members of that family came across the aftermath of what appears to have been a massacre and found a baby still alive. That baby was Neddy O'Rourke, and he was taken in by that family and became one of their own. They had I think nine children or something at the time, and Neddy became another one of their own.

I was reminded of this when reading some of the history of the Ramahyuck Aboriginal mission, which eventually closed down virtually because of the Aboriginal Protection Act that was passed on 1886. It

was that and many others – there were quite a number of acts that went through the Parliament at that time trying to deal with the ‘Aboriginal question’, if you would like to put it that way, because there was much debate in the Victorian colonial Parliament at the time about how to manage the Aboriginal population.

I was reminded of it because in the history that I found of Neddy O’Rourke it mentions that, having grown up with the O’Rourke family at Wulgulmerang and Suggan Buggan, he then ‘moved to’ Lake Tyers. That was the way it was euphemistically put. I am only guessing this myself, but I suspect he did not choose to move. I suspect that he was in fact forced to move. It is an issue that I would personally like to follow up more because, apart from anything else, he married a Thorpe, and I do wonder whether there is a connection with another and famous Thorpe in the political world. That may well be a connection to my family too.

Ramahyuck, as I said, is just outside my electorate. The name Ramahyuck has far more positive connotations for the Indigenous community in my electorate as it is the social services provider in the region, operating out of both Sale and Morwell and providing medical and other health and welfare services to the Aboriginal population. But it is the original Ramahyuck Mission that we are talking about with this piece of legislation.

Subsequently the cemetery, which is still there at Ramahyuck, was established by Reverend Friedrich August Hagenauer – I am not sure if I got the pronunciation of that right – who was a missionary. It was established in 1863 on the banks of the Avon River, quite close to Lake Wellington. As I said, it is still there – you can go there – but it is a little bit difficult to access these days. He applied for and eventually received 2356 acres of land, and it had a level of success, at least in the ways that were mentioned at the time. This history, I might add, has come directly from the Ramahyuck corporation now. It states:

A Melbourne newspaper, the Argus, had described the station as ‘a pretty settlement of white painted weatherboard buildings ... which are supplied with such evidence of civilisation ... (purchasing) stoves, water tanks, meal safes and sewing machines ... out of the earnings of the husbands and fathers from shearing and other work.’

So it was quite productive in a white European sense. The history goes on to say that:

Rev. Hagenauer was a strong leader whose word was law at the Ramahyuck Mission Station.

Now, I do not wish to defame the dead, but I have done some reading on him in the past, and ‘a strong leader’ might be a euphemism and perhaps a little bit misleading. He actually:

... forbade corroborees ... and would not tolerate any tribal habits or laws. His motive was to encourage civilisation and therefore requested that all –

the Gunnai/Kurnai that were there and probably many other people from different tribes –

... gather their spears, boomerangs and other traditional implements in a pile to set alight and destroy them.

This is something that of course happened across not just many of the missions but various other locations across Australia. It is a sad fact that that was seen to be protection and in fact possibly was protection at the time. There were multiple massacres in the Gippsland region as well of Aboriginal people, and I am currently reading a book about that, which is interesting because it is a very challenged and contested topic. I am reading a book called *A Convenient Scapegoat*, a book about Angus McMillan’s role or otherwise in massacres in Gippsland. So Ramahyuck no doubt was a protected area to some degree given that the incursions of settlers into the region had decimated the Gunnai/Kurnai population. I have not actually got to the point yet of whether Angus McMillan was absolved or not, but certainly there is a serious question over his involvement.

As I said, Ramahyuck was established with, in theory at least, good intention – to civilise and Christianise the Aboriginal people – but it is quite startling that it was in 1863, literally only about 23 or 24 years after the central plains of Gippsland were actually settled, that there was a need. I think I

have got the figures here. There were around 200 natives, as it says here, from five different tribal groups, which was no doubt the five different tribal groups of the Gunnai/Kurnai.

I understand that now there is very little, if anything, left at what was the Ramahyuck Mission. It is now just a cemetery. I was just speaking to the CEO of the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation to get a bit of background on it this morning. I understand that there are no headstones and no marking of the graves of the Aboriginal people there but that GLAWAC has done some research and some sonar sensing and the like to get a better understanding of where the graves are and who they might belong to. It has put in a bridge and some better access because it is literally driving across a farm track to access the site these days.

As I understand it, the original act, the Aboriginal Lands Act 1991, provided the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative – or GEGAC, as we know them – with the management of this site, and I believe GLAWAC is now looking to come in and assist them. Perhaps this legislation might in fact facilitate the transfer. As we said, there are transfer restrictions in that original legislation, and I believe that GLAWAC would like to come in and be able to spend some money on the cemetery and actually make it more accessible both to Aboriginal people and their elders in particular but also to the wider community, because Ramahyuck Cemetery is in fact part of the Bataluk Cultural Trail, which runs right through the Gunnai/Kurnai lands of Gippsland and highlights some of the cultural sites of importance. I understand GLAWAC has also undertaken recently a cultural tourism strategy that will hopefully provide better understanding of and an economic basis as well for some of the activities of the Gunnai/Kurnai people in our region.

I look forward to seeing this. I hope that the transfer of the cemetery will assist in better understanding the history as well. As the Leader of the Nationals has indicated, we are not opposing this legislation, and I look forward to seeing it passed.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (12:32): Can I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I did note that we had the co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly in the chamber up until a moment ago, so I just want to put on record my appreciation to them for their work and their patience. I had the great honour of working just a little bit with former co-chairs Marcus Stewart and Aunty Geraldine Atkinson prior to and during the yes campaign. Indeed they allowed me to sit at their table and make phone calls during that campaign. It is something that will probably stick with me for the rest of my life, hearing the good and the bad of some of those phone calls and what some of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters have to put up with.

Today I think is a really important day. This house has a history of passing terrible, racist legislation, and seeing our Aboriginal brothers and sisters in the house today I guess gives us a bit of a sense of their patience over the years of having to deal with us and our systems as we took their systems away from them. Just a bit of googling can take us to legislation passed in this Parliament, and I do just point out that the language in this legislation is pretty subpar and not optimal. The Aboriginal Protection Act 1869: the long title is 'An act to provide for the protection and management of the Aboriginal natives of Victoria'. This act was passed in this house and made Victoria the first colony to create an act that allowed the government to totally regulate the lives of Aboriginal people. It established the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines – quite an ironic name – and gave them an extreme amount of control which allowed them to dictate many aspects of the lives of Aboriginal people, such as where they could live and where they could work.

I want to give some global context here too, because in some ways today we think of ourselves as leaders; we think of ourselves as innovators, But let us look at history. The US Civil War, I think, started in 1865. This Aboriginal Protection Act was 1869. The US Civil War, amongst other things, was based on rights for African Americans and abolishing slavery. During that period, the early to mid-1800s, we had the age of Enlightenment in Europe, and apart from those political decisions and the philosophies of the European philosophers, such as the separation of state and church, they were

also starting to see colonisation and its relationship with the church as very, very unpopular. In fact you do not have to read many authors to find out that in the salons of Paris this kind of discussion was no longer being entertained, and we even saw in some of the dispatches and communications between John Batman and England that colonisation was losing favour. The age of Enlightenment was coming through, but in this house in Victoria in 1869, which was pretty much around that time, we were still essentially passing legislation that took people's rights away.

We move forward to the Aborigines Protection Act 1886, again in this house. The act changed the definition of 'Aboriginal' to exclude those who were half-caste – excuse that terrible term. This began the policy of forcing those who were, again, half-caste off the missions and stations, which is what led to many of them being shut down. We have heard members on both sides of the house talk about Coranderrk. I am always the first to admit in this house that I really knew nothing about our Aboriginal history. Probably in the last 15 years after some self-education and a lot of reading I have come to appreciate our Aboriginal history and just how far it goes back and how rich it is, but during those days it was not appreciated. I guess the real turning point is that now we can be in this chamber speaking about this, having a discussion, having different opinions – democracy, as the Leader of the Nationals was talking about before – but it is a fairly respectful kind of debate, and I think everyone appreciates that.

In that history you come across other Commonwealth countries as well, and you realise that we are the only Commonwealth country without a treaty. You have got New Zealand, who really set the bar pretty high with the Treaty of Waitangi and the fact that at the moment in New Zealand they sometimes sing the national anthem in native language. It is amazing. It is something we should be aspiring to.

You do not have to go far in our history books now – but 20 years ago it would not have been heard of – to find the World War II fighter pilot Len Waters, who flew a Kittyhawk that he called *Black Magic* in World War II up near New Guinea. I think he shot down a couple of enemy planes. But when he came back to Australia no-one would give him a pilot's licence. I guess it is interesting for us to be standing here talking about this today, but I only say this for historical context, because I imagine for people sitting in the gallery – who were sitting here only moments ago but walked out – it must be really tough to be sitting in the same institution that basically took their families away, the same institution that said, 'Because we don't deem you this amount of Aboriginal, you can't live on that mission.'

We have heard about Coranderrk in 1874. There were three walks, I think, with Uncle William Barak to Melbourne to our Parliament to make sure that Aboriginal rights were even considered, and it makes me really proud to know that that does not have to happen now. We have the First Peoples' Assembly, and we will go to meet Aboriginal people where they are to hear about what they want to do for that self-determination piece.

This amendment, as we have heard, will go a long way to dealing with some historical legacy issues, and we have heard plenty of people talk about that. But one of the issues that came up that really made the hair on the back of my neck stand up was people talking about cultural heritage, which has been in the news a little bit lately. I just wanted to say that I do not think the opposition consulted any Aboriginal people or organisations on the development of their new policy – I am happy to be corrected – but that policy directly impacts First Nations people. This has come up in this discussion, and it has been a wideranging debate, but I appreciate that we could actually –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I just refer to your previous rulings about matters that are not relevant to the bill where you brought other members back to the debate. I am more than happy for these matters to form part of the debate, including the government's secret review into cultural heritage.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I do not think we need a commentary, just the point of order. The point of order has been made. I remind the member for Frankston to not stray and to discuss the bill before the house.

Paul EDBROOKE: I will just say that Aboriginal people are not the cause of our housing crisis; how about I just leave it like that.

But back to this bill: obviously we had recent reviews into the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970, and those demonstrated the need for legislative change. That is why we are here today. This bill amends that 1970 act to improve processes for share transfers, and the bill will amend the Aboriginal Lands Act 1991 to remove limitations on the rights of titleholders to exercise their land rights and transfer the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck mission cemeteries to traditional owners.

I have got to say in the minute I have left that I have been really shocked at times in this house by things that have happened, and I find that most people are very reasonable. One of the things that did shock me was the opposition walking away from treaty, and I think that was a big signal about things that will happen.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, you have previously ruled that the member should return to the bill, and I believe he is now defying your ruling.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Can the member for Frankston not stray and continue for the next 25 seconds on the bill.

Paul EDBROOKE: On this side of the house I think we are very proud of our Aboriginal heritage amongst our community. Certainly in Frankston and on the peninsula we have a very proud Aboriginal community, and we embrace them, we work with them and we want to walk hand in hand along with them on this journey for treaty. It is only this side of the house that will do that.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (12:42): I rise to make a contribution on the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. As others have put into *Hansard*, the main purpose of the bill is to amend the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970 and the Aboriginal Lands Act 1991 to update management and ownership structures for Indigenous communities. I will talk a little bit more later about the Lake Tyers Mission in my electorate, which is a significant part of this bill. It will also remove the use and restrictions on the transfer of the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck mission cemeteries, while retaining those restrictions of course that have been requested after discussions with the traditional owners in those areas, and improve landholders' control over their property usage and management. As our shadow minister indicated in his initial contribution, we will not be opposing it.

The changing of the governance of shareholding structures on Aboriginal trusts created under the Aboriginal lands acts of 1970 and 1991 are specifically related to Framlingham in the western part of the state and Lake Tyers in the eastern part of the state. Lake Tyers in my electorate has a really, really interesting history. It was established by a chap by the name of John Bulmer, which is a name synonymous with Lakes Entrance, way back in the 1860s. He came in as a missionary and set about establishing Lake Tyers because of the conflict that was going on between our Aboriginal communities and our white settlers. Bulmer originally looked at establishing the settlement at a little place just south of Buchan, which is further to the north of Lake Tyers, but for various reasons that did not eventuate, and the mission, or the trust, was established at Lake Tyers on the peninsula where it still currently exists. The local Gunnai/Kurnai at the time referred to that area as Bung Yarnda, and a number of the trust residents, many of whom I know quite well, still refer to the area as Bung Yarnda rather than the Lake Tyers Mission. But that peninsula, for anyone who has been there – and I have been there on quite a few occasions – has a beautiful outlook over the Lake Tyers inlet, and it is really God's own country.

Early last century there was also a push to relocate a lot of our Indigenous community from other areas of the state to Lake Tyers, and they came from locations such as Ramahyuck, Lake Condah and

Coranderrk and relocated to Lake Tyers. It was not a great move. In the case of some there was force related to that, against their better wishes. It was not until 1916, when we were actually in the years of the Great War, that that step took place. From what I can gather and from what historians can gather, it did not have anything to do with the declaration of war. It was just something that coincided, but for a whole range of reasons it was a very interesting time in our history because we had a lot of our Indigenous community enlisting to fight for our country, but we also had members of our Indigenous community from other areas of the state being told, 'You have to go and live at Lake Tyers in East Gippsland.'

It was not until the 1960s that there was an effort made to rectify that, but the effort to rectify it was done very poorly, because it then forced Aboriginal families to go to areas of our state that in many cases were not their traditional homelands. You can imagine what sort of conflict that would have caused. There were protests throughout the 1950s and 1960s calling for Lake Tyers to become basically a farming enterprise for the local Indigenous people who were still living there, and an important step was that in the mid-1960s, before the mission was declared, a permanent reserve was declared for the Lake Tyers area, for Bung Yarnda. In 1971 the remaining residents at Lake Tyers – and by that stage, after people had been moved around the state, there was only a few hundred people living there – were granted freehold of the title to Lake Tyers. How they were granted freehold was the government of the day gave shares to the residents and their children. They gave them shares as a gesture of having ownership of that land, and that is an important part of the history of Lake Tyers.

Then in the 2000s we went through a period of unrest where the trust was put into administration. We had an administrator come in. At the time of my election back in 2010 it was a very topical issue because the local community wanted it out of administration and they wanted ownership back. We had a protest where the road into Lake Tyers was closed down for quite a period of time to make that particular point, and in the subsequent years that was done. I cannot remember whether it was our government or yours, but the ownership was handed back to Lake Tyers residents at that time and the administrator was removed. I think, Acting Speaker Addison, it might have been under your government, but I stand to be corrected on that.

This bill proposes updates to the management and ownership structures, and it puts in place certain safeguards and changes landholders' control over their properties. The amendments include appointing deputy and acting chairpersons for governance continuity, which is a good idea. The aim is to ensure fair distribution and responsible management, and that is why we are not opposing this bill. It also makes some changes, as the member for Gippsland South touched on, in relation to removing restrictions around the Ebenezer and the Ramahyuck mission cemeteries to allow for the transfer of these cemeteries back to traditional owners. That is a commonsense move that will give the traditional owners more say over those areas, so we also see that as a positive step. It is important to note that these changes that are being made do have the support of the traditional owners in each area.

Just before I finish – and I have got a couple of minutes – I have a little bit of interesting family history. Back in 1882 my great-grandfather was skippering a boat along the coast between Mallacoota and Melbourne, and a massive storm hit. He had to put the boat ashore to save the crew, and where he put it ashore, when the sun came up the next morning, was directly opposite the entrance to Lake Tyers. If the entrance had been open at that time, the ship would have gone straight up into the Lake Tyers inlet. What happened there was that storm actually claimed and wrecked four or five ships across Victorian coastal waters, which resulted in a significant loss of life. My great-grandfather's ship – captain James's ship – was on the beach. At that location he then sought refuge. It took quite a period to refloat the ship, but he stayed at the Lake Tyers mission and enjoyed the hospitality of our Aboriginal community, the Gunnai/Kurnai.

We have a prominent Aboriginal family in East Gippsland called the Bulls, and a lot of our Aboriginal families adopted the names of settlers. Years later I played football with Murray Bull, who was a good mate of mine – Indigenous Murray Bull. We often had the chat about whether his ancestors had taken their name from my great-grandfather during that period of him staying at the mission there for a

number of weeks. We discussed the probability of that but could not confirm that that was actually the case.

Not every story from the early years was a horrible one. There were a lot of good stories about interaction, cooperation and different people getting along. Certainly there were some horrible stories, but there were some good ones. From that point in time, from my great-grandfather's experience, there has always been that respect for our Aboriginal community, and it has flowed through. I coached football in East Gippsland for 28 years, and you cannot do that without being heavily involved in our Indigenous community. I have got some great friendships there. It is a little interesting part of history. We are not opposing this bill, and we wish it a speedy passage through both chambers.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:51): I too rise to speak on the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. In doing so, I would like to echo the words of the member for Geelong, who recognised that for us in this place it is easy to talk about such things but the words that we say here have an impact on people outside of this place, for good and for bad, so I really hope that my contribution will be for good. I ask for forgiveness if I stumble in what I say.

I appreciate the historical outlook that we have heard from those opposite. We have just had a bit of a *Who Do You Think You Are?* recap from the member for Gippsland East regarding his ancestors. I also would like to know who those opposite are. We sort of thought we knew who they were, but they seem to have changed with their view on some important policies in this state. We also heard from the member for Gippsland South. His *Who Do You Think You Are?* was about Mr McMillan and the question of whether he was a mass murderer or not. I am going to spoil the end of the book for the member and ask: what is the difference between a murderer and a mass murderer? What is the difference someone who leads a massacre and someone who participates in a massacre? I do not think there is much difference. I think that is black and white.

Just as the member for Gippsland East has done, I would like to focus my contribution on Lake Tyers and the history of Lake Tyers. The reason I want to do that is because I believe it is a really good demonstration of the strength and resilience of Aboriginal communities in Victoria, and it also highlights the importance of self-determination and what self-determination can achieve. And I would also like to pay tribute to some amazing champions in the history of the struggle for rights in Victoria. Soon I would like to speak about Laurie Moffatt, Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls, Eric Onus, Jim McGinness, Charlie Carter and Lady Gladys of course, who were instrumental in the return of Lake Tyers to the community.

As other members have touched on, there was a reason that missions were established largely by churches, and that is because Aboriginal community members were being murdered and dispossessed of their lands not just in Victoria but of course all over the country. My own ancestor in his diaries was given land by the government when they came from Germany. Germans were considered good farmers, so they were given land, and my ancestor recorded in his diary about the Aboriginal people that they dispossessed of their land and the corroborees that would continue to happen on the edge of the property. That is my *Who Do You Think You Are?* I recognise my family benefited from the dispossession of people's land.

Lake Tyers was established in 1861 by the Church of England, but under the control of the church of course there was a change to local cultural practices. In 1908 the government actually took over control of the mission at Lake Tyers. Because the government set about reducing the number of mission sites across the state – they wanted to have the land back, some to give away to white Victorians and some for other purposes – they began to move people from missions all over the state to Lake Tyers, and the member for Gippsland East referenced that as well.

On the site right up until the end there were lots of restrictions in place for people who lived at Lake Tyers. In the later years they were not allowed to own a vehicle. They were not allowed to have visitors to the mission without permission. They were not allowed to have a job. There were many rules that

governed the people there, and it was not an easy place to live. In 1962 Oodgeroo Noonuccal from Queensland, then known as Kath Walker – a famous poet of Australia, a voice for Australia – took part in a national tour, and as part of that she visited Lake Tyers and reported on the conditions there, which at the time were deplorable. There was no running water. There were I think 30 huts onsite – what I would call a hut; people probably had pride in their home – for 150 people. There was mass crowding; there were no bathrooms nearby et cetera. That period of the 1960s was really important in Australia's Aboriginal history. In 1965 in New South Wales of course we had the freedom rides led by fantastic students up there who toured country towns in Australia, where they learned that people were not allowed in the swimming pool and were not allowed to use the footpath or anything like that, to demonstrate that segregation existed not just in other countries but in Australia as well. So there was a growing movement and a growing understanding about the rights of Aboriginal people.

The government adopted a policy of assimilation where it was decided that people should move off Lake Tyers and move into surrounding Aboriginal communities. If we think about the nature of the community that they were moving into, Aunty Eileen from Lake Tyers in an oral history described what it was like for her family: It was an unhappy life of racism and isolation, with her mother describing getting really disgusted looks from people everywhere she went. An article in the *Age* from around that time carried the title 'Township bitter about plan to move Aborigines near homes of whites', and it reported that angry white residents in the town of Nowa Nowa were threatening to sell their homes and move out if the board followed through with its plans to rehouse three Aboriginal families from Lake Tyers there. So the choices that people had between that total lack of acceptance in communities and the terrible conditions that were onsite there at Lake Tyers really show you how difficult things were for people and how much change was needed.

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

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery the former member for Hawthorn John Kennedy.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek your guidance in relation to *Rulings from the Chair* at page 154, Speaker Maddigan's ruling of 26 August 2003. Speaker Maddigan ruled that:

When responding to a question a minister must address the question rather than responding generally.

The coalition has concerns that questions are being responded to generally as a standard matter of course rather than being responded to, and I would seek your guidance as to whether or not that ruling still stands.

The SPEAKER: As I have mentioned many times to the Manager of Opposition Business, I welcome his meeting with me in my office after question time to discuss these matters.

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 110 – repetitions and irrelevant issues coming up in the form of points of order – I think the member for Brighton might need some counselling from you.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Frankston! I counsel members that question time is not a time to raise these issues. My door is open for discussion around these matters at any time.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier mistakenly revealed for the first time that allegations relating to poor behaviour and misconduct on government worksites by the CFMEU were 'nothing new' and were raised with her 'from time to time'. When was the first time these allegations were raised?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The Leader of the Opposition referred to comments made by me yesterday in question time that were a repeat of comments I had made on a number of occasions in public commentary I had made on the strong action we are taking to address the rotten culture, working with the federal government to address this issue with the construction division of the CFMEU. As I said yesterday, not for the first time – on a number of previous occasions – and as I made clear in my response to the question from the Leader of the National Party, when allegations have been raised with me, those allegations have been referred to the relevant agency for their response.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to sessional order 11, further to the Manager of Opposition Business's comments before, I asked a very direct question of the Premier just then as to when the first time was that these other allegations, which were aired for the first time yesterday, were raised. The Premier refused to answer that basic question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was answering in relevance to the question that was asked. The Premier has concluded her answer.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): Given the Premier has confirmed allegations of CFMEU misconduct were raised with her repeatedly, how many times have allegations been raised with the Premier?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): As I said yesterday in the house and as I have said previously on the number of occasions I have addressed these matters publicly in response to questions from the media, when allegations have been put to me, those allegations have been referred to the relevant agencies for their action and response.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to the matter I raised with you earlier specific to this response, we have now asked a question and a supplementary. The first question was about when, and then this most recent question was how many times. On neither occasion has the Premier responded. She has responded, respectfully, generally to the topic rather than to the substance of the question. This is making a mockery of question time.

John Pesutto: Further to the Manager of Opposition Business's point of order, sessional order 11, which the government itself introduced, requires that answers to questions must be direct, factual, succinct and relevant. Speaker, I would respectfully submit that you have the power, as Speaker, to enforce that sessional order.

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

Ministers statements: women's health

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:09): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's inquiry into women's pain, which is putting women's voices at the heart of our work to bridge the gender pain gap. For too long and too often women's experiences of pain have been dismissed, ignored and underdiagnosed. Well, we have been listening. Right now I can report that more than 12,000 responses to our pain survey have been received from the women and girls of Victoria, and I have had the pleasure of joining hundreds more women and girls right across our state. I want to call out the hardworking member for Northcote, the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health, for all the work that she has done in leading women's forums right across the state.

From Eltham to Narre Warren South, Mordialloc to Yan Yean and indeed in my own electorate of Macedon, women have come forward telling their stories. Women have told us about persistent migraines, debilitating endometriosis, pain associated with menstruation, arthritis and conditions like lipoedema. We have heard of the impact of sexism, bias and a lack of knowledge about women's health, our bodies and our health concerns. Across generations, across cultures, across socio-economic

backgrounds we have heard the stories. They are as diverse as the women of Victoria themselves. But on this point, women have been united: they need to be listened to, they need to be heard and they want to see action taken.

I can assure the women and girls of Victoria that with this inquiry into women's pain we are looking to change the way in which women's health care is delivered in this state forever and for good. The inquiry closes today. The survey closes today, and I want to take this final opportunity to encourage those women and girls, including everyone in this place, to make a contribution to this important survey.

Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:11): My question is the Premier. Last week the Minister for Planning apologised to Labor Party MPs for inaccurately telling the media that she had referred a 2020 email about CFMEU intimidation and thuggery to the Fair Work ombudsman. In reality she had not made that referral. When the Premier learned the allegations had not been referred, what action did she take?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:12): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, because it gives me an opportunity to remind the Leader of the Opposition what I and others said about this matter last week when this matter was raised. There was an email that was sent – I think it was 28 March 2020 – to all members of Parliament at that time. Every member of Parliament received this email, I am advised, at that point in time. The advice I have is that the Minister for Planning, who was then in her role as the member for Carrum – there was a matter that referred to a company in her electorate that was in dispute with its employee representative. That matter was referred to the Minister for Industrial Relations, who subsequently referred that to the Fair Work Commission as appropriate. As I have said on a number of occasions, when allegations have been raised they have been referred to the relevant and appropriate agency for their response. In this instance it was the Fair Work Commission, given the federal government through the Fair Work Commission wield the industrial relations powers in this state. I am further advised that this matter went to the Federal Court and has been through a Federal Court process in terms of the dispute between –

John Pesutto: On a point of order under sessional order 11, the question, Speaker, related to public statements made by the Minister for Planning that were a lie. They were not true. What action did the Premier take in relation to that misleading comment which the Minister for Planning made?

The SPEAKER: Order! I counsel the Leader of the Opposition not to use that language in the house. And on the second part of the point of order, the Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: I can confirm that the Minister for Industrial Relations responded in May of 2020 to that March 2020 email. Further, I note that this matter went before the Federal Court. It involved a dispute between the company and its employee representative, and I note that the Federal Court found in favour of the employee representative.

John Pesutto: On a point of order under sessional order 11 again, Speaker, the wording of this sessional order, which this government introduced, is that answers be direct, factual, succinct and relevant. At no stage in this answer has the Premier addressed the question in a direct, factual, succinct or, I would argue, relevant manner. If this sessional order is to mean anything, you must enforce it, with respect, Speaker. The Premier continues to dodge legitimate and fair questions about what she knew, when she knew it and what she did about it.

The SPEAKER: I have advised the house on numerous occasions that I cannot direct the Premier or ministers how to answer a question. The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, for clarity, there are previous rulings that this house has abided by for decades that a minister must address the actual substance of the question. If a

question is asked, it is entirely inappropriate for a minister to simply pick a word out of the question and speak to that word for 3 minutes. It makes a mockery of the entire concept of question time.

The SPEAKER: I will rule on the point of order once again. Relevance can be interpreted in many ways. I have been listening to the Premier's answer, and I believe that she has been relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: I appreciate the opportunity to continue to answer the question, as the Leader of the Opposition took a point of order whilst I was answering the question. In terms of the action I took, I sought some advice on what action was taken at the time. The advice I received was that the Minister for Industrial Relations responded on behalf of the government in May of 2020, and I have also given the house the advice I have on the conclusion of how the Federal Court found against the company in this matter.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:17): Shocking revelations about the CFMEU emerged 20 days ago – ample time for the Premier to speak with her ministers. How many ministers have had serious allegations relating to CFMEU intimidation and thuggery raised with them?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:17): As I have said previously in the house and on a number of other occasions, where allegations have been raised, allegations have been referred to the relevant agencies for their action.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier did not even address the question, with respect. We asked how many ministers have had allegations raised with them – a very, very simple question. The Premier did not even go to the substance of the question. This is a joke, and the Premier and the government are avoiding answering these important questions about corruption that is occurring on government worksites. I understand why they are avoiding the question, but they clearly are avoiding the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: women's health

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (14:18): I rise to update the house on access to the safe, affordable reproductive choices that this government is supporting through the amazing commitments that we have made to health care in this state. This is all about progressing gender equality here in Victoria, because on this side of the house we understand that abortion care is health care.

Our government's work to improve access to contraception, to abortion care, to managing women's pain and to managing women's health safely has been underpinned by a range of commitments since the last election, including the expansion of the network of sexual and reproductive health hubs across this state. Victoria has the strongest and most progressive protections for women's rights not only in Australia but around the world. That is why we are delivering an additional nine sexual and reproductive health hubs, bringing our network to 20 sites in total. These hubs have given women access to contraception, medical abortion and referrals for surgical abortion, as well as sexual health testing and treatment, not to mention recognition of women's pain.

Just last month we announced the final six locations, including three regional locations. Women in Kyneton, Horsham, Ararat and Stawell will now be able to access safe, non-judgemental, affordable sexual and reproductive health care. The significance of this investment goes beyond the city walls; it reaches out to our regions and supports so many women, ensuring that Victorians have access to women's health and safety, with a focus on respect.

Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:20): My question is to the Premier. A 2022 letter sent to the Premier by an Indigenous labour hire firm in relation to CFMEU misconduct stated:

On the 11th of April I met with Vicki Ward to outline the continuation of what we believe to be coercive behaviour, and have been in contact with her over the course of the past week.

Did the member for Eltham raise the concerns of this Indigenous labour hire firm with the Premier?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): In terms of the correspondence that the Leader of the Opposition refers to, the 2022 correspondence, I have already outlined my response to that matter.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the question went to whether or not the member for Eltham raised the matter with the Premier. This is an extremely serious allegation in writing, and I would ask if you could direct the Premier to answer this very serious allegation.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has answered the question.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Serious borderline contempt.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on sessional order 11 – answers being direct, factual, succinct and relevant – the question was: did the member for Eltham raise the concerns of the letter with the Premier? In no way could anybody credibly argue there was any relevance to what the Premier said in response. She did not address any aspect of the question. This is a mockery of the sessional orders this government brought in. Speaker, with respect, it is unfair for the Premier and her ministers to expect that you run a protection racket for this mob.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The house will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition needs to be very careful about impugning the Chair.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. *Rulings from the Chair* is very clear on this matter, and I refer you to page 152, chapter 22, ‘Questions’, where Speaker Maddigan was extremely clear:

Standing order 58 provides that ‘a minister will have discretion to determine the content of any answer’.

I would further contend that the Premier has been entirely relevant to every question that has been put to her today, and I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: If I continue to hear contemptuous remarks in the chamber, members will be removed from the chamber.

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Speaker, I refer you to the Speaker Maddigan ruling of 26 August 2003. An extremely serious allegation has been put about the member for Eltham. In no way did the Premier respond to that. If I refer to that ruling, she only responded generally. At no point has the Premier responded in relation to the very serious allegation put about the member for Eltham.

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

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:25): Once the Premier became aware in 2022 that allegations had been raised with the member for Eltham, did the Premier ask the member if she had referred the complaint from the Indigenous labour hire firm to Victoria Police?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): In answering the supplementary question, it presupposes answers that I have not made in answer to the substantive question, and what I will say –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier has just confirmed that she did not answer the previous question.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: In terms of the presumptions that are in the supplementary question, I refer the Leader of the Opposition to previous responses I have given in this house and also publicly in terms of the allegations that were raised in this particular correspondence – how they were handled by me and my office at the time. Those allegations were raised, and those allegations were referred to the relevant agency for their response.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, question time is an opportunity for questions to be put to the executive and in this case the Premier. It is not about whether or not the Premier spoke in a press conference about whatever matter. Questions have been put today, and questions have not been answered. This question specifically asks if the Premier had asked the member if she had referred the matter to Victoria Police. It is a very simple question. It is not the job of the Premier to refer to press conferences, and I would ask you to ask the Premier to answer that question specifically.

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

Ministers statements: women’s community sport

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:27): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government’s commitment to supporting women’s health through our record-breaking investments in community sport. We know that historically women have not had the same opportunities as men when it comes to engaging in sport and physical activity. This is unfair, and it is detrimental to women’s physical and mental health and wellbeing. Right across Victoria this government is investing in community sports infrastructure to deliver new and upgraded facilities that apply mandatory universal design principles, ensuring that women’s change rooms and amenities are just as good as the men’s and not an afterthought.

There are plenty of great examples right across the state. We have invested more than \$13 million in Mildura towards its brand new regional sporting precinct, which I was pleased to visit; \$3 million in upgrades at Mackie Road Reserve, which I visited recently with the member for Bentleigh, which is delivering a new pavilion with change rooms for women and girls; \$1 million to upgrade Deledio reserve pavilion, delivering a new female-friendly sports pavilion which the member for Ripon has been a terrific advocate of; and \$1.25 million to the Portland gymnastics facility upgrade, which, as the member for South-West Coast knows, will redevelop the current facilities into a high-performance gymnasium.

This government has invested more than \$1.9 billion in community sport and active recreation infrastructure since 2014, and almost half of this investment has gone to around 1500 infrastructure projects that directly support the participation of women and girls. That is a record that I am proud of, it is a record that this government is proud of and it is a record that all women and girls in Victoria will benefit from for many years to come.

Geelong transport infrastructure

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (14:29): My question is to the Premier. Labor's Big Build is investing hundreds of millions of dollars into the southern suburbs of Geelong to duplicate Barwon Heads Road; to replace Waurn Ponds train station, South Geelong station and Marshall station; and to duplicate the Waurn Ponds line between South Geelong and Waurn Ponds. What will this infrastructure investment mean for the people of Geelong?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, your Manager of Opposition Business is on his feet for a point of order. It would be very disrespectful to be speaking over him.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, are dixerers from the Labor member in order?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:30): I thank the member for South Barwon for his question. The member for South Barwon's question speaks to the significant infrastructure investment that Labor governments have made in the South Barwon and Geelong area and have always made in the Geelong community. It also goes to demonstrate that, whether it is in the heart of Melbourne with the Metro Tunnel, in the suburbs of Melbourne with removing level crossings or in upgrading every regional rail line across the state, we are investing in infrastructure projects for the whole state.

The member for South Barwon asked in his question what benefit this infrastructure investment will mean for his community. In terms of specifically for his community, the brand new train station at Waurn Ponds provides access for people in the Waurn Ponds community to a train service with more train services than ever before, and of course with the \$10 fares, the fairer fares, people in Geelong and right across regional Victoria can benefit from the fairer fares that we have introduced. But also can I make the point that, alongside the important connections that regional rail and regional road upgrades mean for regional communities, they also mean jobs – good jobs, a pipeline of projects that supports a pipeline of good jobs in the construction industry and in the supply chain. This is why we are the –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition! First of all, do not speak unless you are called in the chamber. Second of all, if you want to raise a point of order, please stand in your place and do not start speaking until you are called.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, under sessional orders, we have tried repeatedly yesterday and today to require you, with respect, to order the Premier to answer questions with relevance, and yet this discredited government gets protection from that disgraced member, being allowed to waffle on but not address the questions we ask on behalf of the Victorian people. Talking about construction, talking about roads, we have got CFMEU intimidation and corruption, we have got roads that are riddled with potholes and the people pay for it. This is a joke. This is not parliamentary accountability. This is not scrutiny. This is a protection racket, and it is all provided by the discredited member for South Barwon. It is a joke.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I do not accept that point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am pleased to –

Brad Battin interjected.

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

Brad Battin interjected.

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

Member for Berwick withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: In answering questions in this place, I will not be gagged by the Leader of the Opposition from talking about our investment that we are making –

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, on relevance, on behalf of the member for South Barwon’s forgotten constituents, the Premier’s speaking notes might also point out what happened to the public homes promise made for the Commonwealth Games and the abandoned Torquay hospital.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: It does not matter whether it is in the seat of South Barwon, the seat of Oakleigh or the seat of – I was going to say Swan Hill, but that is going back in time – Murray Plains, I will talk with pride of the investment that our government is making to provide better connections for people regardless of where they live and regardless of who represents them.

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (14:35): Thousands of high-skilled, high-waged Geelong tradies have worked on these jobs over the last five years. What have these tradie jobs meant for them, their families and the local Geelong community with the infrastructure legacy that they leave?

Richard Riordan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Polwarth will come to order. The behaviour in the chamber today is disgraceful.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:36): In answering the question in reference to jobs, of course we continue to be proud of a state that has driven significant jobs growth. Since November 2020 more than 600,000 jobs have been created in this state, and that is in part because of the pipeline of infrastructure investments that we have right across the state of Victoria. We will not go down a path where there is no pipeline of work for people across the state, like those opposite did when they were in government, and we will continue to support workers in the construction sector and we will continue to support our teachers and our nurses, because all Victorians deserve access to a range of good-quality jobs regardless of where they live.

Ministers statements: gender equality

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (14:37): We are a government that takes women’s and girls’ health seriously, just as seriously as we take respect. I recently hosted the Minister for Health in Montmorency at a women’s pain round table MCed by the terrific Sue Rosenhain from Women’s Health in the North. I want to shout out my appreciation, as I know everybody on this side of the chamber wants to, for the terrific work that is done by our women’s health organisations in preventing and supporting people who have experienced family violence. In Montmorency we have lived experience of pain being ignored, of being dismissed and of not being respected. The conversations were of being disempowered and dismissed, being told you are just menopausal or it is normal period pain. These are stories of disrespect. We want to change these stories. We want all women and girls to be respected across our state, whether it is in health care, in education, in our sporting clubs, in businesses or of course in their homes.

The Allan Labor government knows that respect is the cornerstone of gender equality in our state. We established Respect Victoria, our leading agency for primary prevention of gendered violence. Respect Victoria will be leading the nation’s first concentrated approach to prevention through the Ballarat saturation model, taking a whole-of-community approach to developing respect and safety for women and girls. I thank the member for Wendouree, the member for Eureka and the member for Ripon for inviting me and the Parliamentary Secretary for Men’s Behaviour Change to listen to students from every local secondary school speak powerfully about respect, safety and equality. These students know that respect, kindness and leadership are key to achieving full equality and respect and to ending

gendered violence. I promised these students we will continue to work hard towards these goals, and whether it is in my community in Monty or in Ballarat or anywhere else across our state, we are making it clear this is not negotiable.

Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:39): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday in question time the Premier stated that correspondence sent to her from an Indigenous labour hire firm in 2022 complaining of CFMEU misconduct 'did not contain allegations of criminal behaviour'. In fact that letter includes a transcript of a CFMEU delegate threatening the director of the Indigenous labour hire firm, saying, and I quote, 'I'll rip your effing head off.' Making a threat to kill is an indictable offence under the Crimes Act, so why has the Premier misled the house and the Victorian people?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:40): I went to this matter yesterday, as the member for Malvern has indicated. Those allegations were referred to the relevant agencies for their action and response.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier was just asked why she may have misled the house, and the Premier has not yet responded as to why she may have misled the house.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was directly responsive to the question. She outlined that she has already answered this question. I ask that you rule it out of order.

The SPEAKER: Allegations of misleading the house need to be raised by substantive motion. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I put it to you that allegations of misleading the house do not need to be put by substantive motion. Deliberately misleading the house is disorderly, but that was not the suggestion in the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier has refused to answer every single question in question time except from the disgraced Labor member for South Barwon. What is the point of question time if no question will be addressed?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. That is not a point of order.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:42): According to the same letter, the CFMEU delegate also threatened the Indigenous labour hire firm director with the words, and again I quote, 'I'll effing end you' – expletive – 'and you know it, don't eff with me I'll effing take your soul and I'll rip your effing head off.' Threat to inflict serious injury and use threatening words are both criminal offences under the Crimes Act and the Summary Offences Act respectively. Why did the Premier fail to refer these serious criminal allegations to Victoria Police in 2022 when she became aware of them?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:42): I went through the timeline of my response to this correspondence yesterday. In terms of when allegations have been raised with me, those allegations have been referred to the relevant agency for their action and response.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I would put to you that the Premier is responding generally rather than to the specifics of the question again. These are, again, very serious allegations that run in sharp contrast to words that the Premier uttered in this house yesterday. The letter which has now been revealed explicitly states that criminal allegations were put. The Premier stated in this house that there were no criminal allegations put to her, and I would ask you why the Premier has not been asked to respond directly to those extremely serious allegations.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. I have the question in front of me, and the Premier was relevant to the question that was asked. The Premier has concluded her answer.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, with respect, how can it be relevant when the Premier has not addressed the fact that yesterday in relation to the same letter the Premier said there were no allegations of criminal misconduct and today we have cited excerpts from the letter the Premier was referring to. She has not addressed any of those issues as to why she has a different answer today. How can that be relevant under the sessional order?

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

Michael O'Brien: On a further point of order, Speaker, I make the letter available to the house so that members can see for themselves whether the Premier is actually being accurate or not.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, I would put to you that question time is unworkable if we have a circumstance where no substance to a question will be addressed, and I would put to you that no substance to any question that was put to the executive today was answered. Obviously, that reflects on the government, clearly. My point of order is in terms of the running of the house. How can we run this house? How can we run question time when no question will be answered?

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business, as I did yesterday, is invited to meet with me in my office after question time. I note that there was no meeting yesterday, but I invite you today.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order. If there are issues that you wish to raise in relation to rulings from the Chair, I ask that you come and visit me in my office after question time.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, without embarrassing you, at quarter to 2 I came to your office, and you were detained. I understand that. But I did come to your office today and seek an opportunity to speak.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, to your comment before and on a number of occasions previously, in question time as an opposition we believe, with respect, we are entitled to raise any issue by way of objection. It is perfectly in order for you to invite us to your chambers, and we are happy to do that. But, with respect, we will not desist from raising issues before the people when issues relating to transparency and scrutiny are at stake. We are entitled to raise these issues, and, with respect, it is not acceptable to us as an opposition that we be told, when clearly the Premier is being protected, that we cannot ask questions about basic matters.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, that is not a point of order.

Ministers statements: women's health

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:47): As of today, over 12,000 Victorian women and girls have submitted their lived experience to Victoria's nation-leading women's pain inquiry, and that is a staggering number. That is 12,000 Victorian women and girls who have had their pain overlooked, underdiagnosed, dismissed and even ignored, 12,000 women and girls who have been told that their pain – for some, debilitating, life-altering pain – was normal, was routine or was all in their head. It is 12,000 women and girls who deserve their health to be taken seriously at home, at work and especially when seeking professional care and support. We also know that four in 10 Victorian women live with chronic pain and one in three have a condition that affects their ability to go to work. Every woman in this house, every woman across Victoria, has either experienced chronic pain or knows someone who has.

I want to thank these 12,000 women who have shared their story – their personal story, their important story – with us. It is not just their story; it is their life. Their contribution will help improve the lives and outcomes of thousands and thousands of women across the state as it is such a central and important part of the women’s pain inquiry that is being led by the Minister for Health. Also can I acknowledge the Parliamentary Secretary for Women’s Health, who is leading this work as well. This is important work for women across the state, because if you are in chronic pain and you cannot go to work, it is holding you back. If you are in chronic pain and you cannot care for those you love around you, that is holding you back in your family life. Women deserve better, which is why we are holding this women’s pain inquiry, and I want to thank again those women and girls who have shared their experiences. It will make a difference.

Constituency questions

Croydon electorate

David HODGETT (Croydon) (14:50): (720) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Maroondah Hospital is the closest hospital for constituents in the Croydon district, and my office has been contacted over concerns that the hospital will be moved from its existing site. This is concerning particularly for patients who rely on the public transport accessibility of the current location, especially for medical procedures like kidney dialysis. Minister, will the Maroondah Hospital be built on a different site to where it presently is in Ringwood East?

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:51): (721) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. What are the ongoing benefits for local students associated with the \$9.2 million in new facilities that have been delivered by the Victorian Labor government for Glenroy secondary college? Glenroy secondary college is a vibrant co-educational year 7 to 12 school with students drawn from Glenroy, Hadfield, Oak Park and parts of Pascoe Vale and Coburg in my electorate. The school has long punched above its weight in supporting generations of local students to receive a solid education in the north as reflected through its values of achievement, respect, integrity and teamwork. Growing from 430 students in 2023 to over 450 students this year, the school has always valued the diversity of the surrounding local community and student cohort, continuing to encourage students to aspire, succeed and reach their potential in an increasingly inclusive learning environment that places wellbeing at its heart. Through the excellent learning environment the new principal Andrew Arney has been doing excellent work along with teachers, support staff, admin and family members to support the school to continue to grow, and our \$9.2 million investment has delivered new facilities that will continue improving learning outcomes for years to come.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:52): (722) My question today is for the Minister for Agriculture, and my question is: what measures and protocols are in place for a varroa mite outbreak in Victoria? Australia’s largest livestock migration has commenced, with approximately 360,000 beehives on their way to almond orchards around the north-west of the state. They come from New South Wales and Queensland. It is a large-scale pollination, and being right on the border of New South Wales obviously, where varroa mite was detected last year, growers, brokers and apiarists are asking what the protocols are and how long strip deployment will take when varroa mite is eventually detected on our side of the river, because bees can fly across water. I am aware that the department has been working very, very closely with bee brokers and growers through the migration permit process between states, but for clarity I ask the minister to clarify what exactly the protocol is this season.

Ashwood electorate

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (14:53): (723) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and I ask the minister: how is the Allan Labor government helping my constituents of Ashwood transition away from gas through the electrification of their households? Our community

understand both the urgency of climate action and that electrification will reduce their energy bills, and we see this community enthusiasm through organisations such as Electrify Boroondara. I had the great privilege of attending their first expo last year, which is now an annual event and is coming up again on 8 September 2024. I encourage everyone to get there to learn how we can get off gas, save some money and electrify our homes. I look forward to the minister's response.

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:53): (724) My question today is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the question I have for the minister is: when will the Lavers Hill-Cobden Road near Simpson be resurfaced and made safe? Again, you have sent correspondence to constituents advising them that you have proudly made the road safe by lowering a 100-kilometre-an-hour speed limit to 40 kilometres an hour. Treating country people with such disrespect – lowering the speeds of our roads because you do not have the finances, do not have the resources and do not have the management plans to adequately look after our roads – is no solution to country road problems. The Lavers Hill-Cobden Road is an important road. There have been multiple accidents over the last 18 months. The community is tired of the lack of care for this road. It needs repair. Minister, when will it be repaired? And please do not tell us you are keeping the speed limit at 40 kilometres indefinitely.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:54): (725) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding intersection upgrades in Alfredton in my electorate of Wendouree. I love Alfredton. It is where I grew up and where my mum still lives. It is a great part of Ballarat, and that is why so many people are choosing to live there. Over the last decade we have seen significant population growth in the new housing estates across Alfredton West, increasing the number of road users in the area. This is why the investment in intersection upgrades on Learmonth Street at Cuthberts Road and at the roundabout at Sturt Street adjacent to the Arch of Victory are so necessary. Minister, how will the Learmonth Street intersection upgrades benefit my community? I look forward to hearing the minister's response, because I know there are going to be so many benefits to these upgrades, particularly for the many, many students travelling to and from local schools from Alfredton by bike, by car and by bus as well as by walking, and I know that these intersection upgrades are going to make Alfredton even safer.

Prahran electorate

Sam HIBBINS (Prahran) (14:55): (726) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and I ask: will the government restore tram services to Domain Road in my electorate of Prahran? The majority of local residents who took my survey on the matter wanted to see tram services return to Domain Road. A number also indicated that they would support a hybrid option where trams ran both through Domain Road and the current route along Toorak Road West, and the main reason cited was ensuring accessibility, convenience and safety for residents, students and visitors to the area. The tram tracks along Domain Road are close to people's homes. They are close to local shops and restaurants and close to the botanic gardens and to local schools. I note an accessible tram stop is being constructed near the new Anzac station entrance on Domain Road. There are existing tracks there, so I urge the minister to resume tram services along Domain Road and ensure better access for everyone to the local area.

Bentleigh electorate

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (14:56): (727) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will works begin to install traffic lights at Bignell and Centre roads, East Bentleigh? This is an important project because it is an unsafe intersection, especially for vehicles turning right out of Bignell Road onto Centre Road, which is a main arterial road that cuts right through my electorate. The state government has been ready to go on this project for some time, but it has been delayed, sadly, by NBN Co, who have had to relocate some existing NBN infrastructure under the

intersection and unfortunately have had a lot of difficulty in sourcing a particular part that they require from overseas. But I understand that that part has now arrived, so I am keen to get an updated timeline from the minister.

Gippsland South electorate

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:57): (728) My question is to the Minister for Housing, and the question I ask is: what is the current public housing waitlist for inner and outer Gippsland regions? The minister will be aware of and was at the Homelessness Week event on the steps of Parliament this afternoon and would have heard, as I did, the issues that are coming from those in the sector – that public housing tenants, including sometimes double-income households, are unable to get out of public housing because they simply cannot afford or find private rentals or private accommodation. But there is very limited or almost zero public housing available and very limited or zero emergency housing available. There is a serious lack of maintenance that is occurring in the Gippsland region, and indeed as a result we have a number of vacant homes. It is all well and good for the minister to go out and speak to the event out there today, but she actually needs to address the problem and provide more public housing in the Gippsland region.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:58): (729) My question is for the Minister for Housing in the other place. How is the landmark housing statement going to benefit the residents of Kororoit? Right across Australia finding an affordable home is becoming harder than ever before. Today homelessness advocates have placed over 6000 origami houses on the steps of this place to raise awareness for those facing homelessness and housing insecurity. If you are yet to go outside, please make sure you do. The Victorian housing statement puts forward an ambitious plan to tackle the root of the problem, and that, simply put, is housing supply, because we know that when people have access to safe, secure and affordable housing they have better health and education outcomes. In my electorate of Kororoit there are so many organisations doing amazing work to support those doing it tough. I would like to give a special shout-out to the Salvos, Wombat Housing, McAuley Community Services, GenWest and Caroline Chisholm Society. It is great to see some of those fierce advocates here today. Thank you so much for all of the work that you do.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:59): I have reviewed yesterday's constituency questions. Previous rulings have stated that members should only ask one question for their constituency question, although on occasion two questions have been accepted when the member is essentially restating a question during their contribution. Yesterday, however, the member for Melbourne asked multiple distinct questions during her constituency question; therefore I rule the member for Melbourne's constituency question out of order.

The member for Bass asked the minister to provide an update to her on a matter. I have previously informed the house that I would rule out constituency questions that ask ministers to provide advice or to provide an update on matters as these are technically actions, and I rule the constituency question by the member for Bass out of order.

Bills

Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:00): In my contribution earlier I was speaking about the history of Lake Tyers and I was focusing on the champions in the Aboriginal community who

represented and spoke for their people to bring about the outcome that they sought. So in my closing time I would like to focus on what really is the core value and principle of this bill, which is self-determination. I note that in the development of this bill there was guidance and direction from the residents of Lake Tyers and the shareholders of Lake Tyers because for this government we are talking about people's homes and we speak to the people that are relevant who guide us. It is hard to put into words, but I believe that stands in stark contrast to those opposite, who say when people do not have a home it is because of Aboriginal Victorians' cultural heritage rights, but they do not consult with or be guided by Aboriginal people in that. In fact even worse, there is a blatant disregard for the published outcomes of the relevant budget paper 3 measure, which shows that the percentage of decisions made in cultural heritage management plans within statutory timeframes has always been above 97 per cent and in some years has been 100 per cent. So I ask them to consider self-determination, to take it seriously and to back treaty.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:02): Acting Speaker O'Keeffe, what a pleasure it is to see you in the Speaker's chair this afternoon, and congratulations on your additional role. I know you already work very, very hard in your electorate and in your role in this place, so thank you.

It is with pleasure that I get up to contribute to the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 and to refute some of the things that have been mentioned in the chamber recently about this side's disregard for self-determination for our First Nations people, which is completely untrue. In my location in the north-west of the state around Mildura, with the highest population of First Nations people, I spend a lot of time within that community. They are my friends and my teachers. The Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative in fact have been one of the reasons I have been able to be a working mother, quite frankly. Having an organisation like Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-op and those like them, and First People of the Mallee as well, doing an enormous amount of work in the space of self-determination, which is place-based and community-led like all solutions should be, is highly important, and bills like this, which update management and ownership structures for Indigenous community funds, are obviously very important.

But like I mentioned, it is important that I acknowledge, as I have done several times in this house, co-ops like Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative, which do deliver all sorts of programs and services, and early childhood learning is one of them, with long day care. In fact they are the only early learning centre in Robinvale, which is a town of 8000 people. Not only is the work that they do there in the early childhood space with regard to vulnerable children in the community; also, like I said, they are the only daycare centre in Robinvale. They took care of and educated my children from birth, pretty much, until I could get them in, because as you can imagine, being one centre in a large town, it is difficult to get places. But they do an incredible amount of work, and it is a pleasure to work with them in that capacity and in other capacities to talk about what is actually really important to self-determination locally and what it means for those communities.

When we talk about the removal of restrictions on use and transfers of missions, cemeteries et cetera, this has been one thing that has come up. This is what happens when you build real relationships with our communities, not just with our First Nations people but all communities. You are privileged enough to have some very honest conversations – sometimes they are hard conversations – about what is required, and the cemetery issue and sorry business has been one that has come up a few times locally and is something that needs a little bit more work in our landscape with our local cemetery trust. I do think there is a lot of work there that could still be done with regard to the local cemetery trust being culturally sensitive and appropriate when it comes to sorry business. There is a lot of work still to be done, but again there are some great people doing great work; there are great programs being offered.

I push the Clontarf Foundation barrow often. In small towns they all work together, and the results we see are astounding. I think I have mentioned it before: put the work that Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative do in the housing space, in the counselling space and with the men's program together with the Clontarf Foundation, which is a mentorship program for boys – the data does not lie. The data

is there, and a zero per cent youth offending rate in Robinvale is astounding. Then put that together with the Koori Stars Foundation and the Koorie Girls Academy on a wider scale in our region – I mean, these programs speak for themselves. When we talk about self-determination and closing the gap, there are people doing the work, and that is where we need to focus and talk on a very grassroots level and a very community-based level – specifically community-based, because the needs in every community are different. In every family they will be different. This is something that is really important in my electorate, not only in my town but in the wider region as well.

I will keep this short because I just wanted to contribute to acknowledge the work that is being done in the self-determination space in our region through corporations and co-ops like Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative, First People of the Millewa Mallee, the Clontarf academy, which have several locations throughout the region, and the Koori Stars Foundation as well, which gets as yet no government funding but again is a program that has been set up there and is already having results.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:09): I rise to speak in support of the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and in doing so I would also like to begin by paying my respects to the First Nations people and traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, live, learn and work, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, particularly Uncle Andrew Gardiner, who is a representative of these traditional lands in the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. I would also like to acknowledge of course the member of Geelong for her fantastic contribution from the outset, our good friend the member for Northern Metropolitan Region Ms Watts in the other place and also senator for Victoria Jana Stewart. As stated by then Prime Minister Paul Keating on 15 November 1993:

When the High Court of Australia handed down the Mabo judgement last year, it set our generation of Australians a great challenge.

The Court's decision was unquestionably just.

It rejected a lie and acknowledged a truth. The lie was *terra nullius* – the convenient fiction that Australia had been a land of no one.

The truth was native title – the fact that the land had once belonged to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and that in some places a legal right to it had survived the 200 years of European settlement.

So here was an issue the country could not ignore – either legally, or morally.

There was another form of title that had to become part of the way we manage land in Australia.

We owe it to Aboriginal Australians, to all Australians – indeed, we owe it to our fair and democratic traditions and to future generations – to recognise native title.

...

Over tens of thousands of years Aboriginal people had developed a complex culture built on a profound attachment to the land.

The land nourished them spiritually as well as materially. In the landscape and the life upon it they saw evidence of the epoch of creation. Down through the generations they passed on laws, customs, traditions and ceremonies reflecting an obligation to care for the land which went to the heart of their society.

Yet this most remarkable fact about Australia – this oldest continuous civilisation on earth – has until now –

that is, 1992 –

been denied by Australian law.

The first European settlers declared that the land had belonged to no one and the Indigenous Australians were shunted aside, often with appalling brutality.

Much of the despair and degradation, conflict and disease, and many of the problems which Aboriginal Australians face today are a consequence of this dispossession.

We have no need nor any use for guilt. This generation cannot be held responsible for the cruelty of previous generations.

But to ignore Mabo would be the final cruelty, and we would be held responsible – by the world and by future generations of Australians.

And they'd be right to hold us –
that is, this generation –
responsible.

In rising to speak on this bill I am also very proud to be part of this Victorian Labor government that has long remained committed to building on this historic Mabo decision and over more recent years remained committed to fulfilling the aspirations of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* through voice, treaty and truth. We are proud to be the first state to have established the first voice in Australia for First Nations people through the landmark establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, an independent, democratically elected body that represents traditional owners of country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria.

We are proud to be the first state to have established a formal truth-telling commission through the Yoorrook Justice Commission, which is helping us to begin understanding the full history of Australia – the one that dates way back before the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 and one that stems way back before modern-day Melbourne was first established from 1835 thereabouts onwards – a history, in fact, that dates back 60,000 years.

We are also the first state in Australia to be progressing a genuine treaty with First Nations people through the establishment of the Treaty Authority and the creation of the treaty framework and commissioner. In acknowledging every one of these incredible initiatives it is essential to point out that every one of these milestones has been supported and delivered and continues to be facilitated proudly by this Victorian Labor government.

This approach is about listening and walking with our First Nations communities, an approach that stands in very stark contrast with the approach of the Liberal–National opposition. When it comes to voice, we had the Liberal–National opposition oppose the campaign for the creation of a federal Voice to Parliament, with the opposition leader choosing to ignore the overwhelming yes vote in his own community of Hawthorn at the expense of pandering to the right wing of his party.

When it comes to the Yoorrook Justice and truth-telling commission on any given day you get a different message from the opposition – a lot of flipping and flopping, but you certainly will not get the truth when it comes to the truth-telling commission. And when it comes to treaty, they have now said that they no longer support treaty in Victoria, and they have withdrawn bipartisan support for this historic initiative. This is despite the Productivity Commission having specifically outlined that the best way to close the gap will be through this type of structural reform that the treaty process will offer.

Just last weekend we saw – as we have heard through this debate – the opposition leader also essentially, to a large extent, blame Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for the housing affordability crisis. That is right, the reason why housing is so expensive and unaffordable is because the cultural heritage management plans, which make up less than 1 per cent of development proposals, are to blame!

While those opposite will continue to sadly use First Nations communities as political footballs, we on this side of the house will continue to listen, to walk alongside and to support our First Nations communities as we strive towards closing the gap and reconciliation. Delivering on these things can only occur by empowering and supporting Aboriginal people through self-determination. That is why this Allan Labor government is committed to delivering on legislation that enables traditional owners to take control of their own destinies and their traditional lands.

In this respect this bill will improve the way land is managed at Framlingham and Lake Tyers Aboriginal trusts, and additionally the bill will remove restrictions on decisions made about Aboriginal land by Aboriginal communities at some of the mission cemeteries. It will do this by amending two acts, which were enacted in 1970 and 1991 respectively, and those are the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970 and the Aboriginal Lands Act 1991.

The Aboriginal Lands Act of 1970 was a landmark piece of legislation created in direct response to First Nations advocacy from those respective communities for land rights – well before the Mabo decision too, by the way. As former mission sites they represented, frankly, the state's past racist, segregationist and assimilationist laws which actively sought to deny First Peoples any form of self-determination. On 1 January 1968 residents from these communities were listed in the *Victoria Government Gazette* as members of these respective Aboriginal trusts and were allocated shares in trusts, thereby granting them freehold title to the land. It was the first time the Victorian Parliament recognised Aboriginal land rights and the government's first attempt to recognise the self-determination of First Peoples in Victoria, specifically the trust community's right to own and make decisions about the land. Since then, obviously, the act has become outdated in many respects, and some of the reforms contained in the bill today will very much go towards modernising that very act.

When it comes to reforms in the Aboriginal Land Act 1991, that act sought to redress some of the impacts also of Victoria's past racist laws. Under this act freehold title was granted over three Aboriginal burial sites across three different communities, including to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, the Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative and the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative respectively, these being the only Aboriginal-led community organisations in those regions at those times. Again, the reforms contained in the bill will continue to modernise and improve self-determination opportunities and processes for those respective First Nations communities. These reforms also continue building on the landmark work that Victoria has undertaken in this space in leading the nation, even prior to, as I pointed out, that historic Mabo court decision of 1992 and the subsequent federal legislation that was introduced by the Keating government in 1993.

My community, which is home to and built on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, was one of the first communities in mainland Australia's history to actually experience the process of dispossession and colonisation upon the arrival of John Batman and John Pascoe Fawcner on the banks of the Yarra from 1835 onwards. As outlined in the book *Coburg: Between Two Creeks* by Richard Broome, in late May 1835 John Batman and a survey party surveyed land from Indented Head to the Yarra. Batman sought opportunities for himself and 14 other capitalists of the Port Phillip Association. Throughout their journey they encountered some Woiwurrung, and after gift giving they accompanied the First Nations people to their camp by a stream. Whether this was the Merri Creek near Northcote, Preston or Coburg or the Edgars Creek near Thomastown, various commentators contend where this occurred. Batman was reported to have met with eight Woiwurrung chiefs, and after pleasantries he explained his desire to purchase the land. However, this concept was completely alien to the Woiwurrung, and what followed was frankly a sham. Batman gave them blankets, knives, looking glasses, tomahawks, beads, scissors and flour as payment for about 60,000 acres of land and agreed to give them a yearly tribute of the same. He then had them place a mark outlining their agreement to the deal.

On his return to Van Diemen's Land Batman and the Port Phillip Association actually tried to get the British government to recognise their claim to this land. It was a cynical effort to obtain land without paying the minimum five shillings an acre imposed by the then British government. The authorities declared Batman's treaty as void as it dangerously assumed that the Aborigines were the original owners of the land, whereas the British Crown held that there were no prior owners of Australian land. In that context I commend the bill to the house.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (15:19): I rise to also speak on the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. In doing so I would like to first acknowledge that this Parliament sits on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to elders past and present and also to the generations of First Nations advocates and activists and resisters from across the state who have fought for land justice for such a long time. I acknowledge that Parliament has a long and shameful history of making decisions for First Nations people without First Nations peoples, and a lot still needs to change for First Nations peoples to have true self-determination.

We have heard a little bit today about the history of the Aboriginal Lands Act, and the original Aboriginal Lands Act 1970, which the bill amends, predates the recognition of native title in the common law and the concept of traditional ownership. It was a response to the Framlingham and Lake Tyers Aboriginal communities' fierce advocacy for land rights and represents a historic milestone in the ongoing struggle for land justice. The communities fought for these rights in a context that was violent, racist and assimilationist, stemming from the mission histories of the sites, and the original act recognised the rights of First Nations communities at Lake Tyers and Framlingham to own the land and to control decisions made about it. It vested the land in two trusts and provided for residents to hold personal shares in those trusts.

Despite being in operation for nearly 50 years, the act was only reviewed properly in 2021, just a few years ago, by the First Peoples' Assembly, and this review made recommendations on how to improve the administration of the act. This government has committed to implementing these recommendations in two phases, and this bill gives effect to phase 1. These changes focus on the trusts' governance and other simpler recommendations to implement. The second phase recommendations, however, will be more complex, as these changes go to the very heart of how the trusts function. This will require the government to commit to deep community engagement and to really listen to the needs of the Framlingham and Lake Tyers communities and all those First Nations activists, advocates and community members who so often have not had a voice when it comes to these matters.

We in the Greens support this bill, and we commend the government's commitment to implementing the review's recommendations but to implementing them in full. I am concerned that the review, however, of the Aboriginal Land Act was completed in 2021 and now, several years later, the government is only just getting around to implementing these simpler recommendations, which for all intents and purposes are pretty much low-hanging fruit. To be honest, it is concerning that the real work required to improve the trust system is yet to be done, and this really goes to this Labor government's approach to reform, because this piecemeal approach to reform reflects Labor's broader reluctance to embrace the real transformative change needed to see real and true First Nations self-determination.

This is the kind of change that First Peoples have long called for and that is being echoed by the First Peoples' Assembly and the Yoorrook Justice Commission. Labor's noncommittal response to Yoorrook's second interim report speaks volumes, and it speaks volumes in terms of where they sit on meaningful transformative change. In that report, Victoria's First Nations truth-telling commission gave the government 46 clear recommendations to reform our systems here in Victoria – to reform the child protection system, which has an over-representation of First Nations children and families in it; and to reform our criminal justice systems, which also have a horrible, disgraceful over-representation of First Nations peoples in our prisons. These are racist systems that have caused immeasurable harm to First Nations people since their inception. But Labor has decided to only accept four of those recommendations in full, four out of 46 recommendations, and the four that they did decide to implement were all low-hanging fruit – things like better reporting on funding, things that were easy to implement.

A further 24 recommendations are supported in principle. I am quoting from the government's response here. They have supported these 24 recommendations in principle, but they are 'subject to Victoria's fiscal circumstances', which is Labor's way of saying, 'Well, they're nice ideas, but we're not going to commit to pay for them', 'They're nice ideas – oh, we'd do them if they were free' or 'They're nice ideas, but we might not be able to do them because we might prioritise something else in our budget.'

Fifteen other recommendations are still under consideration by the government. For another four, the Labor government has simply said a blatant no. The ones where they have said a blatant no include raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 and bail reform. Both of these recommendations, yes, are important structural reforms that are not as easy as something like better reporting on funding, but they have extensive support in research and in international law, and this government is refusing to do

them. Why is it? I think we need to ask ourselves that question: why is it that this government is refusing to implement them? They set up Yoorrook as a truth-telling organisation, a truth-telling process. The Labor government say that they are for self-determination for our First Nations peoples and Yoorrook is part of that, yet when Yoorrook makes these recommendations – which are not recommendations that are made lightly, they are recommendations that have been made after evidence has come before the commission, after people have bared their souls and told their painful history and their painful stories of what it is like to be a First Nations person in this state and in this country – after all of that, these very considered recommendations from Yoorrook, from some really eminent, incredible people who are highly qualified in this area, why is it that the Labor government then says a blatant no to these recommendations? Let us be honest: it is because the Labor government is fearful and scared of reprisal by the Murdoch media, and I do not think that is good enough. I think that when we are talking about real reforms for our First Nations communities, when First Nations communities come to us and when there is an overwhelming call for things like raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14, it is incumbent upon us as legislators who have been elected to this place, which is First Nations land, to heed that call and to listen to those calls – not just listen to them but then actually act, not just say that we are listening but then to actually act on those calls. We need to raise the age to 14. We need proper bail reform. The government needs to accept the recommendations that are more difficult to do but are the right thing to do.

Just last week I think it was, or the week before, I was very fortunate to be at the Melbourne Museum for the launch of the treaty database. That was an incredibly moving experience for me to see the first step on the pathway to treaty – to have the Treaty Authority get up and say ‘We are here to accept nominations from the First Nations Victorians, traditional owner groups, the First Peoples’ Assembly, to enter into treaty negotiations’ and to have the First Peoples’ Assembly get up and say ‘We are ready. We are here. We are ready to negotiate treaty and to present a kangaroo skin to the Treaty Authority as a symbol of saying, “We are here and we are ready to start negotiating treaty.”’ It is something that so many people have been hopeful would happen for a very long time, and it is just so incredible that it is here. With treaty negotiations looming, I do not think it is feasible for Labor to continue down this this path of not accepting the Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations.

We know the Liberal and National parties have already backed away from treaty, which I think is absolutely shameful. I think that this is something that should be above party politics. We all live on Aboriginal land, and there used to be this bipartisan commitment – tripartisan, multipartisan commitment – to treaty. I very much hope that they are able to come back to that position of supporting treaty, to put it above cynical politics and to see it as something that is important for all Victorians, because that is very much what it would be. It is not something that benefits one group. It is something that benefits all of us, and I often say that I think my three kids benefit more than anyone from treaty, because for them to be part of a process where they are welcomed onto the land on which they live by the traditional owners of that land, by the First Peoples of that land, for them to feel fully welcomed and celebrated as part of a joint history on this land, for them to know the history of this land and for them to embrace the culture and history of the First Peoples – what a rich, amazing gift to give my kids, who are not Aboriginal. Treaty is a gift to all Victorians, no matter where they come from. It is a call for unity and a call for all of us to be welcomed together to embrace the history and culture of this land. I think that is an incredible, incredible thing and an incredible gift to be offered, so I hope that all parties in this place can find their way back to accepting that gift.

Talking about engaging meaningfully with that treaty process, Labor must commit now to the treaty principles in everything that it does in government, and that means driving real transformation of these unjust systems – we have talked about the child protection system, the criminal justice system – and not just cherrypicking the easy recommendations for change. It means sustainably funding essential services, not leaving critical Aboriginal community controlled organisations woefully underfunded, and it means handing over real decision-making power to First Nations communities. I hope that the treaty that will be negotiated shortly with the First Peoples’ Assembly and the Treaty Authority will go some way to real self-determination for First Nations communities, real decision-making power,

real change in some of these structural elements of society and our institutions that are leaving First Nations people behind and that see our First Nations communities over-represented in the child protection and criminal justice systems.

If Labor want to commit to land justice fully, they would place a moratorium on all public land sales while treaty is being negotiated. Over the past four years we have seen 16 hectares of public land worth \$54 million sold off by this Labor government. A further 148 sites of public land – 2500 hectares – are being prepared for sale. This is land that belongs to the First Peoples, land that could potentially form part of treaty reparations or be used for public purposes, like much-needed Aboriginal housing.

We in the Greens support this bill's intent. We support the government's commitment to heeding the recommendations of the Lake Tyers and Framlingham communities and the First Peoples' Assembly, but for true land justice and lasting Indigenous sovereignty Labor will need to do better than incremental, piecemeal change. Labor must commit fully to the transformational changes being called for by not just the Yoorrook Justice Commission but First Nations communities right across Victoria.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:33): Thank you for the opportunity to contribute on the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I too want to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we gather today in this Parliament, the Wurundjeri people, and pay my profound respects to elders past and present. I also acknowledge the Bunurong and Boon Wurrung landowners in my community that represent my areas through the City of Kingston and Greater Dandenong and pay my respects to them.

I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the contribution by the member for Melbourne, who I respect greatly. I just want to address some of the points that she has made in her contribution. I think you cannot hold an argument or a line around the government's approach to treaty and criticise the Labor government when this government for eight years of its term has come forward with something ambitious and important that should have been done long ago. We have seen the trauma and impact of the Voice campaign and what that has meant for First Nations peoples across Australia and indeed in Victoria as well. You cannot sustain an argument that says we are not genuine on the pathway to treaty when it was literally this government who had the courage to take it to the Victorian people and to be endorsed in its policies on three separate occasions and to live those values of voice, truth and treaty.

So the notion that the Labor government is not serious – while having a process that established the First Peoples' Assembly and the democratic process that that enables and the self-determination principles that that brings – I just do not think stacks up. I hope that some of that commentary was not more about the politics that happen in the inner-city elements. If there is a genuine reflection on the coalition and how they have come to form their view – and I was encouraged by the member for Mildura's contribution and acknowledgement that self-determination is indeed a very important principle and that listening to First Nations peoples in Victoria is such a critical element – she should have the strength in her party room to come forward and let the Leader of the Nationals know that it was an error in judgement and decision-making to lobby the coalition's shadow cabinet and to then walk away from treaty.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity and this is a moment in time, and history will not be kind on those that walk away from such a significant and substantial process. Come forward with ideas around maybe changing and structuring its implementation, not the notion of just a blanket walk away, especially when it has been through the First Peoples' Assembly, and many of those opposite have sat on the floor of the Parliament and been moved by some of the presentations and contributions that have been made. Reflect on how Victoria can be different and the pathway that we have taken, and how that is also helping to lead the nation. So I was encouraged. I am not sure if it was a bit off-grid from the dot points that were provided by the opposition, but I appreciated the honesty and the integrity of the member for Mildura to front up and say that they support self-determination. The language was very similar to the process that we would go through on truth and treaty and some of the language that

was put forward. I welcome that, but at the same time I just think that there needs to be a bit more advocacy by those opposite on where they find themselves.

Where we find ourselves on this bill is really important. It was the incredible previous Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, who is now the Minister for Public and Active Transport, Gabrielle Williams, who was the minister at the time that responded to this review. It talks about how the 1970 act, although its intentions at the time were at an important moment in legislative reform, really needed to be investigated and evaluated after significant changes in policy. That review process was undertaken in 2016 on the 1970 act, and we have found ourselves with this bill today.

I just want to acknowledge a couple of things. The contributions from the member for Geelong and the member for Yan Yean were absolutely outstanding. With the work that was put into their contributions on this bill, I want to place on the record the appreciation of the time that they have taken to really speak power to this legislation and its reform and the history – particularly the member for Yan Yean, who I see in this place. What an outstanding reflection, contribution and elegance in how she went through some of where we find ourselves and the work that has gone into this bill.

Just to give a bit of an overview, bills on these reforms are the government's responses. I again say to the Leader of the Greens that the notion of just supporting in principle can talk about some of the technicalities or difficulties in implementation. That is what happens when you are in government. You do not want to be disingenuous and promise everything to everyone and not get it right. So if you are going through recommendations that you accept in full because they are technical in their nature or they do not need further investigation or evaluation, that is totally acceptable. But the support in principle is that they would be implemented down the track. There is not a support in principle as the member for Melbourne articulated or interpreted in that sense. The support in principle has been worked through in this first phase of reforms under that review of the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970, so I think it was disingenuous to suggest that the government will walk away from that.

On the notion about the Yoorrook Justice Commission – just to give a bit of insight to the member for Melbourne and other opposition members – each and every one of the ministers that have gone forward to that hearing and the ones that I support as parliamentary secretary have been incredibly focused. Their departments have briefed them to no end and have been extremely engaged in how significant that moment is in this Parliament.

If you tuned in to watch the evidence – and I am not sure many would have had that opportunity; hopefully some tuned into some of the coverage – you would have seen the deep care, compassion and honesty. In an environment like politics where admitting failures and the need to do more can carry a significant amount of risk, this is not the approach that has been taken through the Yoorrook Justice Commission. The incredible reflections by Minister Hutchins in her evidence, which has been played out and has reflected some of the contributions in the second-reading debate, go to the values and the integrity of those ministers and the honesty which they have brought forward to that – to apologise and to acknowledge the huge intergenerational trauma that exists and why truth is so important to the empowerment of those with lived and living experience and the ongoing sufferings and impact that has on First Nations communities and the process towards a better way forward.

If you have seen those presentations and you have seen part of those reforms – and I have had a little bit to look at in terms of how the Department of Health has responded as Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention – you would have seen again the massive work that has been done by people like the member for Geelong in her advocacy and tireless work in suicide prevention. She is an absolute powerhouse and a superstar representative. That work, the commentary at Yoorrook Justice and then the pathway to treaty are absolutely integral.

So I do not think that is a fair reflection on their contributions and where we find ourselves. Yes, there will be disagreement, but if you are wanting to build unity in this Parliament and you are wanting to bring people together, those sorts of cheap political points are probably a poor way of trying to

commentate on that. Pointscoring at every single opportunity or juncture: you will get more from working in collaboration over that time, and you will get more integrity and more respect by working through those nuances and maybe disagreeing but not always just saying, 'Oh, well, the Greens would do better. They're not serious about treaty,' even though we have been on that eight-year journey and we have taken that to three elections, over and over and over. That is a disingenuous approach. It is the same disingenuous approach to say that these recommendations that are said to be supported in principle are not supported by the government.

I want to just reflect also on the reference to the 1991 act and the work around Coranderrk mission. This has significance for the Bunurong people in my community. Many descendants have connections to Healesville, and it was a significant connection point after the traumas that were inflicted on the communities I represent along the Mordialloc Creek. This was a site of significant tragedy, and so many generations have had connections to the site in Healesville. It was really one of my last acts as Parliamentary Secretary for Health Infrastructure to do the First Nations cancer clinic in Healesville. To witness the call to country was incredibly moving on land out in Healesville, and the connection to country out in Healesville is significant.

Some of the reforms obviously to the 1991 act will be welcomed across communities as well. As I have said, the self-determination approach and our engagement with this I will take back to my communities. It will be of significant comfort, but there is so much more work to do and so much engagement ahead of us. I commend the bill to the house.

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (15:43): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motions

Budget papers 2024–25

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this house takes note of the 2024–25 budget papers.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:44): It is a pleasure to get back up on my feet to pick up where I left off last sitting week with the time I have remaining. It is a pleasure to talk about all the investment we are making off the back of this budget, the 2024–25 budget, into local jobs, education, transport, health, environmental and social justice, and cost-of-living outcomes for my community, beginning with \$1.27 million that we have allocated to improve road safety along Nicholson Street in East Coburg. I was very pleased to have secured and announced this funding through the budget to improve safety between Bell Street and Albion Street, which will provide for new electronic variable speed limit signage, electronic speed warning signs, dragon teeth pavement markings, coloured pavement at pedestrian crossings and kerb warning signs. I would like to particularly acknowledge local residents for their ongoing advocacy which helped lead to this outcome, including 93-year-old Anna and her daughter Maria. We did announce the funding at their place in Nicholson Street over some beautiful espresso and biscotti as well as with neighbours Rob, Steve, Andrea, Rosetta, Andrew, Desiree, Meg and so many others I have spoken to on this issue since being elected.

We have since also allocated \$805,000 to reduce the speed limit on Bell Street itself between Pentridge Boulevard and Elizabeth Street, which is very welcome news for the Coburg High community, Coburg Primary community and Safe Access over Bell Street Bridge for Everyone community as well, with the members for Preston and Northcote working very hard on this outcome to reduce the limit from 60 kilometres to 40 kilometres at school pick-up and drop-off hours.

Healthwise we have allocated \$813 million to kick off upgrades to the Northern Hospital and \$275 million for upgrades at the Austin Hospital too. But I am particularly proud of the \$175,000 we have allocated to improve the long-overdue cricket nets that have long been declared past their use-by date, first built in the 1950s. That is welcome news for the Pascoe Vale Hadfield Cricket Club, and I would particularly like to acknowledge president Kelvin Thomson, Georgie McElligott, Andrew Carlton, Stephen Whitchurch and many others. Council has come to the party at first drop with \$100,000 and Cricket Victoria brought up the tail at \$40,000.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (15:46): Budgets are about choices. In this year's budget Labor have made their choices very clear. So for those playing along at home, I want to ask viewers: what choice would you make? Scenario 1: we are in the middle of the most disastrous housing crisis we have ever seen. The number of Victorians waiting for a public home has climbed to over 125,000 people. On any given night 30,000 people experience homelessness. Out-of-control rent rises have pushed rents to an all-time high, leaving renters to sacrifice food and medicine just to keep a roof over their heads. You could (a) build 100,000 new public homes over the next decade, force property developers to include public and genuinely affordable homes in all new developments and make unlimited rent increases illegal, starting with an immediate two-year freeze or (b) you could demolish almost 7000 public homes, displacing more than 10,000 people and tearing apart their communities with absolutely no plan for where they will go. You could give huge tax breaks to multinational developers to screw over renters on a massive scale and blame everyone but yourselves for the crisis getting worse. Which one would you choose? Labor chose (b).

Despite the housing, renting and homelessness crises, there was no new funding for public housing – not a cent in this year's budget. Labor seems intent on completely ending public housing in this state. With the demolition of 44 public housing towers, over 125,000 people on the waiting list and a regime of privatisation, people are scared. They are scared of losing their homes forever and never, ever having the right to live in public housing with a 25 per cent cap on rents and security of tenure. That is why people are scared. They are scared because the Greens are telling them the truth and Labor is trying to pull the wool over their eyes while demolishing their homes.

Last year, despite billions of dollars being announced for housing, the government only added 1554 houses to the public and community housing stock. But, guess what, they demolished or sold off 1296 public homes, barely breaking even. At the current rate, it will take 31 years to clear the public housing waiting list. That is assuming that there is no growth in demand, and we know that demand is growing at unprecedented rates.

Labor has chosen to allow landlords to continue to raise the rent by however much they like, locking renters into the threat of a rent increase that will push them over the edge, a rent increase that will mean no matter what sacrifices they make they simply cannot afford it anymore. And because of the terrifyingly low vacancy rates, which do not have as much to do with the supply of new housing as with landlords hoarding 100,000 homes here in Melbourne and Labor letting 48,000 homes sit on Airbnb across the state, these renters know that they have absolutely no hope of finding another home if they choose to leave that home that they cannot afford, because there is no affordable housing. There is no affordable housing that is available to someone on the disability support pension and there is literally no affordable housing for single parents on JobSeeker, so they are forced to borrow and beg and steal or join the 125,000 people on the public housing waitlist for a home they are likely to never get.

Labor have made a choice to put their re-election before people's basic rights to a home. They have made a choice to make deals with their property developer mates –

Katie Hall: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a take-note motion about the budget, and I would ask you to call on the member to be relevant to the motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keefe): I believe the member was being relevant.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: The choice that Labor have made is to stand shoulder to shoulder with property developers and announce a program to demolish and privatise public housing – a program that they have shown no evidence will be successful, will be efficient, will actually work and will improve housing and homelessness and that they can actually fund over continuing to give people a public home. And when pressed about what they are doing to combat the rental crisis, there was nothing in this budget for renters. Labor loves instead to raise build-to-rent apartments, but build-to-rent is a scam. It is total rent washing. The build-to-rent apartments in Fitzroy –

Nick Staikos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would reiterate the earlier point of order by the member for Footscray on relevance. Perhaps the member for Richmond could quote a budget paper or a budget reference or a page in the budget papers.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): I think the member is being relevant. There is no point of order.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: Once again Labor is funnelling public money to property developers with massive concessions. Build-to-rent properties developed by massive multinational companies get a 50 per cent discount on land tax for 30 years and an exemption for foreign investors from paying the absentee owner surcharge, which costs the state and taxpayers significantly. Renters in these developments and renters in Kerr Street in Fitzroy have come to me in desperation. After just one year of living there they face the same vulnerabilities as the broader rental market. They face no-grounds evictions and they face unlimited rent hikes, and corporate landlords do not guarantee any extra security. If anything, the notion of a corporate landlord is a gigantic red flag. Build-to-rent properties are marketed to corporate investors as 20 per cent more expensive than comparable apartments in the same locations, making them in fact less affordable. So stop claiming that build-to-rents are in fact a solution to this housing crisis.

Budgets are about choices. Let us look at scenario 2: the world watches in despair as the Israeli military commits an unspeakable genocide against the Palestinian people. Labor have a choice: they could (a) listen to the hundreds of thousands of Victorians begging their governments to do everything in their power to stop the attacks, save lives and seek peace and justice for Palestine or (b) declare unqualified support for the Israeli government, double down their support for Israeli weapons manufacturers and fund a major –

Natalie Suleyman: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Richmond would know too well that she has now strayed away from the motion that is before the house, and I would ask you to direct the member to speak in relation to the motion that is before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): I ask the member to come back to the budget.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: Is the minister suggesting that the Victorian Labor government is not funding a major arms fair in September? Is that not part of this year’s state budget? I think it is. The Victorian government is the major –

Natalie Suleyman: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is not relevant, and we do have a take-note motion in relation to the budget. I would ask you to remind the member to speak directly in relation to the take-note motion that is before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): I ask the member to come back to the budget.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: This year’s budget has allocated funds to the Land Forces conference, a major conference displaying the products of major weapons manufacturers from across the world – BAE Systems, NIOA, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Elbit Systems. This Victorian government has funded in this budget the major sponsorship of this defence trade fair. This is part of Victorian Labor’s 2024 budget funding commitments. Once again Labor are putting their corporate relations and their corporate dollars that they get to fund the next election over the lives of Victorians and the lives of Palestinians.

Scenario 3: the once-thriving capital of arts and live music is deeply struggling to stay afloat. Independent artists are leaving the sectors in droves, and arts organisations are losing core funding and shutting left, right and centre. Live music venues across the state are struggling and being forced to close because of exorbitant insurance costs. Labor has a choice. They could (a) axe the sick pay guarantee for artists as well as all other casual workers, pay millions of dollars to get the Foo Fighters to come to Victoria, leaving smaller arts and music organisations to languish and close, and let grant programs stagnate to prehistoric levels, or they could (b) properly fund small to medium arts organisations with recurrent organisational funding, establish a percentage-for-art scheme, establish a living wage for artists and make affordable public insurance available to our local live music venues. But instead they choose to ignore the hundreds of venues at risk of going under. Instead they offer tokenistic competitive grants as a box-ticking exercise to get the media off their back. They do not talk to venues about what they actually need. They just turn up at the front door when they need to make an announcement. Labor could provide a living wage for artists, a fair annual wage, so that they have the security to create the art that our state takes for granted.

Our small to medium organisations are under threat. These organisations are the bedrock of our evolving culture, and they suffer from an ever-diminishing pool of funding for the arts. I hear from arts organisations all the time that are struggling with funding uncertainties, from people who are having to close up shop and from highly skilled, passionate arts workers who are heartbroken. They are leaving the sector because they just cannot keep going. The cultural loss for Victoria is colossal. In the Richmond electorate we are bleeding grassroots organisations left, right and centre, organisations that have been feeding our culture for decades and have inexplicably lost their multiyear funding, which forces arts organisations into precarious situations and forces them to make difficult decisions.

At the same time these organisations are being declined getting project grants, with Creative Victoria, which funds them, saying that they are in too precarious a position to be able to receive the grants – the same organisation that took their multiyear funding away. It is a catch 22. The reason for this is that Labor has deprioritised the arts. It has not increased, let alone indexed, the funding that it makes available for the arts in years. It does have plenty of money for major well-established institutions, the ones that bring the international exhibits and international acts – say, the Foo Fighters – but it takes the money away from our local organisations: La Mama Theatre, the Nicholas Building, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne Fringe and the CCP, the Centre for Contemporary Photography. The Centre for Contemporary Photography in Fitzroy is right on the edge after almost 40 years. They have been defunded by Creative Victoria and, because of that, defunded by Creative Australia in favour of these mega festivals, mega events, mega galleries –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the matter of public importance.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Women's health

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

That this house recognises that the Allan Labor government is prioritising women's health by giving it the focus and funding it deserves.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (16:01): I am delighted to rise to lead the debate on this incredibly important matter of public importance, which asks that the house recognise that the Allan Labor government is prioritising women's health by giving it the focus and funding it deserves. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health, it has been my absolute honour to work alongside our

utterly determined Minister for Health and under the outstanding leadership of Victoria's Premier on a policy area that means so much to me and to so many others.

Indeed it does feel as though women's health is at a turning point as women's and girls' voices right across our state have themselves elevated the public discourse and demanded change. It is an extraordinary thing to think that we are now in a time when our Premier can share her personal story of endometriosis. Just consider how unheard of that would have been a decade or two ago and consider the power of that voice being heard by others and the ability for stories like this to bring women's health out of the shadows.

Since we embarked on this work we have been uncovering layer after layer of a complex picture. It is a picture that depicts centuries of stigma and bias which have compounded an embedded disadvantage for women in our society and in societies right across the world. Just as we see these inequalities play out in economic and social spheres, we see them replicated in health outcomes for women. Part of it is bound up in the vexed relationship societies have had with women's bodies for the longest time, seeing them as mysterious, even dangerous, and our ability to create life as a threat, and that danger element then translating into attempts over history to subdue and control women and their bodies. Think about the history of so-called hysteria, a proclaimed disease basically outlining the symptoms of normal female sexuality, yet women were forced into asylums and in some cases had to undergo surgical hysterectomies.

These sorts of horrors are thankfully behind us, but the hang-ups, the stigma and the gaps in medical knowledge about women's bodies unfortunately remain. That destructive and damaging experience of being dismissed, gaslighted and misunderstood has echoed across forum after forum after forum that I have attended as part of our Victorian inquiry into women's pain, an inquiry that has now received over 12,000 survey and submission responses from women and girls across our state – an extraordinary response to a survey – and I thank each and every one of these Victorians for lending their voice to our work to improve women's health care. From Geelong to Monbulk to Glen Waverley to Northcote, rooms of women and girls have reverberated with the grief and pain and frustration that has been felt for too long. It is visceral: story after story of women sharing their experiences of chronic pain, about persistent migraines, about debilitating endometriosis, about birth trauma, about pain during the menstrual cycle, about arthritis or about conditions like fibromyalgia, and story after story of women having to strategise before they go to their GP lest they be dismissed or told they are simply depressed or viewed with suspicion as though they are just there for the drugs, as though being there for the drugs is a bad thing when you are in pain.

I hear women feeling under pressure to push through to meet work and caring responsibilities; women struggling through shifts in excruciating pain, unable to take time off to navigate the system and not willing to when their experience has given them little hope that that system will respond. I hear about the shame and the loneliness and the isolation – of low energy levels, of not wanting to leave home and of friendships that slip away, relationships that deteriorate, opportunities that pass by. As much as there is solidarity in the sharing of those experiences and the commonality of them, there is also anger and determination and, ultimately, hope – hope that in this golden moment, with our collective voices drawing public attention, with the ambition of our government and with dedicated funding, we can and will change things for the better. It is that hope that each of us as parliamentarians is accountable to, an accountability that the Premier, the minister and I take very seriously. It is why we will use every moment that we have to drive and embed reforms in women's health and why our Labor government is giving it the focus and funding that it deserves, because what this goes to is the quality of life for generations of women and girls.

The Allan Labor government has invested \$153 million as a first step to transform the way women's health is treated in our state. This investment means that over the coming years we will open 20 women's health clinics so that women can have access to comprehensive, affordable care. The first tranche of five clinic locations was announced in April this year: at the Northern Hospital, Epping; the Royal Women's Hospital; the Frankston Hospital; Barwon Health, Geelong; and the Ballarat Base

Hospital. These multidisciplinary clinics will allow women that safe, affirming space to see specialists like gynaecologists, urologists, specialist nurses and allied health professionals. They will cover a whole gamut of conditions, like endometriosis and pelvic pain, polycystic ovary syndrome, perimenopause and menopause.

One of the things that we know for sure is that health inequality is compounded by intersectional factors, and in a context where non-Indigenous women live on average eight years longer than Indigenous women, it is extremely important that First Nations voices form a core part of our statewide efforts, which is why in addition to the 20 women's health clinics we are also working with Aboriginal health organisations to deliver a dedicated Aboriginal women's health clinic and have the guiding expertise of Jill Gallagher, who is also on our women's health advisory council.

To make sure our investment in health equity reaches right across the state, we are also establishing an additional mobile clinic to help us serve regional and rural areas, because we want to ensure that no matter where they live, Victorian women have access to quality care. At the same time as setting up the clinics, we are also expanding locations for our sexual and reproductive health hubs from 11 to 20. The final six of these were announced this month, with new locations to open in Kyneton, Melton, Wyndham Vale, Broadmeadows, Ararat and Horsham. These hubs provide access to contraception, medical abortion and referrals for surgical abortion as well as sexual health, testing and treatment. They have been immensely successful, and at Peninsula Health, where there is one, the team, led by Dr Nisha Khot, are also pioneering the use of the green whistle for patients undergoing IUD procedures. The green whistle is common in emergency settings and in sporting events. It is an analgesic that is inhaled, and giving it to women means more women being made comfortable during IUD insertion. It encourages the uptake of this incredibly effective, long-acting, reversible contraception.

There is a lot more that we are doing as part of our women's health reforms. I have got 6 minutes left, so please excuse me for flying through this a little bit, but I do want to put a few things on the record. We are doubling the number of laparoscopies and related surgeries, which are part of the diagnostic toolkit for identifying endometriosis. New health and wellbeing support groups are being funded specifically for women, because no-one should have to go through the challenges of chronic disease or menopause alone. Indeed this is something that came out really strongly in the women's health breakfast that I hosted with the Premier in Northcote last week. Women described feeling like they had no-one they could talk to, like they were letting their families and friends down when they were unwell, and the impact that that then had on their mental health. As women we yearn for those secure and supportive spaces to openly discuss our health journeys, access support, connect with our communities and seek guidance. It is often remarked that modernity has meant the loss of our villages, and for women this loss is profound. There is so much power in sharing knowledge and experience amongst one another. As an example, in my local electorate I am lucky enough to have Women's Health in the North just down from my office, and as part of their women's health and wellbeing package they are now able to deliver a face-to-face support group for people with experiences of abortion, something that has had a huge amount of stigma surrounding it. Women are now able to come together and talk about that.

A strong health workforce is vital to delivering a better healthcare system for women. Just this week our government launched the third round of applications for free nursing and midwifery courses, part of a package that will deliver scholarships to more than 10,000 students. We are also providing more than 175 scholarships specifically to upskill women's health specialists in areas like IUD insertion, sexual and reproductive health, pelvic physio training, menopause and PCOS. The scholarships include funding to promote cultural safety and remove existing barriers for First Nations women, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds and LGBTIQ+ communities. It is a key part of ensuring our new clinics have highly skilled practitioners giving women and girls the care they deserve.

However, even with trained specialists there are still significant gaps in our understanding of women's health issues and effective life-saving treatments, and that is a symptom of generations of women's exclusion from medical research. As uncomfortable as it is, the male body and male experiences are still overwhelmingly cast as the default in everything from discovery research to clinical trials, to drug development, to anatomical models, to diagnostic tools and to treatment in emergency. This exclusion has serious consequences for women's health, borne out starkly in the statistics and anecdotally in the thousands of women now lending their voices to the push for medical equality. We know that chronic pain affects a higher proportion of girls and women than men around the world, yet women are less likely to receive treatment. We know that even when treatment is received, women are more likely than men to experience adverse reactions to many medications because they are not trialled on them. That means they are more likely to stop their treatment. That means more women in pain for longer. To address the gender gap in medical research and grow our knowledge about conditions that impact women we are supporting the establishment of a women's health research institute here in Victoria. This is an exciting part of the reform package and our work towards health equity and a true enabler to enhancing our understanding of women's bodies.

This Labor government has a proven track record when it comes to improving outcomes for women and girls. Whether that is opening Victoria's first clinic focusing on women's heart health or our statewide sexual and reproductive health line 1800 My Options, whether it is legislating safe access zones around abortion clinics or our groundbreaking family violence reforms, whether it is supporting key initiatives like free kinder or the expansion of our early parenting centres or building more female-friendly facilities at sports clubs across the state, we are a party that sees women, that hears women and that delivers policy to make women's lives safer, healthier and more equal.

Earlier this year I had the pleasure of attending the Victorian Pelvic Pain Symposium, the first of its kind. It brought together experts, academics, researchers and lived experience advocates to share expertise, innovation and networks, all with a focus on delivering better patient-centred care for women living with pelvic pain. It was incredibly elevating and edifying to have so many experts in the room with a passion and determination for change.

As we continue to invest in women's health, we are not just changing policies, we are changing lives. We are breaking down barriers, we are addressing inequalities and we are ensuring that every woman and girl in Victoria has access to the care and support she deserves. This is just the beginning of our transformative journey towards a more inclusive and responsive healthcare system. I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this vital work, in particular the thousands who submitted to the inquiry. I thank the minister and the Premier for their leadership along with our hardworking advisers and public servants. I look forward to continuing to work together to build a healthcare system that is as dynamic as the women it serves.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (16:16): I rise to speak on the government's matter of public importance in which the Allan Labor government claims it is prioritising women's health and giving health the focus and funding it deserves. This is a government that likes to crow about the things it does but does not do the work required to deliver beyond the headlines. For a decade now we have been hearing from a government who says it is concerned about the high rates of family violence in our community, a government that believes in more investment in better health outcomes for women and a government that says it will provide suitable housing for women fleeing situations of family violence – all very honourable objectives; that much is true. However, on the ground we are not seeing better outcomes for women, and we are certainly not seeing a government making good on the things they promised to do.

Just one example from my electorate is how a young woman was treated when she approached the Labor government with an idea to assist women in an area of health in which there is an obvious gap, and she recently pointed that out to me when we met. Sarah Wallace is a remarkable young woman who, along with her husband Steven, co-founded the Wish Collective. This is an initiative to support people trying to conceive and to access assisted fertility technologies and recovering from surgeries

and loss from miscarriage. Sarah and Steve became acutely aware of the mental, emotional, physical and financial toll that is often involved with trying to conceive and how isolating the feelings can be.

I have since had conversations with other women, since Sarah and I met, who have talked to me about their experience when they have been going through a miscarriage. As a nurse I have had this experience many times from a medical perspective, but it was described to me by the women who experienced the miscarriages. They said to me that they had done the pregnancy test, they were excited, they were having a baby. Yet when they start bleeding and they present to the hospital the words 'baby' and 'child' are no longer used, and suddenly we start speaking in medical terms about 'evacuating the uterus', 'doing a D and C' and 'removing the products of conception'. That is exactly how we speak. It was identified to me by some of the women that they feel like they have failed. They feel like it is their fault, and nobody actually talks to them about the grief and the loss. Often they just to the GP, into hospital and home. They have lost a child, and that is not really understood.

It really became apparent to me that what Sarah was putting together, this project, was a local initiative to help women when they present either to their doctor or to the hospital. They get a kit, and they know there are people around who they can talk to and share their grief with. Just like the many support groups we have for different conditions – cancer support groups – that is the sort of thing she has started. She went to speak to the local member, Jacinta Ermacora, the Labor member of Parliament for Western Victoria, and she simply was dismissed. I was really disappointed because this is what Labor are saying that they actually want to achieve – prioritising women. So I urge the member for Western Victoria to reconsider meeting with Sarah and give her the respect she deserves to be heard. I actually think it is a wonderful project and very much support this for Sarah.

We hear a lot of words in this place from those opposite and in press release after press release about being the party for women. But we know those words ring hollow. Just contrast, for instance, everything Labor say about their progressive agenda for women with what they actually do in practice. Take the recent state budget, for instance, where we are seeing the results of a decade of financial mismanagement under Labor. Family violence service delivery – cut in the May budget by \$29 million. Women's policy – a \$3 million cut. Labor continues to announce things and then cut them. There is no better example than before the last election, when Labor announced public IVF services so all people could afford to have assistance with getting pregnant. But what did they announce in this budget just gone? Cuts. Cuts to the IVF public services – \$42 million in cuts. So they announce it, then they cut it. So there are no outcomes for people who are really trying to access this palaver that this Labor government say they are trying to assist women with.

But there are more cuts. There are cuts to women's public hospitals. Almost 29 per cent of women in public hospitals feel they are not involved as much as they want to be. These cuts actually make people struggle and suffer. But Labor continually say they care about women – that they care about women in situations of family violence. They advertise on the television that women will be supported and looked after. But how many women come into your offices like they do mine and say, 'I've left a very abusive situation and now I thought I'd be supported, but I can't get anywhere to stay. There are no houses available. I'm sleeping in my car with my children.' How many times are you hearing that, because I am certainly hearing that a lot.

What we were told by the government – their own figures say that vulnerable people like a woman who has left a family violence situation should be able to access a home within eight months. But their own statistics show us that it is actually 2½ years. I am going to re-say that: 2½ years before they can get somewhere to settle their children in a home. Sleeping in a car, sleeping in temporary accommodation, not accessing consistent schooling for their children – this is appalling. Yet this is a government that says they are investing in housing. They announced that they would produce 80,000 homes a year over the next 10 years, a total of 800,000. They are already failing. They did not even reach 55,000 homes last year. They could not even reach the first milestone of the first year of the target they set. They failed. Yet their own data reveals, as I say, it is 2½ years before a woman fleeing violence can actually get some supports.

Labor cut funding from family violence at a time when safety is a top concern for women. It was only a few months ago, in April, that the Premier marched with more than 10,000 Victorians in Melbourne against gender-based violence against women – a noble goal. This is the Premier that for the last 10 years has had the levers and had the instruments that would give the police the support they are looking for so that women whose ex-partners break intervention orders could actually be sanctioned. The police beg for these things and the minister marches with the women but does nothing, and the intervention orders continue to be broken and the women live in fear. The Premier has had 10 years to be able to do something about this. The community expects more than just headlines. Women are still living in fear, and real investment and commitment are what is needed.

We talk about the investment in women's pain. Absolutely I endorse that. Endometriosis is a very debilitating condition. For lots of women work time is lost. A hormonal migraine – terribly debilitating. So much more can be done and should be done. But in my electorate a woman cannot even get a doctor's appointment to be able to get the medication for managing the pain, let alone be able to access one of the women's clinics that are going to come in a point in time – very similar to the mental health beds that are going to come in a point in time and many other promises that Labor do not deliver on.

The Labor sisterhood love to come in here and attack Liberal members – including me – about support for women. Then we find out how Labor women rallied around John Setka, a man who pled guilty to harassing his then wife, breaching court orders and making dozens of shocking, abusive and threatening text messages and calls.

Perhaps the members for Thomastown and Kororoit can come out of hiding and explain why they stand with perpetrators of domestic violence, because what they say in this chamber is very different to the support they showed to a convicted wife abuser. This man's appalling behaviour was laid bare for all to see, and these great Labor sisters gave him a pat on the back. Will the Premier explain why she will not take action against those who continue to stand with culprits of domestic violence, exposing Labor's outright hypocrisy? We have two members of their own party sitting in the crossbench who are accused of persistent and inappropriate behaviour, as has been reported. They have just shifted. Meanwhile, Labor members put their heads in the sand and carry on like there is nothing to see here, just walk on by and pretend it is not happening. They have just shifted. Meanwhile, they stick their heads in the sand and continue like there is nothing to see here.

But it is not just what they do in defence of violent men in their ranks. It is also how they go after their own the moment they step out of line and stand up for themselves. Ask yourself why Kaushaliya Vaghela is no longer a member of Parliament, stating that she was bullied out. Ask yourself why the late Jane Garrett was bullied out of cabinet by the former Premier and Peter Marshall, who threatened to put an axe in her head. The reason is that there is a gangster culture at the heart of this government where women are stood over and knocked aside the moment they stand up for themselves. Let us not forget the way minister Jenny Mikakos was made a scapegoat for this government's hotel quarantine debacle. I could go on and on about the hypocrisy of this government saying they care about women. They are not getting support, because this is not backed up by the actions on the ground of the women.

Another area of concern that comes to my office very frequently, where Labor have not put in the efforts that are required, is child care. If we truly say we care about women, a government which has been in power for 10 years would have done the work to plan, train and build so that we have got the ability to look after children and women can get back to work. They want to work and they need to work to manage the increased cost of living and to manage the mortgages that have gone up and up because of the mismanagement of Labor and the financial mismanagement of Labor. But this is a government that has not planned ahead, and this is why in my electorate and many electorates, particularly around the regions, we cannot get child care and we cannot find places for children to get to kinder. The government makes big announcements like, 'Let's have free kinder,' which is a great and honourable task, but if you have not done the planning and all you have done is increase the demand but not address the supply, you have actually got families really in strife because they cannot

find the care they need for their children. This is a government that say they are investing in health to support women. But what do we do? We kick them out of hospital the minute they have had their babies, not support them and care for them.

A member interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: It is pretty much within the first 24 hours. New mums are going home unsupported. No wonder we are seeing unplanned readmissions within 28 days of discharge, partly caused by mothers being too quickly forced out of hospital. Families are really struggling. We are seeing the family unit really under a lot of pressure. What we should be doing is putting more support around young families, supporting breastfeeding and supporting child care so that mums and dads can really get to support their families.

But this is a government, as I said, that keeps spinning the wheels of spin. They put out the headlines; they announce funding such as the IVF example just before the last election, 2022, yet in this budget we see them actually cut the funding. This is a government who are so insincere, and the hypocrisy is extraordinary. In my electorate I have the women very, very mobilised at the moment, because they are hearing about the health cuts and the mergers. They are hearing it from board members who are saying they cannot speak, and they are asking them to speak up on their behalf. Right now as I speak, there are women in my electorate organising a rally to say to this government, 'We will not tolerate the health cuts and we will not be subjected to the mergers. We need our own voices on our boards in our smaller hospitals and our larger hospitals, and we don't need to be governed out of Geelong. We don't need to be driving down potholed roads to be having procedures that we should be able to have in our own electorate.' That rally will be on 16 August, and I endorse the work of the community to stand up.

They asked me to ask the minister, which I did in the house in May, whether these mergers are going to affect South West Healthcare or going to affect Timboon or going to affect Port Fairy or going to affect Heywood or Portland, but the minister has been silent. I have asked the minister to the rally, and I stand here and ask member for Western Victoria Jacinta Ermacora and any other Labor ministers who want to come along or members of Parliament who want to come along and be honest with our community. Be honest about the cuts you are making, because you have got so much mismanagement of your budget here in Victoria that you are actually going to attack health. You are going to attack the nurses –

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast will refrain from using the word 'you'.

Roma BRITNELL: Sorry, through the Chair. We will make sure that our nurses are supported and our doctors are supported and more investment is made in health rather than less. I do not even understand the rationale behind cutting health care after a pandemic, after putting the nurses and putting all the health professionals, whether it is occupational therapists, under stress. All the health professionals have done an extraordinary job. This government want to pretend they are supporting them but at the same time are cutting the services that they need to deliver to be able to do the job they care so very much about for their community.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (16:31): I feel that I must remind the member for South-West Coast that Book Week is not for another few weeks and the fiction and the fantasy are not required. I am here for the non-fiction. I do prefer non-fiction, so I would like to explain how and why what the member opposite said is pure fiction. She repeated the mistruth that we have cut \$29 million from family violence, when nothing could be further from the truth. In fact we have now reached over \$4 billion investment with the 2024–25 budget – \$4 billion. I think that the issue is that those opposite are too busy asking 'What is a woman?' to ask what women want and need, and that is something that this government has done.

That is why, on the topics raised by the member opposite, I am happy to remind her that we held the nation's first Royal Commission into Family Violence, we have implemented all 227 recommendations

of the royal commission and we have increased the family violence specialist workforce fivefold since 2015 – five times the number of family violence workers since we have been in government. In fact I state again: \$4 billion. There has been the opening of the Orange Door hubs. I have had the pleasure of visiting them and seeing the great work that they do. There is the Dhelk Dja partnership with First Nations Victorians, which is so important for Aboriginal families, keeping them together and keeping them whole and healthy. And we have recently had the core and cluster refuges – 15 of them – rebuilt. So when the member opposite says that we are not doing anything, I think it is very clear that we are very busy and very committed to the true and hard work of supporting women in Victoria who have experienced family violence, and I do not think bringing fiction to this place helps anyone at all.

A further fiction that was repeated by the member for South-West Coast was that we cut IVF services in the last budget, which also is not true. \$120 million has been funded and delivered over five years, and in fact we have delivered an additional \$2 million for the egg and sperm bank in the most recent budget. Fiction is convenient, but facts are what stand.

I am not going to go on to the other topics that she mentioned, doctors appointments and child care, because as we know they are federal responsibilities. But this government has done more than its fair share of heavy lifting to get people in front of a doctor and to get kids into free kinder and into child care, and I really will not countenance any disrespect for our record there, especially when those opposite's federal partners performed so abysmally in that space over such a long time.

I did not know I was going to be talking about that until the member was on her feet, and I would like to turn now to what we have raised today as being a matter of public importance, and that is around women's health and our funding for women's health. I held a women's pain community forum in the electorate of Yan Yean, and I would like to share some stories that were shared in that space. It is pretty amazing. I put an ad on Facebook saying, 'Do you experience chronic pain? Would you like to discuss women's health?' People saw an ad on Facebook and they came. It is a big step for someone to take, and that shows what an important issue it is to them.

I had one woman at the door, Kelly, and she said to me as I was signing her in, 'I've never been to one of these before', and I said, 'Well, I've never run one before, so we're on the same footing here.' Kelly went on to share a story with the women that gathered about the extreme pain that she experiences. She was speaking about her GP, one of the few bulk-billing GPs around, who does not give her pain medication and who will not give her pain medication, except for one time when he did. When her husband came to the appointment and said, 'It's true; she really is in a lot of pain', then he prescribed the medication. We know, sadly, that that is borne out in the data. We know that women are more likely to be prescribed help when the husband is present in the consultation.

We also heard from Bethany. Bethany is an amazing young woman in my community, and I would like to read you some of the words that she has shared with me previously. She says:

The first GP I visited at 16 years old told me it was 'period pain and you're too young to have endo,' gave me the pill and told me to go on my way. Mum insisted that this wasn't the case and took me to see a different GP. She really listened and I was referred to see a gynaecologist. After laparoscopic surgery, I was diagnosed with stage 3 endometriosis, adenomyosis and PCOS at 17 years old. Fast forward to the start of last year, I was back in agonising pain and missing work, as well as my first year of uni due to the chronic pain. This meant multiple hospital visits, functioning off pain killers and just hoping it would stop. This led me to my second surgery last week.

This is a first-year uni student:

This has also resulted in now talking about egg freezing, if I'll have children and the fact that one day I will most likely need an early hysterectomy.

So women are sharing the most serious and life-altering experiences with each other in these safe spaces. I was so happy then to be able to share with the women present that at the Northern we are having a women's health clinic open. One of the issues the women raised was cost and the time going between different specialists. The women's health clinic at the Northern Hospital will have

gynaecologists, urologists and allied health under one roof, so it is not the case of having to go and pay a specialist gynaecologist, and then they send you to the urologist, and then you have to get a test over here, and then you go back over there – but all together under one roof, which is fantastic.

I would also like to give a shout-out to Kym Veale, who came along to the women's health forum. She is a local physiotherapist who specialises in women's physio. She has the Womankind Physiotherapy there, because women often need additional support after childbirth or due to other issues, and she provides care for the women in our community, and I thank her for that.

The image that came to my mind immediately when the member for South-West Coast said that we are not doing anything was Dr Jhelum Paralikar's face. I met her at the sexual and reproductive health hub in South Morang. I was there with the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health, the member for Northcote, who spoke so beautifully before, and the member for Mill Park. Dr Paralikar leads the sexual and reproductive health hub there with DPV Health, funded by our government. What struck me about her was her grace and her strength but also how straightforward she was and how she spoke really plainly, and I thought, 'If I needed help, you'd be just the sort of woman that I would want help from.'

So Dr Jhelum Paralikar is doing something, the Premier is doing something and this government is doing something, and we will not take lectures from those opposite, because this is a government that listens to women, that knows women and that is made up of women. In fact just this morning at women's caucus at the table that we had there were probably more that were able to come along to the breakfast than they have had in their party for their whole existence, and that was just who could make it this morning.

People know when someone is truly listening, and they know when someone is truly acting. The proof is in the pudding. We will continue to work hard for women in Victoria so that they get the health care they deserve.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (16:41): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the member for Northcote's matter of public importance today, although I wholeheartedly disagree with her premise and believe it is completely inappropriate following today's behaviour. After witnessing the behaviour of the Premier earlier today and her willingness to stand with a former Labor MP who allegedly mistreated women and staff, this matter of public importance is offensive towards every Victorian woman. This follows Labor enabling the misogynistic and thuggish behaviour of the CFMEU and Labor MPs offering personal support towards someone convicted of domestic violence offences. So let us call this what it is – an attempt to win female votes while at the same time treating women like ignorant fools who are not aware of the harm this government has caused to them and their families.

When it comes to health care it is difficult to understand the delusion that this government shows. Simply put, health care in our state is in trouble, and there is no ignoring that. It is only getting worse. If we just look at women's health, the situation is not better. Under this government we have seen public IVF services and hospital budgets slashed. We have seen a blatant lack of support for child and maternal health services, particularly in our regional communities. This government is content to leave Victorian women to languish on waitlists for vital surgeries and is forcing hospital mergers that are set to have a significant impact on the ability for people to access health care locally. This is a government hell-bent on destroying what was once heralded as one of the best healthcare systems in the world, evident in the prestigious 2015 King's Fund report.

Labor talks a big game when it comes to health, but the reality is that its savage budget cuts and forced savings have devastated and will devastate Victoria's public health services and have an impact on Victorian women's health. This hypocrisy was on full display in this year's budget, cruelly slashing vital programs for women and babies. The early childhood sector was cut by \$79 million; wellbeing supports for school kids were cut by \$34 million; child protection was cut by \$141 million; family

violence services were cut by \$29 million; and women's policy was cut, following a further cut the year prior, by \$3 million on the previous year. What will this mean? Bed and ward closures, service closures, further cuts to elective planned surgery, slashed breast screening services, closure of dialysis units, staff cuts and worsening health outcomes for all Victorian women.

Despite hyping up its public IVF program, the future of the service is in doubt. There is no funding for overall service delivery listed beyond 2025–26, and only a small amount is being provided for public fertility care at present. Without funding security and certainty, thousands of Victorian women may be unable to realise their dreams of motherhood. These issues extend to maternal and perinatal health care too. We heard from the member for South-West Coast that 2.2 per cent of mothers in public hospitals are facing unplanned readmission within 28 days of discharge, partly due to mothers being forced out of hospitals too quickly after giving birth. I am standing proof of that after being discharged 6 hours after my previous birth from the Northern Hospital, resulting in mastitis two days later. On top of this, the rate of unplanned newborn readmissions remains higher than before COVID. Almost 29 per cent of women in public hospitals feel they are not involved as much as they want to be in decisions about their perinatal care.

These are the facts, and it is not just me saying this or the member for South-West Coast. On one of the Premier's Facebook posts this week women across the state made their voices clear. I am going to directly quote from the Premier's Facebook page:

People are suffering because of your poor decisions and you ignore them ...

Another said:

Ignored. Dismissed. Gaslit.

And:

Exactly what you are doing to regional Victorians and their Hospitals.

I recently attended a community meeting in Seymour where more than 120 local residents shared similar frustrations about the possibility of hospital mergers. The Seymour community feels like they have been kept in the dark about the future of their beloved local health service, and they are not the only ones. Regional communities have some questions that should be answered about what mergers will mean for their jobs or their ability to access local health care. I have expressed these concerns in a letter to the Minister for Health and the board of the hospital and raised some of the questions that were asked during this meeting. It was clear just how important an issue this is for all of those in our community, and they do not feel supported when it comes to health care under this government.

While some of the information revealed was quite distressing, it was incredible to see the level of care our community has for our local health services. Our hospitals are a source of pride for our towns and must be given the proper support that they deserve. This is an issue that will, sadly, impact many of our communities across regional Victoria, and I have encouraged other towns in the region to make their voices heard to make sure that our local services are kept local and out of the hands of this government.

In the letter I wrote I questioned whether the Seymour Health board were even informed of the level of financial deficit of these metro hospitals or the staffing loss at these hospitals. To assume the priority of services or staff would flow back to a regional hospital from a major metropolitan hospital under immense pressure would be commercially naive. You can listen to your own community too. It is our local community who will pay the ultimate price. Replacing the community voice by moving local boards to larger hubs is not in our best interest, instead adding another level of bureaucracy for our community to access what it truly needs when it comes to health care.

The review of the Victorian health system was reinforced by the prestigious King's Fund in 2015, commissioned, might I say, by the Department of Health. Now do your research. It stated Victoria had a well-understood governance model that gives boards running health services at a local level

considerable autonomy, with a statewide framework of priorities. The report said Victorian health services had a culture of innovation, agility, a freedom to govern, all underpinned by a culture of organisational stability. All of this is under threat should these mergers happen. To go against these objective facts proves the Allan Labor government cannot manage our health system and does not care for regional women.

Mental health is another area that this government has brutally and cruelly ignored, with some of Victoria's most vulnerable women being left without crucial support. The Allan Labor government deferred the establishment of 35 local mental health and wellbeing hubs, many in regional communities.

This decision makes a mockery of the mental health levy, which was supposed to fix this failed system. The levy imposed on employers has been in place since 1 January 2022, but it is clear the funds are being used elsewhere to plug the gaps in this debt-riddled budget. Year after year Labor make promises to support Victorians, only to quietly turn their backs, allowing our mental health system to decline further.

The Allan Labor government must prioritise consultation with the mental health sector rather than relying on political rhetoric. Having spoken with the sector at length, I was told of closures, long waitlists, an inability to make referrals and no handover between services for patients. When a local service in Broadford was forced to close its doors, nearby options were unable to take on their referrals, leaving vulnerable locals without a single low-cost option for counselling in the region. On the day we met, two ambulances were ramped out the front of a GP clinic on suicide watch. With a lack of bulk-billing options, many were simply unable to find mental health care that they could afford.

This government cannot manage money and it cannot manage a project, and regional women and their health are paying the ultimate price.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (16:51): I will not be doing a fact check on that speech, that is for sure. It would take a little while. But we are in the house and everyone is entitled to their time to speak and have their words, and some of us talk the facts and some do not. Need I say any more.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Gippsland South, you are not in your place. Maybe it is the place you would like to be, but that is not your place.

Belinda WILSON: It is interesting. I do have talking points, and I could have easily got up and interrupted the last speaker that read every bit from their notes, but respectfully I did not do that. I have got a lot of notes here that I can speak about, but I am actually going to talk about some stuff that probably is a bit more personal, so please buckle in for a nice conversation about many things about women – about menopause, periods and vaginas. I really hope you enjoy this conversation.

I was really pleased to listen to the contributions by my colleagues, who are doing incredible work in their electorates on these really important women's needs and issues that we are facing. I think when the member for Yan Yean told the story about a girl – I cannot remember her name – Bethany, who spoke about what she needed with her treatment, it provoked a lot of emotion for me, because we are going through that in our house at the moment. My daughter, who is only 22, went along to her GP a few years ago at the tender age of 16 and was told that she was making up her pain issues and that there was nothing wrong with her. She comes from a family of three generations of hysterectomies, so it is very common, and I guess our ancestors and family members were just told, 'That's just how we are. It's genetic. We're made up that way. We have pain. That's just the way it's going to be.'

It was interesting because my mum at the age of 45, maybe nearly 50, had to have an 8-hour operation – she had endometriosis attached to every organ of her body – and had to have a full hysterectomy. Fortunately for her, she had had three kids: two that survived, one that did not. She had

had excruciating pain her whole life. My great-grandmother and my grandma probably never knew what they had and what they were going through. They were just told that was normal and that as a woman that is what you go through. For Mum it was a very severe operation. She had gone through 35 years of pain and severe bleeding like flooding, not being able to leave the house, haemorrhaging, having low iron, but again had just been told, 'That's what happens. That's what you get when you're a woman.'

For me to see my daughter go through that is very, very difficult. Those in this place who have children, we all want the best for our kids, and we do not like to see them suffering at any point, whether they are a newborn baby and they are crying and they will not take their bottle or whether they are adults and their hearts are broken or they are in pain. You send them along to the GP and you hope that they get the answers that they want. It is frightening how many times, when I have these conversations with family, with friends, with people in my electorate, with constituents – with so many people – they tell me that every time they go to the GP they do not believe their pain and when a man is with them they prescribe drugs but do not when they are on their own. I just do not understand that. It is frightening, and we need to change that. I think each – little by little – step we take and each change we make is in that direction.

I am digressing. My daughter went to the GP and was told that it was nothing, that she was fine and to go on the pill. You know, starting to take the pill at 16 is young, and is that the answer? It is not always the answer. She had really silently put up with her pain, and at 22, nearly 23, she still does. It is the same story as Bethany's. When she was not feeling any better and was not getting any answers, I got her to see a specialist. I will never forget that day we took that call because we sat on the end of the bed and she said, 'I'm sorry. You've got stage 4 endometriosis.' For me, my brain automatically went to, 'Can she have kids?' That is the last thing on my daughter's mind, but that was the first thing I thought of. She took us through all of that. There are lots of people with endometriosis that still do have children, but it is difficult. It can be difficult. She had to go through it. She had her first operation 18 months ago, and it is a big operation.

The thing that has touched me the most about this and about what we are doing as a government is being able to offer this service to those that cannot afford it. I could afford to pay for her to go to a specialist, but I speak to women every single day about these issues who cannot afford to have these operations and they suffer in silence. This is one of the biggest things that came up for us. The member for Narre Warren South hosted a great pain forum. The Minister for Health, who is in the chamber at the moment, attended with us when we had a pain forum. They were interesting, the things that came up in that forum. You automatically think about period pain and general pain issues, but what was so interesting was what came up in the room about the barriers with listening to talk about pain and what those barriers are: language, interpretation, not knowing what the pain is and what is causing it, not being listened to – not having people listen to you and understand what you are trying to say.

So I am really proud of this government and what we are doing with this. To get 12,000 responses to the pain survey is absolutely incredible. Kit, who took us through the service, really articulated how incredible this survey is and what a difference it is going to make. The work that the health minister and the parliamentary secretary, the member for Northcote, are doing is incredible work – going around to the electorates and speaking to people and hearing their stories. My story is just one small story of a small family, and we will continue to go down the path of managing it and hoping that it does not affect my daughter's life. Modern medicine has changed a lot these days.

I really hope that Victorian women, as they grow older and as they grow up, are able to access these incredible services, and that is what it is about. It is not about today or tomorrow; it is about the future. Whilst these clinics are not built right now, they will be built, moving forward, in the future, and I am excited about that. It is also like the IVF clinic. There are so many people who cannot have kids. I have been lucky enough to have three kids, but so many people cannot, and we forget that.

I come to this chamber every day being so proud to stand with the women in this chamber, to stand with the people that have our backs and back each other in – and men also have these conversations with us, not only about pain, not only about women's issues, because, yes, we are heading towards an over-50 generation, some of us in here. I am really proud to be part of this incredible government that is making change and doing such incredible things – not one note read.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:01): It is always great to contribute to a matter of public importance and particularly one where the government are really trying to paint a different picture than reality here, about them prioritising women's health by giving it the focus and the funding it deserves. I have a lot of evidence that I can bring to the debate here to show that that is absolutely not the case and that the government are in fact failing in this area. They always talk a big game when it comes to health, when it comes to supporting women, but let me tell you, the cuts that they have made recently, the savage cuts, the forced savings they are putting through the health system, the possible amalgamations, are going to devastate Victoria's public health services. We see budget blowouts on major infrastructure projects to the tune of some \$40 billion, and we see thuggish behaviour. We have seen allegations of corruption, intimidation and harassment and links to bikies and people of very poor standing that are really working hand in glove with the CFMEU. This is causing problems for all projects, and it means the government really do not have the money that they should have to put into investing in our health services and boosting things for women rather than making the cuts that they have. We saw things in the budget like the slashing of IVF services and the hospital budgets, the waiting lists – I will give some figures around the waiting lists shortly – the hospital amalgamations that are currently being forced at the moment and the failures in and around child and maternal health servicing, particularly in those growth corridor areas which are to the north and the south-east of Melbourne.

We have seen the budget; we have all had a good look at the budget; some of us I would suggest have had a much better and closer look than some of the others. But it did slash many vital programs for women and for babies as well. What we have seen is the early childhood sector supports and regulation cut by 11 per cent, \$79 million – that is pretty significant – and wellbeing supports for schoolkids cut by \$34 million or 8.4 per cent. And who does this fall back on? The women in the families that are typically taking the main lead and responsibility of caring for their schoolkids are the ones that absorb all this and get really stressed about what is happening. Child protection – it breaks my heart to hear that \$141 million has been cut, 6.2 per cent. Child protection is an area in crisis. I have had families come and talk to me in my office, and it is really quite distressing, what is being done. They have let communities down.

We had an announcement not at the last election but at the election before about community hospitals. I think there were 10, and maybe only five are going ahead. For people in and around Eltham, the Eltham community hospital looks like it has absolutely been shelved. There was talk it might actually move from Eltham and go to Diamond Creek, and that has disappeared. These are some things that were said six years ago. They talk a big game. The one at Torquay: I remember reading an article – same deal. A young mother thought, 'This will be great, a community hospital, a growth area like Torquay. It's a place that we want to live in, and I feel great thinking that they're investing in a community hospital in Torquay.' You can say goodbye to that as well. This is very typical of what this government does. They make announcements, and they just cannot back it up.

I want to mention elective surgery, and we have waitlists. We have huge waitlists for all types of surgery, but there are a lot of women's surgeries here: general gynaecological, endosurgery, reproductive surgery, urogynaecological issues – all of these sorts of things. In February this year we heard that the wait time for some of Victoria's most vital health services continued to grow, and this is data released from the Victorian Agency for Health Information. This is real data. This is not made up. The elective surgery waitlist remains high: 67,207 patients are waiting for treatment. The average overdue wait time for category 3 patients has increased to 330 days compared to 281 a year ago. It is getting worse, and I know that we all know in this place about people waiting for surgery. They come

to us; they talk to us. I heard the member for Narre Warren North; I was listening intently to her poor contribution, and she said people cannot afford to get surgery – and they cannot afford to go on the waiting list, because it takes years as well. I think she forgot to mention that.

I am going to mention some of the things that are happening locally, but prior to doing so I want to talk about family violence and some of the things that have been confirmed in this year's budget – again, facts, things that everybody can go and check. The average wait time for a woman and families fleeing family violence when the government came to being was eight months, and now it is 24 months, two years. Women are staying in dangerous relationships next to the perpetrators of the violence. They are not able to get support and to move on. This is stuff that is in the budget. This is not something that I have made up. The government are very good at talking the talk, but they are not very good at walking the walk. It is getting worse.

At the same time as they are talking about family violence, what needs to happen and how much progress they are making we see that there is a willingness to stand by those who have been charged with family violence offences: John Setka. It was really quite mind-blowing actually to see the members for Thomastown and Kororoit in secret messages – and the former CEO of EMILY's List, who was supposed to be progressing the rights of women – come out and say, 'John, hope it all blows over. You'll be right mate; we'll get through this.' That is not what you do to those who have committed family violence.

With the hospital amalgamations that are happening at the moment, we have got amalgamations in country areas and some of the city areas, and prior to this happening is budget cuts. Some people have been told about budget cuts. There is a lot of secrecy. People are really trying to work out what is going on. Again, the Victorian Healthcare Association, the peak public health service body, says the Royal Children's Hospital warned of jobs and services that are at risk, bracing for \$60 million in cuts; the Royal Melbourne Hospital over the next two years, \$230 million in cuts; Monash, \$350 million; the Alfred, \$230 million; and the Royal Women's, specifically about health for women, \$30 million. It is probably worse in country areas – Mildura, \$12.3 million; Bendigo, \$120 million.

These are cuts they need to find, and what is this going to mean? They are not going to be able to deliver the services. They are going to have to close wards. In Yea, in my home town, they have been talking about a 30 per cent cut to their budget. This makes it exceptionally difficult for health services to run effectively. Have a look at the hospitals in my area that may be forced to merge with Goulburn Valley Health. We have Alexandra, Yea and Mansfield and on top of that, out of the district of Euroa, Benalla, Seymour, maybe Wangaratta and Heathcote. This is what is proposed. The women in Mansfield have obstetric services. They actually can deliver babies there. They have GP obstetricians who do really well. It is a great model that works for them. They have gynaecological procedures.

They have them locally, get discharged locally and go back to their own doctor, who has that relationship with the hospital and who knows what is going on. They do not want to have to travel for other services weekly or monthly. Alexandra has a gynaecologist as a consultant, a specialist consultant. Is that going to go or not? Are they going to be expected to go to Shepparton, over an hour and a half away? These are not close distances by any means. Yea – if the consulting obstetrician out of Alexandra has gone and if there are changes to obstetrics in Mansfield, where will they go? What does it mean for these small country hospitals?

It is devastating what this government are currently doing. They are very happy to turn a blind eye to the thuggish behaviour – to the allegations of criminal behaviour – on major infrastructure projects. They are happy to have that \$40 billion be a great hit for taxpayers. What that means is they do not invest where they need to invest. They actually need to invest in women's services; they do not need to talk about it. They need to invest more in public IVF instead of cutting that, breast screening, perinatal health, maternal health and nurses. We have got a workforce shortage here, and nurses are walking away rather than wanting to come to our hospitals.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (17:11): It is a pleasure to rise today to make a contribution to the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Northcote:

That this house recognises that the Allan Labor government is prioritising women's health by giving it the focus and funding it deserves.

I am so proud to be a member of this government, who are taking real action in this space to improve models of care and service delivery for Victorian women and girls. For far too long women's health has been overlooked. It has been underfunded. Women have been persistently misdiagnosed and women's pain has been dismissed. Women have been told that the pain they feel is just normal and that they should put up with it or that it is all in their head, even when we know from global research that more women report chronic pain than men do.

This is a government that is deeply committed to addressing inequities in women's health, from record investment in women's health facilities across the state, with landmark projects like the Barwon women's and children's hospital in Geelong, to establishing free and public IVF, launching the 1800 My Options sexual and reproductive health phone line and establishing sexual and reproductive health hubs right across the state. And of course there is the landmark inquiry into women's pain, the first of its kind in the world. This inquiry aims to address the challenges faced by women and girls when seeking care and support for the pain that they experience. It provides an opportunity for women, girls and clinicians to share their experiences of pain and pain management in their own words and for these experiences to be heard and acknowledged, often for the first time. The inquiry will listen to these experiences to identify the barriers and enablers when accessing care, treatment and services for pain conditions.

This is so important, as we know that women face real and continuing challenges when seeking care and support for pain. Chronic pain affects girls and women more than men around the world; however, women are less likely to receive treatment. A Victorian survey found that 40 per cent of around 1700 women are living with chronic pain. Research has shown that women generally experience more recurrent pain, more severe pain and longer lasting pain than men. Medical gender bias routinely leads to a denial of pain and therefore a lack of pain relief and associated treatment for women. This occurs for various health conditions, including cardiovascular, neurological, reproductive and autoimmune conditions. From speaking with women in my community, I am sad to say that nearly every woman has an experience that reflects this.

Along with the member for Geelong and the member for Bellarine, I hosted a women's health forum with the member for Northcote and women and girls from right across the Geelong region. That night we had 100 people in the room sharing their stories of pain and listening to one another's experiences. Our expert panel bravely shared their stories – stories of endometriosis and living with chronic pain. The forum was fully booked out in record time, showing us just how much our community wanted to have this important conversation. Women are wanting to share their stories. They want to hear from others who have similar experiences to them. Importantly, the forum showed that our community wanted to be a part of this inquiry.

What this inquiry has shown is that women's pain is not a niche issue. Over 12,000 women and girls in Victoria have made a submission to the inquiry or completed the survey. That is remarkable. One of those people who made a submission to the inquiry is a good friend of mine who has endometriosis and has had three surgeries for it. Her experience is like that of so many women: long waiting lists for surgeries in public hospitals, with surgery in private hospitals out of reach for many as it can leave women out of pocket over \$10,000, symptoms of endometriosis that were not recognised by her doctors and doctors who did not believe her or treat her pain. When it comes to pain I think every woman has a story and her own unique experiences. Ahead of this debate I was reflecting on my own experiences of pain – nothing quite like endometriosis, but I do remember missing many, many days of high school because cramps were just so painful that I could not go to school. I remember in

particular being in university in my first year and going to the bathrooms and throwing up from period pain that was so hard to manage.

What is clear is that we need more investment in women's health so that we have healthcare professionals who can diagnose so-called niche issues early so that patients can get the care and the treatment that they need early, and that is exactly what we are focused on doing on this side of the house, with record investment into health care and focused, targeted investment into women's health and sexual and reproductive health. The Allan Labor government is supporting more women to access free and comprehensive care and support under one roof with the opening of women's health clinics across Victoria. Barwon Health in Geelong will be home to one of the first of these 20 new clinics, and these clinics will provide multidisciplinary care for conditions like endometriosis, PCOS and perimenopause as well as contraception and abortion services. These clinics will remove the barriers that women face when trying to access specialist care and deliver more services closer to home. Services will be delivered by hardworking gynaecologists, urologists, specialist nursing and allied health support all under this one roof. In Geelong I am pleased to say that the Barwon Health women's clinic is now available five days a week.

In addition to this, the new \$500 million Barwon Women's and Children's hospital in Geelong is something that the Allan Labor government is so proud to be funding. The new facilities will provide world-class maternity and paediatric facilities and deliver additional capacity to ensure that families in Geelong and our community can access the very best care close to home. This will include more maternity inpatient beds, paediatric inpatient beds, special care nursery cots, birthing suites, operating theatres and expanded paediatric and maternity specialist facilities. Site preparations commenced in September 2022 with the demolition of old buildings on the corner of Myers and Bellerine streets, enabling works to commence in mid-2024. These works will clear the way for main construction works. The expanded facilities will provide more access for people living locally, meaning more families can access the care that they need. Importantly, it will support the ongoing delivery of integrated health care that is family friendly, culturally safe, high quality and accessible. It is the largest investment we have ever seen into health infrastructure in the Geelong region and something that only a Labor government would deliver, allowing Barwon Health to grow their services to meet the needs of our ever growing community.

This government is truly transforming the way that health care for women is delivered in this state. Our \$153 million women's health election commitment will continue our work to give women the care they need and the care they deserve. It is important to acknowledge the tremendous strides we have made in prioritising women's health in Victoria. From establishing the first clinic dedicated to women's heart health to launching the statewide sexual and reproductive health phone line 1800 My Options, the Allan Labor government has laid a strong foundation. With the most progressive reproductive choice laws in Australia, we have indeed set the standard.

However, our journey does not end here. We are embarking on groundbreaking reforms to revolutionise women's health in Victoria through this substantial \$153 million investment into women's health. Furthermore, the recent 2024–25 budget has allocated an additional \$18 million to support women's health organisations in their crucial efforts to promote sexual and reproductive health, manage chronic conditions and combat family violence. This demonstrates our unwavering commitment to advancing women's health and wellbeing in Victoria. As I said earlier, we have invested \$58 million to deliver 20 new women's health clinics, including in Geelong. In addition to this, we are delivering a mobile women's health clinic, and this will improve access to services for women in regional and rural Victoria. We are investing in an additional nine sexual and reproductive health clinics, and this will expand the current statewide network to 20. These hubs provide access to contraception, medical abortion and referrals for surgical abortion as well as sexual health testing and treatment.

We also plan to conduct 10,800 laparoscopies over the next four years in order to enhance the accessibility of diagnoses and treatments for conditions like endometriosis. We are taking initial steps

to establish a pioneering women's health research institute aimed at closing that research gap in women's health, which has historically been chronically underfunded. We have allocated \$2 million in scholarships to further educate our dedicated health professionals, empowering them with the knowledge and skills to better serve the women of Victoria. To date 175 scholarships have been awarded to nurses, GPs and other healthcare providers, covering a whole range of areas that are so important to women's health.

Additionally, this year saw the successful inauguration of the Victorian Pelvic Pain Symposium, a groundbreaking event that brought together leading experts, scholars, researchers and advocates to collaborate on bringing improved patient-centric care to fruition. What we are finally seeing in Victoria is a real focus on women's health on the medical research agenda.

For the first time in the Victorian Parliament the Legislative Assembly has achieved gender parity – a century after women were given the right to stand for election. That gender parity has been driven by this side of the house; 64 per cent of the cabinet are women, and it is not surprising that a government with such an unprecedented number of female MPs is focused on programs and policies that are informed by women and better support women and their children. And we will never stop supporting women. Women's health has been neglected for too long, and it is time that changed.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (17:21): Women, trans people, non-binary folk and people who are gender diverse have historically been neglected, ignored and dismissed by our health system. In recent years this government has taken on the task of focusing on women's health, and it is very comfortable committing publicly to addressing certain health inequities across the state that fall under women's health. But unfortunately some health inequities have been prioritised over others, and other areas of health care that drive inequality, often ones that are clouded in shame, remain in the too-hard basket.

It is true this Victorian state government has announced a number of new clinics and services and sexual and reproductive health hubs, but last year the Auditor-General's report showed that there were 17 local government areas with no access to medical or surgical abortions. It also showed that the sexual and reproductive health hubs have no consistency. Some provide accessible and frequent services while others provide very few. One of the newest hubs charges \$500 up-front for a medical termination, and in government-funded hubs this should not be the case. They should be providing free services consistently. If the government really wants equity of access to health, then Victoria's sexual and reproductive health hubs need resourcing so that they can all provide free services and so that they can have funding for ultrasound machines, training for their staff and funding for enough staff, not just one nurse or a doctor who only attends one day a week.

Many stakeholders have expressed frustration that the government is choosing to open new clinics rather than work to bolster the services that already exist – because in fact there are many hospitals across the state that do receive public funds and yet refuse to provide the whole suite of health needs for women and trans and gender-diverse people. In fact, the fact that the government is funnelling public money into opening new hospitals in key growth areas and yet these hospitals refuse to provide postnatal contraception, refuse to provide surgical terminations and refuse to provide tubal ligation or family planning consultations is beyond comprehension.

In November last year the Minister for Health announced that three hospitals across Melbourne would begin to offer surgical abortions, and we are thankful for that announcement. But what was needed to make this happen? For the minister herself to plead with the hospitals to take it up. Why rely on the opinions and the effort of the minister of the day to ensure that a publicly funded hospital provides abortion services? Are we still unsure whether accessing a termination is an essential right? Why doesn't this government stand up and say, 'If you are receiving our money, public money, you must provide these services'? Right now doctors, receptionists, nurses, sonographers and pharmacists can deny a whole host of healthcare services, including medical and surgical termination of pregnancy, if

they conscientiously object – because this Labor government protects the rights of individual practitioners so they do not have to participate in certain, often life-saving, aspects of their profession.

Labor is responsible for these people being denied basic health care, not only by individual providers but by entire institutions. Being turned away from receiving medical health care exacerbates what is already a stressful situation. It erodes our trust in the health system, and it delays care which can lead to complications and limit somebody's options. This is especially the case for terminations. For abortion, accessing care quickly is the difference between paying \$42.50 for a medical termination or up to \$8000 to access surgery in later stages of pregnancy. The prices are even higher if you do not have Medicare or if you are on a temporary protection visa.

What is more, Victoria is facing a syphilis epidemic. Despite these new hubs, there is nowhere near enough testing to impact the number of new cases that are spreading throughout our communities. In this day and age no baby should ever be born with syphilis. Congenital syphilis has a very high rate of death or disability, and it is very easily prevented with a simple blood test and penicillin. But it has reappeared in Victoria after a long absence. It was once rare in cis women and people with cervixes, but syphilis has returned and sexual health hubs are having no impact. So this government can and should do more to eliminate syphilis in our communities.

This is essential, often critical, health care and yet women, trans men, non-binary folk and gender-diverse people in need are often left to suffer, left unable to access care and left to be further stigmatised. This stigma is a result of outdated cultural norms and outdated state-based legislative barriers. The spectrum of trans and gender-diverse people needing such health care are often left out of so-called women's health conversations, although many also have health needs that come under this umbrella term of women's health. The medical system has failed by designing structures that cater only to the majority, but there is overwhelming documentation of trans and gender-diverse people facing difficulties navigating the health system, of being disproportionately impacted by adverse health outcomes and of not seeking medically necessary care due to the fear of mistreatment or prior experiences of harassment or mistreatment.

I would like to emphasise that this is not a criticism of our health workers. They are doing the absolute best they can with what they have been given. The government must provide adequate funding, more funding, to ensure access for everyone – funding that will enable the sector to break down the barriers faced by many women and trans and gender-diverse communities. Equating sexual and reproductive health – pap smears, chest cancer, cervical cancer, menopause, endometriosis, contraception – with only cis women can reinforce gender norms in a way that harms trans and gender-diverse people by excluding them from health care.

Again, the proliferation and protection of conscientious objection adds to stigma for members of our community who already face so many barriers to having their rights met. For First Nations people as well, for those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, if you live with a disability or if you live regionally and rurally, if any of these intersectional marginalisations apply to you and you need an abortion, an IUD inserted or any of those healthcare services, those barriers are compounded. Marginalised people still face higher boundaries accessing health facilities that offer the services they need, that are open to them and that are inclusive, safe and respectful.

While Labor celebrate – and we will join them in celebrating – the small steps that they have taken to support women's health, I would encourage them to consider all parts of the sector and the parts of their own health departments that have traditionally fallen under the term 'women's health', and I would ask them to consider whether their workforce, their training, their capabilities and their processes, educational materials, advocacy work, engagement, workplace culture, research and service provision are sufficient, up to scratch and truly inclusive.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (17:30): I am delighted to rise to speak on this very, very important matter of public importance (MPI). There is some good news ahead for the member for Richmond.

Coming from Ballarat and regional areas, we have got a good story to tell. We do not see ourselves as marginalised, and we have got a lot on offer, but you will have to stay and wait to hear. This house recognises that the Allan Labor government is prioritising women's health by giving it the focus and the funding that it deserves. I would like to take a moment before I discuss it in full to point out that this focus has come about over a long time, with our party having affirmative action to make sure that we have women MPs in Parliament. As people have pointed out, we have 68 per cent ministers in cabinet, and we now have equal numbers in the house itself. Member for Richmond, you are going to miss out on the regions.

A member interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: It is past 4 o'clock and past Carlton. The reason I am making a point about the members that we have in this house is because there are a couple of members that I would really like to point out – and they are the conveners of our women's caucus – so my good friend and neighbour the member for Wendouree, and with us in the chamber today is the member for Laverton. They did some pretty extraordinary things very early on. They got the women's caucus together, and they sat down and – it was not just a talkfest – they looked at ways that they could make change, and, goodness, they did. The things that came out of those women's caucus policy discussions went up through government, and we now have a government that has an extraordinary record on women's health and women's pain. I do just want to acknowledge the women's caucus and particularly the women's caucus conveners for driving that policy work. It has been so important, and we are a better government and a better state for it.

I guess I turn to home now. I was listening to the member for Richmond talk about marginalisation and about the regions as being marginalised. I am really delighted to report that some absolutely extraordinary things have gone on in the regions. First and foremost to talk about is we had the wonderful Minister for Health come up in April, and she was announcing the women's pain clinic being set up in Ballarat. Of course let us remember that that covers a very broad area. Ballarat Base Hospital, which is in fact the Grampians Health service, services all of the Grampians. We have got this fantastic hub coming to our electorate, and I know that many women in my community are delighted to know about that.

There are a few other things that I would really like to highlight. We have an extraordinary organisation in Ballarat called Women's Health Grampians, and they have done a power of work to promote women and women's issues in the region. This government acknowledges the good work they do and supports the good work they do, and I am delighted that they are commencing a program called Menopause@Work. Lots of people have talked about their experiences of having children, and members of the opposition at the table have stories to tell about having children. That was a long time ago for me, and even menopause is becoming a distant memory. Going through menopause was extraordinary. I have a wonderful mother who tried to talk me through everything, but it is surprising how little information there was even 10 years ago when I first started to go through menopause. There was no information 10 years ago, really, about what was coming down the line. It is funny because I even find it notable that we talk so openly about menopause in this place, and I am delighted that we have got to this stage because it is something that every woman will go through, and it is a pretty important part of your life. There is a lot to get through there.

This program from Women's Health Grampians is about menopause at work, and I think that is really interesting, trying to get workplaces to understand the reality of what is happening to women. With all due respect to Acting Speaker Edbrooke in the chair, if this was a man's problem you would all have a day off, no problem at all. We have battled through what for some women can be really debilitating effects of menopause, and that should be no barrier to a fulsome career. I think that the work that Women's Health Grampians are doing is around getting people at workplaces across Ballarat, going in there and talking to them about what their workforce is going to be facing, so I am delighted that our government supported that, just one of the many, many supports that we have offered in this space.

We have another extraordinary organisation called Ballarat Community Health, and it services the area broadly as well. They are funded and have a sexual and reproductive health clinic, so the member for Richmond, were she to go to the marginalised area of Ballarat, would be able to find those services. I would like to point out that, through the hard advocacy of my colleague the member for Ripon, one of those clinics is now opening up in Ararat as well. So we go further afield, acknowledging that women live everywhere and women need that support, and this government has done so much to bring that to the regions.

This MPI really is about this government's focus on women's health. Of course there has been lots of discussion around the pain inquiry, and that has been an extraordinary experience to go through. I believe there has been over 12,000 submissions to that inquiry, and in many ways it is horrifying that so many women have gone through this experience and not had a place or a forum to talk them through. Of course those forums are not just about talking; they are about informing us as a government what more we can do, and I know with such a fierce women's caucus and a fierce woman at our helm this government will continue to develop more and more programs that really support women through their varied experiences.

As I say, my experience of menopause is very different from the conversations we have had today here about childbirth and endometriosis. I have not had those, but I have been through menopause. But we have all had that experience. Both of my sons were born by caesarean, and I quite literally found out recently that a caesarean is a bit of a flag for developing endometriosis. I did not know that, and no-one told me that when I was going in for my two surgeries. So when I started to have a pain, it was actually someone in this building, who will remain nameless, who said to me, 'Hey, you had caesars; it might be related to that.' That information should be there, and with these wonderful hubs that are coming to Ballarat, in that circumstance I can go and say, 'I think we've been told for too long to buckle up.' We are pretty tough. Having gone through childbirth, we are all pretty tough, and maybe we have been too tough. At last we have got, thanks to this government, an opportunity to go to a specialised clinic that will have specialists in there that understand the finer details of the many and varied things that women go through.

As a matter of public importance, I am incredibly proud to stand up for the record of this government in women's health. I cannot think of another government that has led such a strong and open charge to improve women's circumstances, particularly with regard to women's health, and to identify through the pain inquiry more work that we can do. This government is made up of women, and it is a great supporter of women. Our women's caucus has just done amazing stuff in bringing this to the fore, and I know that we are going to keep fighting every day within this government to make sure that women's issues sit at the forefront of everything we do. But I do stand on our extraordinary record of provision of women's health.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (17:40): If this Labor government was serious about women's health and mental health, then why didn't they look out for Jane Garrett? Why didn't they look out for Kaushaliya Vaghela? Why didn't they look out for all of the Labor women who have been exposed to violence and domestic violence and sexual harassment from Labor men? That is what I would ask, because this goes to the heart of Labor's hypocrisy. Labor are hypocrites when it comes to this. They like to talk the big game and have the headline about women's health, but really, when it comes to the crux of it, they actually do not care. They would rather care about the CFMEU bosses and bikie gangs. There are not many women there, and in fact the harassment and intimidation and thuggery by the men in the CFMEU, the CFMEU bosses and bikie gangs, is something to behold. It is amazing how the Labor government would rather care about the CFMEU and protecting their position than actually doing what it takes to support women and women's health across Victoria.

When I looked at this matter of public importance (MPI) put forward by this Labor government, the first woman I thought about was Tammie from Ringwood North, who tragically had her son Ben stolen from her. Tammie's son, an Indigenous boy, worked on a CFMEU site. He was really proud of being in construction, getting trained and getting a job on a construction site, but he was bullied by the

CFMEU. Tammie's son was bullied by the CFMEU, locked up in a shed for hours by CFMEU bullies enabled by Premier Allan's rotten Big Build. He went home. He was so upset and distressed, he committed suicide – died of a drug overdose. That was Tammie's son. What has that done for Tammie's health? That has done absolutely massive damage, untold damage, to Tammie and her health. She is a woman – she is a Victorian woman – and this Allan Labor government let her down.

I think of Rosie Batty. The CFMEU also have a pretty terrible record there – and their former leader John Setka. Rosie Batty, again, suffered untold damage when her son died at the hands of a male perpetrator, her former husband, and yet the CFMEU and John Setka came out against Rosie Batty, who is now a really well-known and advanced advocate for women experiencing and fleeing family violence. But the Allan Labor government decided to do more to protect the CFMEU on these corrupt state government construction projects than women like Rosie Batty and all of the others experiencing family violence.

Just think of the \$40 billion in budget blowouts as a result of the corruption, kickbacks and misuse of public funds on CFMEU construction worksites that could have otherwise gone to help women fleeing domestic violence. Under this Allan Labor government we have a housing crisis, and particularly women facing family violence are now waiting up to 24 months to get housing. But back on the CFMEU issue before I explore housing a little further, under the CFMEU and the leadership of John Setka but not just John Setka, all of the bullies and thugs in the CFMEU who this Allan Labor government have protected and enabled, I was really astonished to hear that it is actually Labor women, like the member for Kororoit, like the member – I do not know where the other member is from because she is never here –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): Member for Evelyn, it has been a wideranging debate and I have given you plenty of latitude. Let us bring the debate back to the MPI, please.

Bridget VALLENCE: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I would really appreciate not being told how to talk about women's health, because for me these are precisely about women's health.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): That was not a point of order; that was a ruling from the Chair.

Lauren Kathage: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is defying your ruling.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): Thank you.

Bridget VALLENCE: It is so typical that Labor men tell women how they should think and feel. As a woman I find it highly offensive how these Labor men and Labor women tell Liberal women how they should feel and diminish the feelings of Liberal women.

I will repeat what I am talking about here in relation to the protection racket of the CFMEU by many Labor women. It is completely astonishing that we even got to this, that when former CFMEU head John Setka was embroiled in an awful situation where he was found to have harassed his former female partner, we had members of this Allan Labor government defending him and giving him tips on how he could actually make himself look like a better and improved man. It is completely outrageous.

I will move now to housing. Frankly, if this Labor government were so serious about women's health, they would really do something more about the extraordinarily long waiting lists for women fleeing family and domestic violence. It now takes some 24 months for women fleeing family and domestic violence to access public housing under this Allan Labor government. Back in 2014 it was an eight-month wait, and that has increased year after year after year under Labor to now 24 months wait time for a woman with her children fleeing domestic violence. That is a 300 per cent increase. Why is that so important to the health of these women? It is because with the 24-month wait to get into public housing when they are experiencing and fleeing family violence at the hands of male perpetrators these women are often forced back into the hands of the male perpetrators and the violence that they are committing on these women. These women are having to live in their cars, sleep in cars, couch-surf,

which has terrible physical and mental health outcomes for these women., and that is a shameful record of this Allan Labor government. They talk a big game on housing, but the amount of housing that they are providing to these women fleeing domestic violence is completely dismal. I can only imagine the anguish and pain. In fact I know someone – a woman whose son plays football with my son – fleeing family violence who has had to couch-surf with her three children, one of which was a baby, because she had no support from the Allan Labor government.

In terms of health outcomes for women, those women with young children who need to access the emergency department at Maroondah Hospital are not being looked after. The Maroondah Hospital's emergency department is under severe strain and pressure. In fact Maroondah Hospital is under a cloud. This Allan Labor government knows how bad the situation is at Maroondah Hospital, so much so that it said that it was going to fix it and upgrade it in 2018 as an election promise. It failed that election promise. In 2022 it promised again to upgrade the Maroondah Hospital, the biggest public hospital for the residents in my community to access. Again, it has so far failed to allocate any capital funding to upgrade that hospital.

We have ambulances ramped at Maroondah Hospital. Some of the hardworking paramedics in my community at Lilydale ambulance station, many of whom are women – these paramedics are women – are telling me how challenging it is that they are spending their entire shifts sitting in their ambulance ramped at Maroondah Hospital. These paramedics do an amazing job providing health care and emergency response to people in my community, often women and children, but they are sitting ramped at Maroondah for their entire shift. Where is the duty of care from this Labor government to these public sector employees, these paramedics? They have a war on paramedics. This Allan Labor government is at war with paramedics, many of whom are women. They are not being cared for properly. Their mental health and their ability to provide a great service to their community are being completely denigrated by this Labor government. This MPI is so serious, but it is being treated as a joke by Labor.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (17:50): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this matter of public importance. There are so many elements of our commitment to women's health that I think I could fill the rest of the evening, but I cannot leave that last contribution from the member for Evelyn, especially as it relates to our commitment to our health services workforce, without going back to a story that I have told before, a story that I first heard from the member for Melton about what happened the last time there was a Liberal Party member for Cranbourne. I know the member for Melton tells this story with a lot of important vigour, that there was a privatised ambulance service the last time the Liberal Party held Cranbourne.

Today I was very fortunate to be able to honour the previous member for Cranbourne Jude Perera, who served the community I am now fortunate enough to serve with passion and care and who fought day and night for our health workforce. I am very conscious that it is a feminised workforce. I happen to also have as one of my constituents the previous assistant state secretary of the nurses federation. She talks about what it was like when the Liberal Party last had that honour of serving Cranbourne. There is nothing quite like a hardworking union like the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, like our ambulance employees, to remind us that there is one party that is trusted with our healthcare system. I am very honoured to have been a member of this party since 1992 and to have watched the way that we make sure that our services are supported and funded the way that they should be.

Sexual and reproductive health is something that is at the centre, for so many of us, of the reason that we have decided to commit ourselves to standing for election. It is something that motivates so many of us. As one of the majority of Labor Party members of Parliament who are women, I – like so many of my colleagues and the many allies we have in the Labor Party – care very much about making sure that our healthcare system caters for and is centred around women.

As part of that I was very fortunate to join with the member for Narre Warren South when he held a women's pain forum. As part of that the Minister for Health attended, as did my colleague the member

for Narre Warren North. We heard from the women in our community about why our health system needs to focus on women's pain and what happens when our health system ignores women. It was extraordinary. I think that so many of us, over and over again, are moved by the resilience, courage, grit and determination of our diverse community and what they have endured to care for family and to often put their own lives on the line to be able to give their children the best start in life. So what an honour it was for me to be joining with the members for both Narre Warren South and Narre Warren North at the pain forum with the minister and to hear firsthand about how important it is for us to take women's health experiences seriously.

I was also very fortunate to join with the member for Bass, a very hardworking member with a great passion for women's health. She also held a forum, and at that forum we were really so delighted that the Premier of Victoria was able to attend. I just have to say that the generosity of the women in the community that I serve came through over and over and over again, the way women stand shoulder to shoulder with each other and support each other. That was demonstrated in a way that really energised me and reminded me why it is important for us to listen to women.

In the context of that particular forum, I do want to identify particularly the Cranbourne mosque. The sisters at the mosque – many of them are healthcare workers. In fact several of the sisters at the mosque are nurses themselves. The way that the women look after each other involves multigenerational conversations, reassuring each other that what they are experiencing is worthy of care. I pay credit particularly to the sisters at the Cranbourne mosque not just for the way that they reassure some of the younger women who gather with them as they share cups of tea and talk about experiences in their own families but the way that they often say, 'That doesn't sound right. Go back and ask another question' or 'Let me commend another doctor to you because it sounds like the care you're getting isn't absolutely the care that you deserve.' This is an opportunity for me to thank the women at the Cranbourne mosque for the way that they have brought me into their hearts as well as the way that they have ensured that they care for each other in a way that is compassionate and generous and kind.

We had a terrific Sikh community leader attend one of the pain forums, and she was extraordinarily generous. I would like to pay credit to Amrit for the way that she articulated the issues and concerns that are experienced by many members of the diaspora and for her words when she said, 'I can't believe I came to this country 17 years ago and I find myself sitting next to the Premier of Victoria', who shared her experiences of the healthcare system. That generosity is something that is not just marked but something that is a credit to the Victorian community. We have got to a situation where people can share and have that mechanism in place to be able to put forward their own experiences and then, in turn, that the health system will be able to respond to that in a way that acknowledges that there is so much more that can be done but that this government is listening to the community and is open to making any changes to the mechanisms to ensure that the care is there.

I often talk about this, but I hold monthly chai and chats, and I just held one last Saturday. As always, the women in the community provided the tea and provided cakes and companionship. The way that the women in the community turn to each other to assure each other is always something that astounds me and delights me. I am very grateful in particular to identify one of the community members from the Zimbabwean millennium sewing club, Lindi, for the way that that group looks after each other and takes notice of the care that is needed and the way that they nurture each other, including particularly people who have not long been in Cranbourne and particularly sometimes some of the younger members of the community. It is a very nurturing environment at the millennium sewing club. I watch those women, shoulder to shoulder, listen to each other and pivot around and sometimes say, 'That doesn't seem right. You need to get some new advice or some additional care.'

I am also going to take the opportunity to thank the BAPS organisation – in fact a couple of them are clinicians themselves – for the way that they generously share their advice but also ensure that the temple where they congregate is a place of welcome and inclusion. It is extraordinary to see.

To think, Acting Speaker Edbrooke, that your community, and Frankston in particular, is a place where my constituents can go to get additional health care at one of the first tranches of the clinics is very important. I am very fortunate to have Frankston Hospital growing exponentially – the resources that go into Frankston Hospital and this extraordinary capacity that we are building in our community – but also our workforce, our hardworking nurses and our clinicians, are going to be able to staff that in a way that is appropriate. I commend this matter of public importance.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (18:00): I am pleased to rise for the remaining 1 minute on the matter of public importance submitted today by the member for Northcote:

That this house recognises that the Allan Labor government is prioritising women's health by giving it the focus and funding it deserves.

Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. We have heard contributions today from across the chamber that do not tend to highlight the cuts that we saw in this year's budget to women's services and health services right across the state of Victoria. Whether they were cuts to IVF services or hospital budgets, we are now staring down the fact that there are going to be amalgamations across regional Victoria, cutting health services for women right across this state. These forced hospital amalgamations will see child and maternal health services cut time and time again in this state. While this government likes to promote and talk up their responsibility for women, their responsibility when it comes to women's health, nothing could be further from the truth, because this government cannot manage money.

Motions

Budget papers 2024–25

Debate resumed.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (18:01): I am absolutely delighted to make a contribution on this year's take-note motion on the budget. I am excited about what is to come in Footscray in the next year, because 2025 is going to be a huge year in Footscray, where we will see the delivery of budget commitments from the past come to fruition. I will get to this year's budget in a moment, but I cannot overstate how exciting next year is going to be in the electorate of Footscray because our \$1.5 billion new Footscray Hospital project will be opening in 2025. Footscray Hospital of course has a proud history in my community. It was funded through philanthropy and through volunteer fundraising, and we have wonderful staff at Footscray Hospital. The new Footscray Hospital, which many people in this place have commented on to me, is a remarkable-looking building. The facade has just been completed and the fit-out is well underway. The new Footscray Hospital will have 200 extra beds. It will have a village green running through the centre of the hospital. It is going to have childcare facilities and of course that all-important connection to Victoria University via a footbridge across to the Footscray Park campus of the university. Victoria University will be moving a whole range of its allied health courses to Footscray Park so that they can maximise the ability for the students to benefit from having a tertiary teaching hospital right across the road at the new Footscray Hospital site. I am enormously excited about seeing that beautiful facility for my community come into fruition.

When you are visiting the new Footscray Hospital you will be able to get there on a next-generation tram, because we are rolling out next-generation trams in Footscray and in Melbourne's inner west with a brand new tram stabling facility in Maidstone. There will be a tram stop right near the hospital on Droop Street for people to catch public transport to this beautiful new hospital. It is not just trams you will be able to catch in 2025 in Footscray, the Metro Tunnel will also be opening next year, and Footscray of course will be one of the biggest beneficiaries of this extraordinary infrastructure project.

The Sunbury line will have a 60 per cent increase in capacity, and I know for residents in West Footscray, Middle Footscray and Tottenham that is very exciting news. Also the Werribee and Williamstown lines will see major benefits from the Metro Tunnel opening. For the Footscray health precinct – and we are developing a health precinct in Footscray – residents, patients, people working

there and students will also have a direct connection to Parkville through the Metro Tunnel project. That is a very exciting development.

I feel like I am on one of those late-night infomercials: 'But wait, there's more happening next year, in 2025.' The opening of the West Gate Tunnel is just going to be extraordinary for our community. I would like to acknowledge that it has been a challenging time for the residents of the inner west as the West Gate Tunnel Project has been taking shape, but what will happen when the West Gate Tunnel opens is that we will have 9000 trucks every day being taken off streets in the inner west. This is something that my community has campaigned for for decades through the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group, and this year in our budget we delivered \$10 million to provide truck enforcement cameras on those streets that are going to be getting truck bans as part of the West Gate Tunnel Project. This budget announcement was so well received in my community and by residents who live on these truck routes, because of our proximity to the port. The port is growing and getting busier. But the streets of Footscray and Yarraville were not designed for the container trucks that are coming through so close to houses and schools, and we have done what we can with curfews and with data cameras.

I really want to give a shout-out and express my gratitude to Minister Horne because she worked really hard to help me deliver this commitment. The truck enforcement cameras – and you will see all across the inner west people have signs up saying 'Enforce curfews now' – will mean that residents can have the confidence that the truck bans that we are going to be delivering in 2025 will be effective. Certainly that was the feedback I heard from residents. I ran a campaign to get the funding for this important budget commitment and was thrilled to see it delivered in full in this year's budget. Again, I would like to thank the member for Williamstown for her advocacy and support as someone in the inner west – someone whose electorate is also impacted by the movement of trucks from the port. So that has been an exciting development.

Next year, 2025, we have got our truck bans and our truck enforcement cameras coming, the new Footscray hospital of course, the West Gate Tunnel delivering that crucial second river crossing, the Metro Tunnel and the new next-generation trams. Another budget commitment from a couple of years ago will be delivered next year, and that is the upgrade to the Footscray Community Arts Centre. Footscray Community Arts is a much-loved arts centre in Melbourne's inner west. It is Australia's finest community arts centre, and it has a remarkable history in our community. The building itself was saved by local activists and the meatworkers union. It was an old piggery, and it was saved as a place for working people of the western suburbs to have access to the arts.

Since that time Footscray Community Arts has delivered that in spades, and it is now a very highly regarded community arts facility. In fact I think it is Australia's only NDIS provider of arts services, and it is a wonderful thing. I was really pleased to take Minister Brooks down to Footscray Community Arts to meet with some of the NDIS participants recently. That beautiful new facility, which is a \$9 million commitment, will be opening, and that puts a roof on Footscray's famous amphitheatre out by the Maribyrnong River. Many people have been married there, with school plays, music festivals, concerts and multicultural arts events, but of course it is always exposed to the weather. Footscray Community Arts as an old piggery was not designed for large music festivals, and having to bring in the infrastructure every single time we had a Laneway Festival or another comparable event down there by the river has been expensive. Delivering this budget commitment next year is just another wonderful thing happening in 2025 in Melbourne's inner west.

In addition to the truck enforcement cameras, the \$10 million commitment, one of the things I am so excited about is the 20 kilometres of new bike lanes that are going to be delivered as part of the West Gate Tunnel Project, including the magnificent veloway that will be taking cyclists from Footscray and Yarraville directly into the city. I had the opportunity last week to stand on the veloway, and it is a really remarkable piece of infrastructure. I know that Footscray is a place that people should commute to the city for work from, and lots of people do want to ride their bikes. But of course navigating the traffic around the port has always been a challenge, so having it fully separated, with 24-hour CCTV and entry and exit points as well as being wide enough for an ambulance to travel

along the veloway is a really impressive piece of infrastructure. That is an exciting thing that is coming on line next year that complements the wonderful budget commitment we had this year with the enforcement cameras to make sure that our streets are safer, because the truck movements have been increasing in recent years as the port gets busier.

In my inaugural speech in this place I spoke about Footscray and the inner west being a place that was designed for factories and freight. As the factories have increasingly closed and been turned into apartments there has been a lot of change happening in the inner west, and getting trucks off our roads is one of my highest priorities and certainly something that in my community people are very passionate about. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group, who have campaigned for enforcement cameras to complement the West Gate Tunnel Project. As I said, 9000 trucks being taken off roads in my community every day will be huge. For the students at Kingsville Primary School on Somerville Road and St Augustine's to know that there are enforcement cameras I think will give the parents a lot of comfort, because unfortunately we know from the data cameras that we have installed in recent years that some truck drivers whether deliberately or by accident have been breaking the curfews. I know that having this \$10 million commitment this year means that we will be ready, when the West Gate Tunnel opens, to enforce those curfews. I know that Martin Wurt from the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group was absolutely delighted to hear about that.

With the time I have remaining I just want to speak a little bit about food security. The magnificent Foodbank is located in my electorate in Yarraville. The school breakfast program is something I am really passionate about, and just last week I visited the volunteers who were packing the boxes for the school breakfast program, who were thrilled with the budget commitment for the school breakfast program expansion in addition to the \$400 payment that families will receive to support them with cost-of-living expenses. Camps are expensive, but we are doing a lot with the glasses program, with the camps fund and with the school breakfast program to make sure our little learners have enough food in their tummies to concentrate at school. It is really important stuff. So they were delighted at Foodbank with the expansion of this program, as am I, and I know I will be encouraging every school in my electorate to sign up to the program and make sure that they can have their own school breakfast program at school. It has been a great outcome for Footscray to have the expansion of school breakfast programs, the \$400 payments and of course our \$10 million enforcement cameras to support the West Gate Tunnel opening in 2025.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:16): I rise today to speak on the 2024–25 Victorian state budget, a budget filled with funding cuts, broken promises and taxes that quite simply are the result of a government that cannot manage money and cannot manage a project, and regional Victorians are paying the price.

When it comes to our state's healthcare system the cuts have been brutal and significant. More than \$207 million has been cut from public health to go along with the millions being cut from dental services, aged care, ambulance services, health workforce training and maternal and child health. These cuts are coming at a time when our healthcare providers and patients can least afford it. We have significantly delayed ambulance response times, out-of-control GP and surgery waitlists, forced mergers of regional hospitals and a general lack of resourcing.

Our regional hospitals have not been given a chance to succeed, with Labor consistently cutting their funding to compensate for their own financial mismanagement. Years of waste and underinvestment in our health services have resulted in too many Victorians suffering tragic health outcomes. Nurses and employees at hospitals across the region remain concerned and disappointed about the forced mergers of local health services. A petition has been calling for hospital amalgamations to be cancelled and for local jobs and services to be protected. 15,000 people across three petitions have told the Allan Labor government to keep their hands off our hospitals. For too long this government has exploited our regional health services as a cash cow to bolster its financial mismanagement of Melbourne projects, of which we have now learned nearly \$40 million in cost blowouts is largely due to widespread corruption by CFMEU executives and has been enabled and protected by this government.

Labor has painted a picture that local hospitals are losing money due to inefficiencies and a poor allocation of resources and that hospital operations are to blame. This could not be further from the truth. The reality is the Labor government has never provided enough funding for hospitals to succeed, because we know it cannot manage money. Towns like Benalla still do not have a dialysis unit despite consistent calls for funding to this government. Wangaratta is left without a PET scan machine, and services like Nexus health have had to cancel their counselling program, a crucial mental health service for the Kilmore and wider Mitchell shire community. This is the only mental health service in the southern Hume region, cut because this government cannot manage money.

Mental health has had a brutal impact, cruelly ignored in this year's bleak budget, with some of Victoria's most vulnerable people being left without crucial support. The Allan Labor government deferred the establishment of 35 local mental health and wellbeing hubs, and so many of these are in regional Victoria. This decision makes a mockery of the mental health levy, which was supposed to fix our failed system. Year after year Labor make promises to support Victorians, only to quietly turn their backs, allowing our mental health system to decline further.

The Allan Labor government must prioritise consultation with the mental health sector rather than relying on political rhetoric. Having spoken with the sector at length, I was told of closures, long waitlists, an inability to make referrals and no handover between services for patients. When a local service in Broadford was forced to close its doors, nearby options were unable to take on its referrals. It left vulnerable locals without a single low-cost option for counselling in the region. With a lack of bulk-billing options many were simply unable to find mental health care that they could afford. This is entirely unacceptable. It is time for concrete action, not empty words and false hope, to address the critical issues in our mental health system.

The current hospital funding level is just barely enough to cover wages and basic expenses, such as food and medicine, and has suffocated hospitals and left them unable to replace equipment that has reached its end of life or to recruit more staff. Other towns have been unable to keep their emergency department doors open, leaving locals at severe risk. We are already seeing the impact of these proposed mergers before many of them have even begun, including job losses for long-term cleaning, catering and support staff as well as nurses. These mergers are punishing local health services that by all accounts are running better than the state's major health providers they are being merged with. This government is hell-bent on destroying Victoria's health services, which were once regarded by the prestigious King's Fund in 2015 as hospitals which had a culture of innovation, the freedom to govern, excellent services, and all underpinned by a culture of organisational stability. This is the real-world consequence of Labor's mismanagement of our health system.

Our hospitals are a source of pride for our communities. They are major employers and ensure that locals get high-quality treatment without having to travel long distances. Instead, we are hearing of specialised medical facilities replacing existing services in our towns, meaning each of our regional communities will have far less health services available to them locally. This plan might make sense from an office in the city, but when there are no public transport options, you are forced to travel hours for simple health care. It will not work. If all health specialists are moved to centralised locations outside of our towns, how are patients meant to get to appointments? Regional taxi fares are expensive. Our overcrowded trains leave most of our towns just three times per day. Ambulances are left ramping at our hospitals, and volunteer options like the Royal Flying Doctor Service community transport team are not being supported with sufficient government funding.

We do not want to have a health system like the US, where only the wealthy and those that can travel freely have access to crucial health services. It is clear that funding effective local health services is not prioritised by this government, as seen by this budget and their consistent push to merge local hospitals. I wholeheartedly oppose these mergers and support the right of our local hospitals to operate independently and not lose their local skill, local knowledge, local care and local voice. As things stand, people living in regional areas already are 1.8 times more likely to die from potentially avoidable causes compared to people in major cities.

MOTIONS

Wednesday 31 July 2024

Legislative Assembly

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Much like health, child care is another area set to suffer as a result of this year's budget. We are already seeing the consequences: \$79 million has been cut from early childhood sector supports, while funding for Labor's new kindergarten and childcare rollout is set to take a back seat. The failed childcare rollout will have a profound impact on not only my electorate but the entire state, particularly regional Victoria. Seymour's childcare centre was announced as one of 50 initially planned by the state, yet it seems that it has just ended up being another broken promise. It was bad enough when Labor said it would take until 2028 for the new centre to open, and now it has been delayed beyond 2032. When it comes to voting, Victorian mothers will not forget the brutal cuts this government imposed on their families. At the earliest, it will now be 2032 before Seymour receives a childcare facility, which it so badly needed when it was announced in early 2022. Regional Victoria has been suffering due to the lack of accessible and available child care for such a long time. Labor's inability to successfully deliver childcare facilities is making this so much more difficult.

Towns like Avenel, Seymour, Nagambie, Broadford and more are struggling with outrageous waitlists caused by a lack of childcare and early learning facilities. The Seymour announcement deterred three not-for-profit and private investments from coming to our community, leaving only a broken promise by this government. Labor's attempted rollout of new childcare centres across the state has been a disaster, with our region only going backwards in this sector and the government single-handedly compounding this crisis. This government time and time again have shown they cannot manage money, they cannot manage a project and they cannot deliver accessible child care for our regional communities.

The same can be said of education – another area of concern for this budget. Upgrades to Broadford Primary School were among 29 education projects across the state that Labor committed to during the 2022 election – yet another broken promise by Labor will now remain unfunded. Labor committed nearly \$14 million for Broadford Primary's redevelopment during the 2022 election. However, this school will no longer receive the funding any time soon as it was left off the budget. But let me reiterate: we mothers do not forget easily. We will not forget when a government impacts our families with poor policy, broken promises and corruption. Parents, students and staff are rightly concerned that the school's redevelopment has been cancelled. When the commitment was initially announced Labor representatives said Broadford Primary School's funding would be life-changing for these students. This life-changing promise is no longer important to the Labor government, who instead will continue to blow hundreds of millions of dollars on unnecessary Melbourne projects and remain under the thumb of the corrupt CFMEU executives. Failing to uphold this commitment jeopardises the academic success of the local children and undermines their overall wellbeing and future opportunities. This is yet another direct consequence of Labor's financial mismanagement, and local students and the education system have paid the ultimate price.

This year's budget is full of tax changes that are set to have a pretty devastating impact on the state as a whole, but in particular on communities like my electorate of Euroa. One of the major changes is an increase to the fire service levy. The announcement means Victorians will pay nearly \$200 million more in fire taxes in the next year. Despite this sizeable increase our CFA brigades are unlikely to see much benefit at all. Like last year, the vast majority of funds raised through this fire service levy will not reach the brigades. We are seeing regional residents and farm owners saddled with significantly higher fees. These are fees that will see at least an extra \$1000 added to bills for farmers – all just to cover the demands of city-based brigades. Much of this levy increase will go towards the United Firefighters Union and not our dedicated volunteer firefighters, who put their lives at risk to protect their own communities. All our brigades want is simple; they want vehicles that are safe, appliances and facilities that are fit for purpose. I do not think that is too much to ask. These brigades want to be able to effectively keep our communities safe.

Labor has decided to delay 83 per cent of existing CFA capital projects by another year. The delay to these critical projects highlights Labor's long-term neglect of our tireless volunteer firefighters. On our side of the house we stand with our volunteer CFA firefighters. The CFA is still waiting on the

delivery of 28 of the 48 critical new heavy tankers that were originally promised by a Labor government back in 2021, with only 15 currently active. These are years overdue, with many of our regional communities in desperate need of new vehicles as their existing ones are unsafe and not fit for service. Documents from Fire Rescue Victoria were made public earlier this year. It was revealed 193 vehicles in the CFA's 2322-strong fleet are over 30 years old, while 430 are more than 25 years old. Having met with brigade captains and several volunteers, there are serious concerns about these ageing vehicles as well as the culture of the CFA as it deals with a lack of funding and support. We have witnessed the disastrous decisions by this government regarding fire management – a lack of planned burns, the closure of the sustainable native timber industry, failure to replace ageing vehicles and the loss of more than 6500 operational CFA volunteers.

I put forward questions to the Treasurer to ask how our CFA brigades will benefit from these ludicrous tax changes, and I am yet to have a response. This government's lack of support is death by a thousand cuts to our selfless volunteer firefighters, and it fails those who risk their lives to protect our regional communities. This budget has also seen cuts made to crime prevention programs, representing a wider issue this government fails to address: keeping our communities safe. People in my region have expressed how they are feeling more vulnerable to crime at the moment in town, at their places of business and on farm. A recent community safety forum held in my electorate heard of the incredible efforts of households, farmers and businesses and what they are doing to keep safe. Many are reinvigorating their Neighbourhood Watch programs because they feel unsafe under this government. While my community is always inspiring, this is a temporary solution. This government must step up and address the increasing crime rates and keep our communities safe.

Another issue that we have to raise is those that are not being funded outside the public school system. Those that have been discriminated against who are at Catholic and independent schools were failed and were ineligible for the \$400 payment – another example that this government cannot manage money and cannot manage projects, and Victorians are paying the price.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (18:31): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Bills

State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (18:32): I rise to speak briefly on behalf of the Victorian Greens in relation to the State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. This is a bill that proposes to make various governance changes to sports boards, sports trusts, venues, grants, leases at major sporting venues and the appointment of people to the various boards. It includes changes to a number of acts, including the Kardinia Park Stadium Act 2016, the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act 1985, the Melbourne Cricket Ground Act 2009, the Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Act 1985 and the State Sport Centres Act 1994 as well as the ANZAC Day Act 1958, and it removes gendered language across a number of acts.

The one aspect of this bill that we did take a keen interest in was that the legislation proposed to repeal the requirement for Kardinia Park and the State Netball Hockey Centre advisory committees to be constituted under legislation, with the understanding that they would operate as advisory bodies under

ministerial direction. Overall, broadly, we are supportive of the changes in the bill, but we did hold concerns around the proposal to dissolve or to no longer have the advisory committees in legislation – to repeal their establishing provisions. This comes on the back of some recent legislation by government to abolish legislated advisory committees. We had the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024 just recently, which sought to abolish the Public Records Advisory Council and replace them with an as yet unknown process.

I appreciate the government has indicated to us and to members of those committees that they do intend to retain those advisory committees, it is just that the main reason for the changes here – to no longer have them in legislation – is to reduce the administrative load in actually appointing members, and that can actually be a barrier to appointing members to those committees. Because the committees are currently established by law, members are required to be appointed by and to submit resignations to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, which involves a number of checks and paperwork and what have you. As I said, the government have advised us that they intend that the advisory committees will remain operational and that there will be no change in the powers or the existence of the committees and that they will continue to meet as required.

We do really support the retention of advisory committees. They provide crucial oversight and are essential to upholding the principles of open governance, in preserving the integrity of our democracy and in making sure that governments do actually engage with citizens. We are in consultation with a number of groups who use both these sites and who have members on both advisory committees. Some have raised concerns with us, including the possible replacement structures, assurances of the ongoing working groups remaining in place to allow for appropriate collaboration and operation of Kardinia Park – and their general concerns were raised with the Kardinia Park advisory committee – ensuring that the voices of existing stakeholders within the Kardinia Park precinct can be heard. We are still consulting with the users of those sites and will continue to engage with them, but we will not be opposing the bill in the lower house. We will continue to engage with those users as the bill moves towards the upper house. That deals with the main content of the bill.

Whilst I am speaking more broadly on the issues of sport in Victoria, I will just raise two issues: number one is that I think this bill is a real demonstration of the level of involvement, and of course we all know the level of funding that goes towards major sporting stadiums here in Victoria. I think particularly Kardinia Park is a very well looked after stadium. I am a Bombers fan, so I probably cannot speak too much about the footy, but significant funding is going towards supporting Kardinia Park in Geelong, and significant funding is going towards the MCG and towards Marvel Stadium as well.

Again I would raise an issue that I have been raising in here for many, many years now. It has been announced, I think, that there are now more Australians signed up as AFL club members than ever before, no doubt a significant number of them being Victorians, yet when it comes to grand final day around a third – just a third, just one in three – of attendees at the grand final are actually club members. Only a third of tickets are allocated to club members. They are encouraged every single year to stump up and support their team, yet when it comes to them making the grand final they are missing out; they are missing out to corporates and to people who are paying for those thousand-dollar package deals. It is outrageous. Not only do the Victorian public support their footy teams, they stump up through their governments to build stadiums to support footy.

As I have raised before, under the legislation that governs ticketing to major events it is the government that signs off on the ticketing allocation for the AFL Grand Final. It is well within the minister's remit to ensure that when ticket allocations are signed off on they actually allocate more tickets to competing club members. That is well within the government's remit. Some years ago I actually moved a private members bill to ensure that there would be an increased level of tickets allocated to AFL club members. I would urge the government to make sure that it is standing on the side of club members when it comes to grand final day and not let so many tickets be siphoned off to corporates.

In addition to that, I also acknowledge the construction work that is happening at Toorak Park, right on the other side of the road from my electorate, but of course home to the fantastic Prahran footy club and Prahran Cricket Club as well. I acknowledge both the Stonnington City Council and the state government for funding that project. I walk past it just about every day, whether it is on my way to Toorak station when I am catching the train to Parliament or when I am going for a jog around Toorak Park. I know both the footy club and the cricket club are very eager to move back in once the construction is complete, but it is looking absolutely fantastic.

On that note I will wrap it up there, but we will continue to engage with the users of both the state sporting centres and of Kardinia Park in the lead-up to the bill going to the upper house.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (18:40): I too am very pleased to contribute to the debate today in support of the State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I would like to recognise the great work of our Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events – also known as the portfolio for fun – and his ministerial office and the department for bringing this bill to the house, which really does tidy up a lot of things. Also there is a gender equality aspect of it, which I am very interested in. As always, consultation is incredibly important. As good governments do, we have consulted with a range of relevant organisations throughout the process of this amending bill, including government bodies, sporting trusts and committees, and I thank them all for their contributions. This bill puts forward a variety of administrative improvements for the management of many of our state sporting institutions, so the involvement of the organisations themselves is critical. It is because of these incredible sporting institutions that Victoria really is the sporting and major events capital of Australia.

From the Australian Open to the grand prix to the grand final, sporting events are central to the Victorian calendar, as proven by ever-impressive attendance figures. We really do make sure we have got events at the start of the year, we have got events at Easter and we have got events in September. It is really so important for the economy and to drive visitation that we continually have these incredible events. When we talk about driving the Victorian economy, the actual impact on the economy is to the tune of \$3.3 billion annually and over 15,000 jobs. This is really, really significant when it comes to jobs in Victoria as well as being an economic driver.

Certainly Ballarat is no exception. I am incredibly proud of everything we do in Ballarat when we put on events. We are looking forward to hosting the Western Bulldogs again, one of the highlights for me. We talked about club membership. I am a member of two clubs. I am a Geelong Cat, and I have a Ballarat Western Bulldogs membership as well, so I have two memberships. That is how much I support my electorate. We are delivering in the electorate of Wendouree.

I want to make mention of the Ballarat sports package, which is delivering more world-class sporting facilities for elite and grassroots players alike. The Allan Labor government is delivering an additional 5000 new permanent seats at Mars Stadium and building a brand new athletics track next door at the old Ballarat Showgrounds site. We are continuing our commitment to Selkirk Stadium, the home of basketball in Ballarat, with upgrades to courts, lighting and broadcasting, with both locations receiving accessibility improvements. We want everyone to be able to enjoy watching all-star football and all-star basketball, and accessibility is really important.

Talking all things basketball, I want to wish the Ballarat Miners teams all the best for this week's prelim finals. As the proud number one ticketholder for the Ballarat Miners women's team I am strongly supporting our women in their game against the Keilor Thunder on Saturday night. We are playing away from home. As well, our men's team are taking on the Sandringham Sabres. I have already got a bet with the member for Sandringham over who is going to bring home the win, so 'Go Miners' I say, and I look forward to getting that drink off the member for Sandringham.

But it does not just stop there in terms of the Ballarat package. There is so much investment going on in sport across my electorate. Through the council support package we are delivering for Ballarat North a \$5 million upgrade to the Frank Bourke Oval, with new clubrooms and new facilities at

Ballarat North at the number 2 oval. It is great news for the North Ballarat Football and Netball Club and the North Ballarat Cricket Club. One of my favourite election commitments is \$8.4 million for the Marty Busch Reserve in Sebastopol for huge upgrades. When we are talking about state sport we are not just talking about Melbourne, we are talking about state sport, and Ballarat loves its sport. I am so pleased that we are doing great things.

Just one final thing: we just announced two weeks ago \$1 million for the Ballarat Aquatic & Lifestyle Centre for new change rooms and new supports for people with disabilities to be able to use the pool. I could not be prouder of what we are doing in working with the City of Ballarat to ensure that recreational facilities are open to all. Then we have got the Get Active Kids budget, but I am going to get back to this very important issue of gender equality in sport and what that means, because we have done stuff with Change Our Game. We have got \$18 million invested in increasing women's board representation.

But back to the bill, the bill before us proposes a number of amendments to a variety of acts, including the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act 1985, relating to the National Tennis Centre and Olympic Park; the State Sport Centres Act 1994, concerning the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre, the State Netball and Hockey Centre, Lakeside oval and the Knox Regional Sports Park; and the Melbourne Cricket Ground Act 2009, which guides administration of the G; and of course the Kardinia Park Stadium Act 2016 and my beloved Kardinia Park, home of the mighty Geelong Cats – as our song says, 'down at Kardinia Park'. Further administrative and statutory amendments to change the Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Act 1985 and the ANZAC Day Act 1958 are also included.

Many of the changes proposed across these acts have similar goals in order to support consistency of governance in major sporting institutions and also regarding ministerial delegation, so it is really tidying things up to make sure that they are reflective of what we need in the 21st century. For example, several amendments concerning the Kardinia Park Stadium Act, the State Sport Centres Act and the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act will facilitate the delegation of lease approvals by the minister to the department. This does not have to be managed by a minister. The minister will remain responsible for major leases which concern an entire precinct or which include 21-plus-year terms, while minor leases within these precincts can be considered at a more appropriate level. The bill also removes the need for approval from the Minister for Environment, of all people, for leases concerning Melbourne and Olympic Park, although the holder of that portfolio will oversee the leases at Gosch's Paddock, where the Magpies train. Other specific decision-making processes can be delegated – namely, the MCG floodlight determinations and the Kardinia Park event management declarations – to allow for a reasonable degree of flexibility for staging events at such iconic locations. When we talk about the managing of these things, we know it is so important.

This legislation will also improve the administration of managing bodies across these various sporting grounds. The maximum membership of the MCG Trust and the State Sport Centres Trust will be expanded by one and four members respectively. This change will allow the trusts to further incorporate broader skill sets and maintain the personnel necessary to meet their responsibilities.

We all know that the MCG is iconic. It is our Colosseum – the home of AFL grand finals, the Boxing Day test, the 1956 Olympics, the 2006 Commonwealth Games and the Taylor Swift Eras tour. It is a national treasure for all Victorians, and that is why the MCG Trust is so important. I want to acknowledge former Premier and fellow Ballaratian the Honourable Steve Bracks AC, who does a great job of chairing the MCG Trust, as well as some former trust board members, including my friend the amazing Belinda Duarte AM. Belinda is a proud First Nations woman who grew up in Wendouree and who served as a board member of the MCG trust for five years, and I particularly want to acknowledge the important contribution Belinda has made to the reconciliation action plan advisory group of the MCG Trust. One of the reasons I did want to speak on this bill was to have the opportunity to acknowledge former Senator Linda White, who died earlier this year, who served as a board member of the Melbourne Cricket Ground Trust from 2017 to 2022 prior to becoming a Labor senator for Victoria in the federal Parliament. I had the great honour of attending her memorial service. One

of the key things that kept coming up in the wonderful speeches about Linda and her life was her love of the MCG, and we really celebrated the important work that she did with the MCG Trust.

In the closing moments I will just say that we have got some other important amendments regarding governing and alterations to vacancy procedures for some of the trusts, including Kardinia Park again as well as the Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board, and we will introduce ministerial discretion regarding the appointment of Tennis Australia and Tennis Victoria members to ensure that the candidates are suitable for their positions, and remuneration will also now be permitted in line with other memberships of the trusts. In concluding, I welcome the introduction of the State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and I commend the bill to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (18:50): I too rise to speak on the State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, a bill that has been introduced by the government to largely put in place a number of administrative changes, particularly to amend the ANZAC Day Act 1958 to change the description of an area in which sports are held on Anzac Day, and also a series of changes made to the Kardinia Park Stadium Act 2016, the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act 1985, the Melbourne Cricket Ground Act 2009 and the State Sport Centres Act 1994 in relation to trust membership, leasing powers and other miscellaneous amendments. It is a very exciting piece of legislation, but I think what is more exciting at the moment is the fact that we are celebrating sport more broadly with the Olympics in Paris. I am sure many of us are waking up early in the morning to see the results coming back home: the gold, silver and bronze medallists making Australians very, very proud.

Like our Olympians are making us proud, in the electorate of Kew we have so many wonderful sporting organisations and clubs that are so much part of the fabric of our community. We are not only a place where we have so many schools – more than 30 schools – but also a place where sporting communities are in constant connection with the local community, making sure that they are working to enhance our local community and working to provide that broader input that sporting clubs can provide.

I thought, given the fact that we are celebrating sport at the moment and speaking about the State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill, I would talk about some of the wonderful clubs we do have in the electorate of Kew. Where to start? It is still footy season, and the Kew Rovers are run by their president Nathan and their fantastic team with Allison and Bec. The Kew Rovers are the home of the Daicos boys, Josh and Nick. Being a Collingwood supporter, it is terrific to have them reigning from the electorate of Kew, and they were down at the club a couple of weeks ago with Steele Sidebottom talking to the young kids about the importance of community sport, getting involved and working hard to excel in football. It is very much a family club; it is a community-focused club. Just recently I went to their event about fighting MND, the Big Freeze, raising money for that important cause, and that says so much about the Kew Rovers and the committee there, a parent-run committee. It is also the club of Andrew Dillon, the CEO of the AFL, so it has a very proud record when it comes to contributing to AFL more broadly here in Victoria.

Of course the Kew Comets are neighbouring, with a rivalry between the Kew Rovers and the Kew Comets. The Kew Comets, based at Victoria Park, have a big focus, like the Rovers, on growing their female teams and increasing that female participation, and it was great to get down to an under-11 girls game not too long ago. The senior club the Kew Bears works with the Rovers and the Comets to make sure that those junior players can come through into a senior club, and congratulations to Michael Cochrane and his team at the Kew Bears, who also put a lot of effort into giving back to the community. Just recently I went to a luncheon there that was supporting the Breast Cancer Network Australia and raising funds for that important cause.

The Balwyn Tigers is not only a junior club but a senior club, and congratulations to David Fileccia and his team at the Balwyn Tigers, who over the past few years have worked incredibly hard to merge a number of junior clubs – the Boroondara Hawks, the Greythorn Jets and the Balwyn Tigers – to make sure that those clubs can come together and actually ensure that young players who start off in

the under-8s and the under-9s can continue all the way through to the under-18s before going on to the senior team and do not have to change clubs. As we know, so many local sporting clubs have parent-run and volunteer-run committees, and they put so much effort into making sure these clubs are successful and that kids in particular, young people in particular, can get the most out of those clubs. David and his team, Fiona and others, at the Balwyn Tigers do that every single day, and last year it was terrific to follow the under-14 girls team through the season. They put an amazing amount of effort into making sure that they were the reigning premiers once again. Three years in a row they have been reigning premiers, the under-14 girls, and they are hoping for another premiership this year.

Turning to the upcoming cricket season, we have of course the Deepdene Uniting Cricket Club and the Deepdene Bears. Deepdene is probably the smallest suburb in the state of Victoria. But they do have two cricket clubs, and the rivalry there is fierce. Congratulations to both of those clubs on always looking to grow and expand to include more female players and grow their female teams. A shout-out to James Lindsay at the Deepdene Bears, who puts a lot of effort into making sure it is an inclusive club for everyone.

The North Balwyn Cricket Club, the Bulls, with Matt and John, is another club that is focused on supporting the local community through the Pink Stumps Day lunch and making sure they are supporting the Breast Cancer Network Australia as well. At the Koonung Heights Cricket Club with Juliette, Warren and Theo there is a huge focus on the women's team. It was terrific to get out there last year and open the gala day for their women's section, growing not only the senior team but the junior team as well. The Kew Cricket Club had great success last year, with their first XI being the reigning premiers.

Gavin Collopy and his team at the Balwyn Saints and Blasters Cricket Club are a club that has really grown in recent years in terms of its junior development, and it is very much focused on bringing those juniors right through to the senior club. It is one of the oldest clubs in our area and has a fierce rivalry with the North Balwyn Cricket Club. I heard from some others on the government side about the investments made in local sporting clubs. Well, if there is a club that would look to see some investment in their local facilities, it is Balwyn Saints and Blasters down at Myrtle Park, making sure that those facilities are actually provided for young female players and that the change rooms have the facilities that those players need to get involved in the club.

The North Balwyn Baseball Club, the Stingers, share facilities with the Balwyn Saints and Blasters down at Myrtle Park. Matt St Onge is a passionate baseball player and has invited me down a number of times to deliver the first pitch, which has been successful and not successful on different occasions, depending on how far I can make it. But it is a very active club, and last year the women's team, the Hornets, saw a premiership come their way through their hard work. It is a club that really brings people in from many different areas.

Of course there are the local soccer clubs in our area. The Boroondara Eagles, thanks to Chris, Marina and Manny and all of their work, is a huge club that is only growing in size as soccer continues to grow as a sport, particularly after the success of the Matildas over the past couple of years and the growth of female soccer. The East Kew Football Club with Vange down at Willsmere Park is another great local club that is really focused on providing the opportunity for younger players to get involved in soccer and work with the local school community as well to build that out as a sport.

The Boroondara Netball Association under the leadership of Sue is a place on Saturday morning where there are thousands of young people coming in and out of that venue, and parking can be an absolute nightmare. But to Sue and Kirrily, who is always on the barbecue, it is wonderful to see the netball club continue to go from strength to strength. A huge amount of work goes into that as well. I know Sue's passion for growing netball, and making sure that local schools are connected to it is very, very important to her as well.

The North Balwyn Bowls Club, with Peter O'Brien and his team there, is a club that continues to grow. It was great to have them in at the Parliament a couple of weeks ago, have a game here on the bowls green and have an opportunity to take them to lunch and enjoy the Parliament. Thank you to Peter for all that he does.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the Kew Box Hill Hockey Club, my own hockey club. I have not been playing this season unfortunately, but I hope to get back on the pitch next year. To the girls there – to Amanda Harper, who does so much work to bring that team together every single week, a dear friend – I am very much hoping that the girls have a good season and I can get back out on the pitch soon.

Finally, a huge congratulations to Susannah Lutze, a Surrey Hills resident in my electorate, who is heading to Paris any day now for the Paralympics. Susannah is a young girl who went to Genazzano who is heading across to the rowing at the Paralympics and is very much excited and thrilled about the opportunity ahead.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

David Hodgett: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I just wish to raise for your attention two outstanding adjournment matters that are yet to be answered by ministers. The first one is adjournment matter 625. It was asked on 1 May 2024 to the Minister for Housing. It was an urgent matter on behalf of 66-year-old Bronwyn. It was due 31 May, and I would ask that you take that up with the Minister for Housing. The second adjournment matter is number 601, asked on 21 March 2024, again to the Minister for Housing – an urgent case of a 45-year-old female seeking crisis accommodation. That was due on 20 April 2024, and I would ask you to please pursue that. These matters are urgent, and I wish to be able to respond to the constituents in relation to these two adjournment matters.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will raise those with the Speaker, and they will be forwarded on to the appropriate minister.

Road maintenance

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (19:01): (741) I have yet another matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for urgent attention with appropriate funding to be given to address the potholes and failing surfaces on the Eltham-Yarra Glen Road, centred mostly around Christmas Hills. The road between Yarra Glen and Alma Road at Watsons Creek stretches for about 12 kilometres. It is winding, with double lines for most of it. It is heavily treed, and there are many challenges known at the best of times for this road. There are constant ads about motorbike alerts because of the dangers of riders losing their lives, and there are often ads up there bringing people's attention to that fact.

There is also a lot of traffic on this road. It is the link between Healesville, Yarra Glen and the Melba Highway, pretty well, with the ring-road and the Greensborough Highway, and the ring-road traffic goes to the airport. It is a very busy stretch of road. It has deteriorated rapidly over the last month or so. I have had so much contact about this section of road, and in fact at the moment it has overtaken the number of the complaints I have about the Melba Highway, which has come out as the worst road in the state. So momentarily the Eltham-Yarra Glen Road is right up there.

I had seen this road. Despite people having come in and spoken to me, I had actually seen some of the potholes being filled when it was raining heavily, and you could see that the tar mix was just spraying everywhere during the rain. I went to take photos at another time, and I met a young man, Metin, who came up and saw me, and he asked whether I popped a tyre. And I said no, I had not, but his wife had

just damaged a rim of her tyre on her vehicle, and they were quoted \$2500. This was a young couple with a four-month-old baby, so they were really quite distressed by that.

I was travelling on a Saturday night just after that, in the rain again, and I saw a tow truck with a car on the back at the spot of some of the worst potholes. I am sure, had the RACV survey been completed at the moment, this road would have been there. It really needs attention. There is not a lot of room for people to go because it is narrow, it is winding and it has double lines, so it is very difficult for people to avoid, and it is difficult at night to see some of those potholes.

The funding for resurfacing and resealing contracts for Victorian roads in the 2023–24 financial period has dropped dramatically, and the shadow minister has found out through questions on notice in this place that \$37.6 million was spent across the state compared to \$201.4 million in the previous year. That is a pretty damning statistic, and the government need to lift that and certainly fix this road.

Small business support

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (19:04): (742) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Small Business, and the action I seek is for her to join me in Mernda for a small business forum. The minister joined me in Donnybrook for a small business forum which was an absolute success. We were able to support small business owners and would-be entrepreneurs with how to take those first steps and then how to grow their business. We are blessed with an entrepreneurial community in the north – real go-getters who love to create valuable services for their communities. I feel so proud to represent them, and I am looking forward to having the minister join me and share what excellent services and supports are available from our government.

Bank Street–Princes Highway, Traralgon

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (19:05): (743) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently install traffic lights at the intersection of Bank Street and the Princes Highway in Traralgon. The minister may be sensing some *deja vu*, and that is because I stood in this place eight months ago and requested this exact action. Despite this, despite repeated calls since then and despite pleas from the Latrobe Valley community, the notoriously dangerous intersection at Bank Street still does not have traffic lights, and it is a death trap waiting to happen.

Last week ambulances and MICA paramedics were called to Bank Street after a crash involving a school bus and a car. Two people were taken to hospital. I pass through this intersection most days, and in my own mind I had run the scenario of a truck hitting a car or a car hitting a golf cart leaving the golf club – never had I thought about a school bus being involved in an accident at the intersection. Now imagine being the parent and receiving a call to say the school bus your child was travelling on has been involved in a serious crash, a crash that was completely avoidable. A few weeks ago the minister reduced the speed limit at the Princes Highway through Bank Street to 60 kilometres an hour despite warnings this would do little to improve safety, so the warning bells are obviously going off in the minister's office that this newly altered intersection is a major danger to everyone who passes through it. Then when I asked directly why the traffic lights could not be installed, the minister showed a complete lack of understanding by suggesting traffic lights would add to the risk at Bank Street because cars may queue across the railway line and the highway. This is something that they have already been doing for decades. We know the traffic lights will not be linked with the railway line, which is the issue, until at least 2026 because of issues with signalling and upgrades, but we need lights on the poles, and we need them operating from now.

It is not good enough that people are literally risking their lives every day at this intersection because of the government's inaction. It is not good enough that a school bus full of children was involved in a serious crash last week. It is not good enough that the minister has ignored repeated calls for traffic lights to be installed at Bank Street. Does somebody need to die, Minister, for this government to take

this issue seriously? I implore the minister, and the Latrobe Valley residents implore the minister – install the traffic lights at the Bank Street intersection and install them now.

Ripon electorate schools

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (19:07): (744) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Education. The action I seek is that the minister visits my electorate to see some of the amazing school upgrades currently taking place across our rural communities. I am lucky enough to have 54 schools in my electorate. Some have as few as three students and others have over 1000. All of them are staffed by some of the most fantastic principals, teachers and support staff you could ever meet. I am proud we are making so many of them even better with the doctors in schools program, mental health supports, equity funding, free dental vans, school upgrades and more.

We have recently finished upgrade works on many, including a \$4.1 million upgrade to Skipton Primary School, a \$1.9 million upgrade to Linton Primary School and a multimillion-dollar upgrade to the Ross Creek and Smythesdale campuses of Woody Yaloak Primary School, but there is so much more still to come. We are transforming St Arnaud Secondary College, Mount Rowan Secondary College and Wedderburn College; upgrading classrooms at Ararat College; redeveloping Tarnagulla Primary School; and improving our amazing Catholic schools in Ararat, Inglewood and St Arnaud. We will also complete work soon on school upgrades in Snake Valley and Scarsdale and build new outdoor sheltered areas at Dunolly and Little Bendigo primary schools. That is not even the full list, but it is safe to say that we are getting on with making sure our kids have the very best school facilities no matter where they live. I welcome the chance to show off some of the work to the minister and introduce him to the amazing school communities across Ripon.

Ambulance services

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:09): (745) To the Minister for Ambulance Services, the action I seek is for this Labor government to end their war on ambulance paramedics by settling the protracted enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations with this vital frontline workforce. Paramedics right across Victoria do tremendous work in emergency response providing life-saving health care and should be respected and valued by the Labor government for the work that they do and provided with the certainty that they need and deserve.

Sadly the Allan Labor government has taken Victorian ambulance paramedics for granted. The minister and the government must end their protracted pay dispute and arrest the declining standards of health care and ambulance response times in my electorate and my region. As Lilydale ambulance paramedics have told me, code 1 incidents have increased, but response times are failing to meet targets and cardiac arrest survival has tragically decreased. Lest there be any doubt, the declining ambulance service in our community is through no fault of our hardworking and dedicated local paramedics, and I want to make that very clear. It is the fault of the Labor state government's failure to properly plan, invest in and resource ambulance services for our local community and our state.

If all our local ambulances are spending hours on end ramped at Maroondah Hospital, they are not able to get out to another person having a heart attack, anaphylaxis, road trauma or any other life-threatening episode. The government has failed to address the significant and increasing pressures on Victoria's healthcare system, the intensifying strain on Ambulance Victoria, the chaos and alleged corruption within Ambulance Victoria's management and administrative functions and the massively, totally unacceptable ambulance ramping at hospitals. Paramedics are forced to work extraordinarily long shifts, which is unsafe and shows that this Labor government does not take seriously its duty of care for these public sector employees. Paramedics are suffering burnout. After years of training to become a paramedic, the average time in the sector is only three to five years and then many simply retire. We cannot lose this valuable workforce. Ambulance Victoria and the Allan government have failed to address the high staff attrition and have lost the confidence of the ambulance workforce.

It was a privilege recently to meet with the paramedics who live and work in our local Yarra Ranges community at the Lilydale ambulance station and to be able to thank them in person for the important work that they do in our community. I want to pay tribute to these paramedics for their courage in sharing their stories as well as providing ideas on solutions to fix some of the current challenges – in particular, Amanda, Daniel, Clare, Stephanie, Matthew and Madeleine, but also the many other paramedics that joined our meeting unexpectedly last week. These paramedics told me how ambulance ramping is entrenched and that the Labor government has lost track of the crucial role ambulance services play in our community.

Point Cook Road–Central Avenue, Altona Meadows

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (19:12): (746) The adjournment matter that I seek is for the Assistant Treasurer in his capacity as the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to join me at the intersection of Point Cook Road and Central Avenue, which is part of the Big Build project and probably the number one issue for the community that I represent. It is a hugely busy intersection. It is dangerous for all users of that intersection, be they drivers, riders or pedestrians. This has been a massive project for our community. I cannot wait for it to be delivered, and I cannot wait to see the minister onsite with me.

Transport infrastructure

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:13): (747) I rise this evening with an adjournment matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is that the minister take immediate action to reduce waste and blowouts on Victorian transport projects. We are seeing blowouts and budget blackholes on every government transport project. This affects my community, especially in regard to the Gippsland rail line. The Gippsland rail line commitment was originally \$520 million. It is now at \$878 million, and the project is still not completed. The bridge duplication across the Bunyip River has not happened as originally promised when the project was originally specced out. But think of that for a moment: the \$350 million blowout on that is half of the cost of the West Gippsland Hospital, a hospital that is now being shelved in the budget. So if the government can rein in and control these transport projects and stop the budget blowouts, the people of Victoria will get the benefit because they will get projects delivered, rather than being shelved. This is affecting my community greatly. Like the member for Morwell, I have intersections that are in desperate need. They are deathtrap intersections that need to be completed. We need to get the spending under control. The minister needs to go back to these projects and look at them and look at the contracts, especially now after what we have found out about the CFMEU's behaviour and the bribery and extortion that have been happening there which are causing cost blowouts. I am urging the minister to go back, have a look at these projects – especially if they are CFMEU projects, like the Gippsland rail line is – look at the contracts and get the spending under control.

Kororoit electorate telecommunications infrastructure

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (19:15): (748) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Government Services. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the investments the Victorian Labor government have been making to deliver mobile broadband and wi-fi infrastructure in my electorate of Kororoit through the Connecting Victoria program. We know that Connecting Victoria is fast-tracking more reliable mobile coverage and faster internet across the state, not only for work, study and leisure but also for accessing information and keeping in touch with loved ones during an emergency. The Victorian Labor government has delivered over 600 connectivity projects across the state, including over 230 mobile towers, which have been upgraded from 4G to 5G for faster data and network efficiency. Over 200 mobile towers in bushfire-, flood- and storm-prone areas have had battery backups installed, allowing people in affected communities to stay in touch with loved ones and access information during extreme weather. Over 100 broadband projects have been completed, benefiting more than 75,000 businesses and homes.

Currently in my electorate of Kororoit we have residents only 30 kilometres from the CBD of Melbourne with little or no mobile coverage. Whilst these residents are not considered to be living in regional Victoria, they are in fact living in the fastest growing area in Australia. Residents in Rockbank, Mount Atkinson and the Grandview and Olivia estates currently have little to no mobile coverage. Connectivity is important, as we all know, at the best of times but especially in emergencies. Residents have reported having issues when calling emergency services, with phone calls dropping in and out, the call being disconnected or even having trouble connecting to emergency services to begin with. The Australian government has the primary responsibility for ensuring that telecommunication services are adequate, and this Victorian Labor government is investing in telecommunications infrastructure to fill the gaps. As a Labor government we have always advocated and will continue to advocate for new and upgraded telecommunications infrastructure. I look forward to receiving the minister's response so I can share it with my dedicated Kororoit community, who I look forward to continue working with, supporting and of course advocating on behalf of.

Botts Road–Murray Valley Highway, Yarrawonga

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (19:17): (749) I rise on the adjournment debate today with an issue for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is an onsite inspection with VicRoads and me to discuss two very dangerous issues at one particular intersection: Botts Road and Murray Valley Highway at Yarrawonga. Yarrawonga is one of the fastest if not the fastest growing town in regional Victoria. Much of the town's growth in housing and commercial development is out to the west side of the town, and coupled with that the Murray Valley Highway is one of the busiest roads in north-east Victoria. Where Botts Road and Murray Valley Highway meet there is a dangerous open channel that is not visible from the highway, and as residents and tourists turn into Botts Road the lack of lighting on that intersection compounds this problem. If a car ends up in this channel, deaths will occur. With the township growing rapidly and more tourists enjoying what the beautiful Yarrawonga has to offer, it is important that we reduce traffic hazards or, as we know, accidents waiting to happen. This would not be an expensive fix, but it would be a proactive approach to road safety problems that exist, and I urge the minister to request a visit that includes me, rather than sometimes what happens when you find out that VicRoads have already been and found there is nothing to see here. I would like to put some context to this intersection, so I would like to meet with them at the intersection. The open channel along with no lighting at this intersection is very dangerous.

Wallington Reserve

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:18): (750) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit the Bellarine and join me and meet with the Wallington Cricket Club and Bellarine Bears Baseball Club to discuss the upgrades to the Wallington Reserve announced in the recent regional Community Sports Infrastructure Fund. The Wallington Reserve is home to both clubs – cricket and baseball – and the two clubs are leaders in their community in inclusion in sport, where they run incredible all-abilities programs to create opportunities for kids of all abilities to play baseball or cricket and be part of a sporting community. In recognition of this work the Wallington Reserve has been successful in a \$1 million support package for a \$4.25 million redevelopment under the regional Community Sports Infrastructure Fund, which will mean serious upgrades to the pavilion to improve all-abilities access, change rooms and social spaces for the club. What comes with this is an additional \$50,000 to help boost their all-abilities programs.

The community are all very excited to see this project underway to improve the clubs' facilities, and I would like to just congratulate, while I have this opportunity, the club and members, especially Damien Carr, Daniel Harvey, Matt Connell from the Bellarine Bears baseball team and Marc Occhipinti, Ross Moreland and John Dunstan from the Wallington Cricket Club. I know they have worked tirelessly towards this project over many years. I know both clubs and the wider community would welcome the minister to visit the Bellarine and discuss these upcoming upgrades.

Responses

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:20): The member for Eildon raised a matter tonight for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding urgent repairs to potholes on the Eltham-Yarra Glen Road, predominantly around the Christmas Hills area. I will make sure that the matter is passed on. The member for Yan Yean, a hardworking member of Parliament in the north of Melbourne, raised a matter for the Minister for Small Business. There are many small businesses that are thriving in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, and she has asked that the minister join her in Mernda for a small business forum, and I am sure that the minister will be keen to do that. The member for Morwell raised a serious matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in relation to some traffic lights at the Bank Street and Princes Highway intersection in Traralgon, and I will make sure that that matter is passed on given the seriousness of that situation.

The member for Ripon – the hardworking member for Ripon – raised a matter for the Minister for Education. She ran through the significant education upgrades in her electorate, and she asked that the minister visit the electorate to see some of the amazing school upgrades currently taking place across our rural communities. I am sure that the minister will want to visit the electorate of Ripon. The member for Evelyn raised a matter for the Minister for Ambulance Services. The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to join them on a visit to Point Cook Road and Central Avenue. I know the hardworking member for Point Cook will be pleased when the minister attends to visit that electorate. The member for Narracan –

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Colin BROOKS: We are glad you are with us. We were worried you might have been left on the Kokoda Track, and we were genuinely happy to – sorry, Deputy Speaker. We are glad to have the member for Narracan in the chamber. He raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure around the cost of major projects and the impact that has on his community.

The member for Kororoit – an extraordinarily hardworking member – raised a matter for the Minister for Government Services seeking an update on investments in mobile broadband in her electorate through the Connecting Victoria program, a great program. The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety seeking an onsite inspection I think from the minister and/or VicRoads around the intersection of Botts Road and Murray Valley Highway in Yarrowonga. I am sure that the minister will want to make sure that matter is resolved. The member for Bellarine, another extraordinarily hardworking member of this place, raised a matter for the Minister for Community Sport in relation to visiting the Wallington Cricket Club and the Bellarine Bears Baseball Club to have a talk about the upgrades to Wallington Reserve that have been announced recently. I am sure that the minister will want to visit those sporting groups.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you to the hardworking minister and hardworking members. We stand adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:24 pm.