



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 15 August 2023**



**Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

**60th Parliament**

**Speaker**

Maree Edwards

**Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

**Acting Speakers**

Juliana Addison, Christine Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Paul Edbrooke, Bronwyn Halfpenny,  
Paul Hamer, Michaela Settle, Meng Heang Tak and Jackson Taylor

**Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier**

Daniel Andrews

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier**

Jacinta Allan

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

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

**Leader of the Nationals**

Peter Walsh

**Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

**Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

**Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury

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

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel	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	South Barwon	ALP	O'Keefe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleland, 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	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Fowles, Will <sup>1</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Home, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Wayne Farnham	Narracan	Lib	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

<sup>1</sup> ALP until 5 August.

**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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**Tuesday 15 August 2023**

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

*Bills*

**Bail Amendment Bill 2023**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (12:05): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Bail Act 1977 and to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (12:05): I ask the minister to provide a brief explanation of the bill.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (12:05): The bill makes a number of changes to the Bail Act 1977 in a way that ensures our bail laws protect the whole community. The bill will reduce the use of remand for low-level, non-violent offences and ensure it remains targeted towards serious offences where it is necessary to prevent an unacceptable risk to community safety.

**Read first time.**

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

**Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2023**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (12:06): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Open Courts Act 2013, the Court Security Act 1980, the Coroners Act 2008, the Spent Convictions Act 2021, the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019, the Forests Act 1958, the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014, the Criminal Procedure Act 2009, the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the Jury Directions Act 2015, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998, the Wrongs Act 1958, the Limitation of Actions Act 1958, the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, the Crimes Act 1958 and the Victoria Police Act 2013 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (12:07): Speaker, if it is not a contradiction in terms, I ask the minister to provide a brief explanation of the bill.

**The SPEAKER:** That could be challenging.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (12:07): Thank you, Speaker. The bill includes miscellaneous changes to support the courts and VCAT, implement recommendations regarding police coronial investigators and improve the operation of various justice and legal acts. The bill also expands the firefighters presumptive rights legislation to include three female-specific cancers.

**Read first time.**

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

***Business of the house*****Notices of motion****Notice given.*****Committees*****Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee*****Alert Digest No. 9***

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (12:08): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest No. 9* of 2023, on the following bills:

Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Ending Political Corruption) Bill 2023 together with appendices.

**Ordered to be published.*****Annual Review 2021 and 2022: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments***

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (12:09): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being the *Annual Review 2021 and 2022, Statutory Rules and Legislative Amendments*, together with appendices.

**Ordered to be published.*****Documents*****Documents****Incorporated list as follows:****DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

*Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* –

Orders under s 17B granting licences over Alexandra Gardens Reserve (two orders)

*Land Tax Act 2005* – Report 1 July to 31 December 2022 of Land Tax Absentee Owner Surcharge Exemptions under s 3BB

Ombudsman – Misconduct in public organisations: A casebook – Released on 9 August 2023

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

Banyule – GC220

Boroondara – GC220

Buloke – C45

Darebin – C182

Kingston – C218

Manningham – GC220

Nillumbik – GC220

Port Phillip – C213

Victoria Planning Provisions – VC236, VC238

Wellington – C112

Whitehorse – GC220

Whittlesea – GC220

Yarra – GC220



Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Building Act 1993* – SR 80

*Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* – SR 78

*County Court Act 1958* – SR 81

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – SR 79

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*:

Documents under section 15 in relation to statutory rules 60, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81

Documents under section 16B in relation to:

*Port Management Act 1995* – Pilotage Services Provider Standard – V1

*Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* – Notice to fix fees (8 documents)

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council – Assessment of early government-accepted Land Conservation Council recommendations

*Wrongs Act 1958* – Notice of scale of fees and costs for referrals of medical questions to medical panels under Part VBA (*Gazette G26, 29 June 2023*).

### *Announcements*

#### **Electoral Commissioner**

**The SPEAKER** (12:10): I advise the house that today I administered to Sven Bluemmel, the Electoral Commissioner, the oath required by section 16 of the Electoral Act 2002.

### *Bills*

#### **Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023**

##### *Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (12:10): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023 without amendment.

#### **Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023**

#### **Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023**

##### *Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:11): I inform the house that on 8 August 2023 the Lieutenant-Governor gave royal assent to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, and I inform the house that today the Governor gave royal assent to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023.

### *Committees*

#### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

##### *Membership*

**The SPEAKER** (12:11): I have received the resignation of Iwan Walters from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee effective from today.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:11): I move, by leave:

That Gary Maas be appointed to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Electoral Matters Committee***Membership*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:11): I move, by leave:

That Will Fowles be discharged from the Electoral Matters Committee and that Luba Grigorovitch be appointed in his place.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:12): I want to just make two brief comments on this motion. Before making those two comments – and I will seek your guidance on those two matters, Speaker – I would like to note for the house that it is my personal view, and I think it is the view of all parties in this place, that the convention of parties proportionally having the right to elect the people that are appointed to committees in this place works well and parties work well together to ensure that that convention works and plays out well.

In relation to this matter, I would bring to the Speaker's attention the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003. Earlier you spoke on a member resigning from a committee, and I did note that in relation to this motion the member appears to have not resigned. The committees act at section 21(3) states – if I may, for the house, read the subsection:

A member of the Council or Assembly ceases to be a member of a Joint Investigatory Committee if –

- (a) the member's seat becomes vacant; or
- (b) the member resigns by writing delivered to the President and Speaker.

The section is exhaustive. The section sets out an exhaustive list of changes to committees, so I would seek your guidance in relation to the act and the motion that has been put forward as to whether or not there are issues in relation to the act and the motion that has come before the house.

The second point is in relation to the motion. The member for Ringwood has made public comment in relation to communication with him, and I would ask in relation to this motion: has there been any proactive communication with the member in relation to the motion that has been moved before the house today?

**The SPEAKER** (12:14): I thank the Manager of Opposition Business for raising these matters. Of course any questions to the Speaker will be dealt with offline, and I am happy to speak to you in relation to the question that was at the end of your comments.

This is a really good opportunity for me to share my thinking on this motion with the house. I have accepted the motion moved by the Leader of the House as I consider it competent for the house to deal with. Section 21(3) of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, as you rightly pointed to, states that a member ceases to be a member of a joint investigatory committee if:

- (a) the member's seat becomes vacant; or
- (b) the member resigns by writing delivered to the President and Speaker.

Members will realise there is no reference in section 21(3) to the power of the house to discharge a member, as there is in standing order 208 relating to standing committees. However, section 21(3) needs to be read in the context of section 4(1) of the act, which states:

The standing orders, joint standing orders and the practices of the Council and the Assembly apply to the committees referred to in this Act to the extent that they are not inconsistent with any provision of this Act.

The act does not prohibit the discharge of members, meaning the practice is not inconsistent with the act. As it was a routine part of the house's practice prior to the commencement of the 2003 act, the practice continues. In a sense section 4(1) works to safeguard the practice that the house followed prior to the coming into operation of the 2003 act. The house's right to discharge a member of the joint committees has been preserved.

Further, the merits of discharging or appointing members is a matter for the house, not the Speaker. If members have reservations about the motion, they may vote against it or seek to amend it. The Speaker's role is to assess whether the motion is in order, and I believe that it is. Whether it should be supported is a matter for the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Motions*

#### **Israel**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (12:17): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house:

- (a) notes the Albanese government's decision to abandon sensible diplomacy and its harsh stance towards our democratic friend Israel;
- (b) notes that this decision aligns the federal Labor government with its Labor left faction; and
- (c) calls on the Premier to publicly distance himself from his faction's stance.

**Leave refused.**

#### **Antisemitism**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:17): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house:

- (a) notes the worrying, but deeply important, findings of the Australian *Jewish University Experience Survey*;
- (b) affirms our bipartisan commitment to fighting antisemitism; and
- (c) calls on the Minister for Education to bring university vice-chancellors, Jewish students and leaders together to work towards a solution.

**Leave refused.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Standing and sessional orders**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (12:18): I move, by leave:

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

**Leave refused.**

#### **Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:18): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 17 August 2023:

Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023.

It is good to be back in the house. I always relish the opportunity to stand here as a member of our progressive Andrews Labor government. We have got a full legislative program, but we also have a lot of work that we get on with and deliver every day in our communities when we are back in our electorates, working with our communities, making sure that we are in touch with the issues that are important to them, and we bring those to the house when and where required in order to enact the legislation that is important to the people of Victoria.

I hope that all members of the house will find it within themselves to support the government business program. I note the Manager of Opposition Business's previous expression of a desire for members of this house to debate the budget take-note motion, which is listed under government business, and I am delighted to say that if time should allow this week, we will go back to that motion. I know that there remain many members on this side of the house who very much look forward to the opportunity that that take-note motion gives for them to rise to their feet and talk directly about the way in which our government's budget delivers on each and every one of our election commitments and continues that commitment that we made to the people of this state back in November 2022 to deliver on those commitments. It is an opportunity to talk about the way in which not just the budget but indeed the increasing legacy that our government delivers to the people of Victoria impacts people within their own communities. It is always a great debate.

Now, with respect to the bills that are before us, I will make a few comments. In terms of the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 there could be no doubt that there is no other government in this country that has done so much in such a short period of time to absolutely reform our energy markets and to take the real, live existential threat of climate change as seriously as this government. We have demonstrated time and time again a commitment to transforming energy generation in this nation, and this bill is part of that theme.

Of course, as people in the house already know, we comfortably surpassed our 2020 renewable energy target of 20 per cent, we increased our 2030 renewable energy target from 50 per cent to 65 per cent, and as a government we will continue to be ambitious as we work towards 95 per cent renewable energy generation by 2035. There are those, perhaps on the other side of the house and in other places, who said it could not be done. Well, we have demonstrated that with determination, political will and the preparedness to go out to the community – to respond to the needs of the community and to work with the community – you can take real action on climate change and you can transform an energy market from coal-fired power to renewable energy, and that is just what we have done. Our Minister for Energy and Resources in this place is the most consequential energy minister of the time, and this will only go to confirm the role that she will play and rightfully hold in the history books when it comes to looking to governments that took real action on climate change.

We will also be talking about the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023. Now, I expect that there will be many speakers on this bill. There will be many people who will take the opportunity, perhaps also particularly on the other side of the house, and I look to the Manager of Opposition Business. I look forward to his effusive comments in relation to the bill, and I think he is in fact the lead speaker on the bill. Of course we have many, many acts that reference –

**James Newbury:** I'm not. Sadly, I'm not.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Oh, aren't you?

**James Newbury:** Sorry to disappoint you.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Oh, well, I am disappointed. But this is an important bill. It is important that we amend references in our legislation from 'Her Majesty' to 'His Majesty', and that is indeed what the bill will do. I commend the government business program to the house.

**James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:23):** The coalition will be opposing the government business program. What concerns the coalition is that the very first item the government has listed for debate this week is another motion. The government has provided advice to the community, to Parliament and to the coalition that the very first thing that they will be debating today is a motion – another motion. In fact it is the seventh motion we will have dealt with in this chamber. What I know that the members on the other side of the house will know quietly – they may not be saying it loudly – is that the government has spent more time debating motions than the budget bills and the budget. The government are so proud of this budget that they are introducing motions that are completely unrelated to the budget and spending parliamentary time each and every week debating those motions. As I have

said in this chamber before, every member on this side of the chamber wants to speak on the budget – every single member. We absolutely want to speak on the budget, and we have had no opportunity. We have all got things to say because all of our communities were left out of the budget. All of our communities were left out.

So I note the comments made by the Leader of the House that the budget take-note motion may be debated this week. It may be. But I know that everybody, as I look around that side of the chamber, wants to speak about the budget, and they have not had the opportunity. Why? Because another motion has been introduced into this place that is unrelated to the budget or any legislative program. I share their disappointment. Members, I share your disappointment, and I would say to you that you need to lean on the Leader of the House. The other side of the chamber should lean on the Leader of the House and say, ‘Why can’t we debate the budget? Why can’t we? Our crowning glory of the year – why can’t we debate our budget?’ I think it is a question all of us are asking in this chamber, and the obvious answer, as we know, is it was a dud.

**Danny O’Brien:** It’s a shocker.

**James NEWBURY:** It was a shocker. It is a series of new taxes that are going to hurt a lot of people in this community. So the very first priority of the government today on their government business program is another motion. Well, I will also note that six motions the government has moved, which I have previously referred to as sledge motions, have been debated so far – six – and there are three more in line which I am sure will see the light of day. One of the ministers introduced one earlier, and I am sure that will be spoken to tomorrow. I am sure that is on tomorrow’s agenda.

Six government motions have been debated so far this term. Three are on the list from the government to be debated shortly, I am sure. And how many non-government motions are there of the 30 that are on the notice paper? Zero. Of the 30, zero, including important motions about ensuring that we all speak out strongly about antisemitism, and I am sure this house should be making that message loud and clear to the community. I am sure that we all would support a motion of that nature, and I would say to the government: please, if you are considering the scheduling timetable for this week and further motions rather than any legislative agenda, I call on you to consider – through the Speaker, of course – an opportunity for this house to speak about important issues of antisemitism, not only in relation to policy but in relation to the university-related report that was released today, which I am sure is deeply distressing to the whole community. This house, if it is spending time on motions, should certainly be spending time on that motion. It is an important priority this house should consider.

But the coalition will be opposing the government business program because frankly there is no legislative agenda. I think that case has been made clear. The government are now refusing to speak to their own budget, and I am sure that members on both sides of the chamber understand why that is the case, why no-one wants to bring up the name of the budget and allow opportunity to speak on that. We are going to spend time again on some motion some minister has moved, and frankly our parliamentary time should be used in other ways. For that reason we will be opposing the government business program.

**Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (12:28):** It gives me great pleasure to rise in support of the government business program today. Once again we have got an incredibly important piece of legislation coming up for debate, which speaks to the real and rapid transition our state is making to delivering a clean energy future. Today that is the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, an omnibus bill that amends the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005 and the National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008 to deliver better outcomes for Victorian energy consumers.

The Minister for Climate Action has been absolutely unrelenting in her ambition to drive forward the reforms that are needed as part of Victoria’s energy transition, and we have seen that week after week with energy legislation coming through the Parliament modernising aspect after aspect of our energy sector to give effect to Labor’s fundamental goal of a safe, affordable, reliable and clean supply of energy for Victorians. This bill is yet another example of that – another example of us getting on with

the job of legislating the necessary changes to Victorian laws as we work towards our targets to run the state on 95 per cent renewables by 2035 and hit net zero emissions by 2045. Our electricity system is undergoing a fundamental technological transformation. Unreliable, dirty coal-fired generators are exiting the market and this year –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the member for Northcote that it is not appropriate to pre-empt debate on the bill.

**Kat THEOPHANOUS:** Thank you. This year rooftop solar has generated nearly five times the power generated by gas in Victoria – we are well on our way. But we also need our laws and our regulations to keep pace with that, and that is why this legislation – this government business program – is so very important. The Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 introduces some vital decision-making criteria and consultation safeguards to be used in the event that the Victorian minister needs to trigger the retailer reliability obligation framework in response to an emerging risk of significant electricity disruption. The RRO puts in place responsibilities on retailers and large customers to secure contracts with electricity producers during periods of forecast lack of supply. So it is literally a bill about keeping the lights on – what could be more important than that? Not only that, but it is about accountability too. It enables regulations to be made in relation to Victoria's wholesale gas market.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I again remind the member for Northcote that she is going into the weeds of the bill, which is not appropriate, and to come back to debating the government business program.

**Kat THEOPHANOUS:** I think every Victorian would be interested in ensuring that our laws reflect the environment that we are now entering in terms of our action on climate change, and that requires changes to our legislation in the form of bills in this house. That is why we have put this on the government business program today.

There are of course other matters to be debated this week. If we have got time, the budget take-note motion is there, and that does allow members to elucidate the impact of strong Labor budgets and what they have done to deliver for our communities, whether that is in health care, education, transport, jobs or the creation of landmark decisions like bringing back the SEC. I am sure there is going to be, as well, some lively discourse in the government business program debate on the ins and outs of our constitutional monarchy as we consider the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023. I am sure there will be contributions from both sides that we will all listen to. We will all gain a better understanding of that bill, why it has been brought forward and what people are thinking about it as we look to the future and how we redefine ourselves going forward.

I think this is a fantastic business program. There are many and varied opportunities for members to contribute thoughtfully and respectfully on issues that matter to Victorians, whether that is about our energy sector and our transition to renewables and having better consumer protections, whether it is about the vital investments we are making in the budget, whether it is about level crossing removals or whether it is just about making sure our statute books are accurate. I support the government business program.

**Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:33):** I rise for the first time to talk on the government business program. As the Manager of Opposition Business said, the coalition will be opposing the business program this week.

It is very nice to be able to talk about the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. Down in the heart of the Latrobe Valley, in the seat of Morwell, where I come from – the hub of making energy for Victoria – it is a topic that we talk about often, and it is nice that we can get up and actually talk about these bills. But it is a very, very thin program when we are talking about technical changes within the energy sector. A lot of them have come up in the past few weeks, which we have debated. I know on

this side of the house, and especially among regional members, we do like to stand up and debate the energy legislation bills as they come in. Sometimes we feel that the time line between our current energy source and heading into renewables is a very, very tight program, so we do like being able to get up and put forward not only our thoughts but the thoughts of the people of the Latrobe Valley.

Speaking about that, being able to, as we heard before, get back to talking on the budget take-note motion, that is the pressing issue of the day with people that come into my office and in correspondence that I receive. I know we need to talk about the energy legislation and to make changes there, but we need to also respect the thoughts and the concerns of our constituents and what they want us to be talking about here in the chamber, and that is the right to talk on the budget take-note motion about the cost of living and funding for actual places and programs in the Latrobe Valley – and I use the Youth Space program in the seat of Morwell that has not been funded within the budget as an example. We need to be able to get up and actually talk about these programs and the impact that the budget is having on the general public – you know, the average punter on the street. It is very hard for them to make ends meet and to put food on the table and, as part of the energy legislation, as we heard before, to keep the lights on. They are having to make choices.

I know we are super excited to stand up and talk about statute law instead of about the budget take-note motion. Well, I think it is the other way around: we should be getting our chance to talk about what the people want from us inside this chamber to make their lives a little bit easier. It is going to be fantastic, and I am sure everyone will be geed-up to talk about statute law and formally changing the name of the Queen to the King. That is going to be super exciting. I know it is stuff that needs to be done to make sure that we are in line and everything is running properly in the house, but I also think that surely the government can come up with some other things that we can debate here – things that the actual, as I said before, Joe Public, the man on the street, the lady on the street, the families that are doing it tough, want us to bring here to Parliament to debate.

I notice that the Manager of Opposition Business does say that we will be opposing the government's business program most weeks. That is because the government business program is super thin and it gives us nothing to talk about realistically. We want to get our teeth into legislation that is going to make a difference for the public – for the people in the seat of Morwell and the Latrobe Valley, for regional Victorians around the place – stuff that is really concerning them. I know we are going to be talking about the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 and statute law also, and I am pumped about all this type of stuff, but let us get on board with what the general public wants us to talk about: the budget, what we missing out on and how hard it is with the cost of living at the moment.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (12:38): It is my pleasure to rise in support of the government business program for this coming week. We do have two important bills to debate: the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023 and the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. The Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill is not the most earth-shattering piece of legislation which has been brought into this house to be debated; that is undeniable. It is not legislation which will make a material difference to the lives of Victorians per se, but it is important nonetheless, because accuracy is important.

Statute law amendment is a longstanding and common feature of parliamentary legislative practice. It has the purpose of addressing formal issues. It makes editorial changes and modernises drafting styles. It is important to be correct. The bill is going to change all references to 'Her Majesty the Queen' to 'His Majesty the King' across all effective legislation in our state. That will ensure that our acts are accurate and will reflect that the head of state now is a man, namely, King Charles III. The old history teacher in me has to say that it is interesting that four times this has occurred since Victoria was a state – four times we have had a change in gender of the head of state. The first time was in 1837, and if you want to find the time before that, you need to go back 234 years in history to the death of Queen Elizabeth I. It does not happen that often. It is happening now. We need to deal with it, and we will.

Moving on to the second bill up for debate, the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 is an omnibus bill, and it is designed to strengthen the electricity and gas regulatory framework. The changes will enhance the protections afforded to energy consumers, which is practically each and every Victorian. Therefore, in my humble opinion, it is quite important legislation. The Minister for Energy and Resources has been driving an incredibly positive and full program of reform of legislation in terms of the future of energy in Victoria, and that is absolutely to be commended. As you have already heard, the bill will amend the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005 to establish Victorian-specific controls for the retailer reliability obligation ministerial instrument, and it will also amend the National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008 to provide the Australian Energy Regulator access to higher penalties in response to non-compliance by participants in Victoria's wholesale gas market. Now, that might not sound terribly exciting for everyone here, but it is crucial and critical for this state that we have legislation which keeps pace with the needs of our state now and into the future. There are very, very few people in this state who are completely off the grid and do not rely on electricity and gas, so I do not think we can say that it is thin to be debating this.

In addition, we have two motions, including the budget take-note motion – which is being brought on, so let us clear up any confusion there. That will continue from the previous sitting weeks. I have to say there have been some excellent contributions in terms of that. I will admit I was slightly daunted when I saw I had to speak for 15 minutes on it, only to find out I completely ran out of time and could have kept going on and on, because we had so much there, people. We had so much there, and I am really looking forward to the future contributions to be made in this regard.

Some of these debates will be without much controversy. I cannot see there being a lot of battling over the statute law amendment changes, for sure. Others will invite a more rigorous exchange, and that is a wonderful thing. That is what this place is for. The word 'parliament' is derived from the French word 'parlement' – excuse me if my pronunciation is off – and it is literally a translation of the word 'speaking'. We certainly do a lot of that in this place, so I tell you what: if there was ever a workplace that was aptly named, it is this one.

When I last participated in this government business program debate, I did say I was looking forward to hearing the contributions from all the members in this chamber – government, opposition, every seat occupied here – and I am pleased to say that still remains the case. I am always keen to hear the contested ideas and insights brought into here. We all have our own stories, we all have our own experiences. We are the voices for our electorates – all so different. I am sure there is not a single one of us who would disagree with the fact that we all believe our electorate is completely unique. So we all walk in here with their voices as we speak, and that is a fabulous thing. Bring on the debate, bring on the motions, let us have a contest of ideas – that is what we are here for.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Narracan, who has moved seats.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (12:43): Apparently I have been promoted or demoted – I do not know, but I have come down a seat. I am happy to rise today on the government business program. I would like to think I was excited about it, but I do not feel that excited about the program at this point in time. It seems to me that the government is really, really struggling for ideas at the moment. I think it is pertinent to point out that we are only in this chamber 16 weeks a year, three days a week, so what we really need to do is make the most of that time. I think Victorians deserve better; they deserve real debate on real issues that matter to them. As the member for Brighton stated earlier, we should really be debating the budget and continuing to debate the budget, because it has affected so many Victorians. Even in the last sitting week, we were talking about the Commonwealth Games and what that is going to cost Victorians.

But what is really concerning me is the fact that back in March Porter Davis Homes went broke and cost thousands of Victorians money – a lot of money. The government had to stump up \$15 million as well. I am amazed that even now we still have not introduced a bill to protect consumers in the construction industry. We have ignored the problems of construction – and it is not getting any better.



Week after week there are builders going into liquidation. That is affecting everyday Victorians. It is affecting their dreams. I would have thought the government would have got its act together and introduced a bill along those lines. I understand we have to do the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023, but honestly, let the government speak, let the opposition speak and just move it on. It is not so critical that it should take up all the time. I am so concerned about the Victorians at the moment who are really doing it tough, and we should be debating legislation that affects them, those people that are struggling. I have over 1000 people in my community at the moment that cannot get a home. We should be introducing bills that really affect everyday Victorians and change their lives.

The Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 – I am always happy to rise and talk about energy. I love talking about energy, with my background, but the problem with this is I have listened to the commentary on energy, what a wonderful job they are doing and that it is going to bring the price of energy down – but it has not. No-one in this chamber can tell me today that their electricity bill or their gas bill has dropped in price – no-one. Every bill the government has put forward on energy to date has driven the costs up. The cost of living is out of control. People cannot afford to pay their energy bills at the moment, and then we are talking about getting rid of gas. We have not got the foundation right on renewables to get rid of gas, so I do not know why the government keeps pushing this agenda. Do it step by step, do it methodically, but introduce bills into this house that are worthy of debate. Introduce bills into this house that are going to help everyday Victorians and improve their lives.

We still do not have a resolution to the Commonwealth Games debacle, and that would be nice for Victorians to know. I do not know, but if you sign a contract, I would have thought you would know the exit clause before you sign the contract so people actually know what it is going to cost – but apparently not. I can only put this one way: the government needs to pull its finger out with the limited time we have in this house and put forward bills that really do help everyday Victorians. They are the bills I want to debate. They are the bills I am happy to go toe to toe on with the government across the chamber. I would love the government to put forward some bills that have some context, some bills that actually matter to Victorians, not the bills that we have got to debate today. They are pretty wishy-washy bills. I think the government are extremely tired, and they have run out of ideas because week in, week out we have to debate this stuff. This is why we oppose the government business program.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the member for Narracan about inappropriate, unparliamentary language.

**A member** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Indeed. The question is that the government business program be agreed to.

#### **Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (52):* 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, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

**Motion agreed to.*****Members statements*****Berwick electorate roads**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (12:55): Last week I had an adjournment for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the response came back around some of the conditions on the roads from the minister. Of the many roads we mentioned, she managed to focus on one specific road and not the other roads. We wanted to raise the issue that this is a big issue in our community – the quality of some of the roads down there, the repairs and the lack of maintenance – but we found that the response was on the one road that is not the responsibility of the minister, and it has been passed to another minister. My community need the answers in relation to what is happening with the road infrastructure down there, and they are sick and tired of it being passed from one minister to another to avoid answering questions for my community.

**Government performance**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (12:55): Corruption in the state impacts us all. When the government of the day is focused on what is important to them and their mates and their own personal gain, we all lose. This corruption leads to bad decisions like the Commonwealth Games, a decision that will cost billions of dollars and was all about protecting Labor seats at an election. Labor have lost focus and lost their way, and it is comments like ‘It costs what it costs’ that do not work in our house but that the government think they can use. Imagine saying ‘It costs what it costs’ when you cannot turn the lights on or the gas on to cook at home because you have no money or ‘It costs what it costs’ to put food on the table and fill your plate when the credit card is already at capacity. Victorians are sick and tired of being told that things need to be the way they are and to just deal with them. What they need are real solutions instead of a tired old government who will not help them.

**Ashwood electorate sports clubs**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (12:56): I rise to do a quick update on all things sport in the Ashwood district, and it seems only fitting to start with a game that quite literally stopped the nation on Saturday night, with our good old Tillies keeping the finals dream alive and at the same time making history as Australia’s first-ever semifinalists in a FIFA World Cup. But let us not forget our wonderful netballers, and let us congratulate the Diamonds who, for the 12th time, I might add, have won the Netball World Cup.

It is not just elite sport where our athletes are shining though, as we know community sport and local clubs play a pivotal role in shaping tomorrows sporting greats. The Eastern Lions Soccer Club is one of these clubs, and I was lucky enough a couple of weeks ago to be with them to celebrate their 60th anniversary, which is an amazing achievement and such a huge milestone. This club is an integral part of our local community and has been for 60 years. I extend a huge thankyou and congratulations to president Ange Stamatelos and vice-president Norm Wilcox for organising such a great night and to all of the Eastern Lions community on such an important milestone.

I also popped down, over in the Glen Waverley area, to see my constituents playing with the East Burwood Rams. Thanks to Libby Hadjiloukas and vice-presidents Peter Storey and Matt Scarffe who invited me down there. I am going to run out of time. Maybe I will do a second half next week when we are back – but a shout-out to the Waverley Blues under-13s.

**Leongatha deaths**

**Danny O’BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:58): I rise today to grieve on behalf of my beautiful community of South Gippsland, most notably the towns of Korumburra and Leongatha. The last few weeks have been a devastating time for many in our community, and I extend my condolences and, I am sure, those of all members to the families and friends of Gail and Don Patterson and Heather Wilkinson. We extend our best wishes to Ian Wilkinson and send our prayers that he may recover

from the critical condition that he is now in. The Pattersons and Wilkinsons were and are well known throughout the Korumburra community through their roles as staff and teachers at Korumburra Secondary College, the Baptist church and their community work. As one local told me, 'They were the sorts of families that rural and regional communities are built upon.' While we grieve with their loved ones, we should also respect the family's wishes for privacy and respect. As a former journalist and now the local MP, I am acutely aware of the level of public interest in this story. However, this is our community and these are our people, and I appeal to all Victorians to recognise that this is a sensitive time for our towns. We should also respect process and acknowledge a police investigation is ongoing and that the vast majority of us do not know the full facts of this incident. Speculation and rumours are not helpful to our communities. Korumburra and Leongatha are beautiful towns full of beautiful people in a beautiful region. That will not change, despite this incredibly sad time for many in our community.

### **Elonera Preschool**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (12:59): It was great to join the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood and member for Footscray to officially open the new Elonera kindergarten buildings this week. It was great to join with the committee, led by Janique Hankins, and the range of parents that for 60 years have contributed to this wonderful volunteer-led community kinder. To Hema Srekrishnan, who is an incredible educator who put her mark on this new three-year-old space, we thank you for your dedication, and we thank all the educators and education support staff that work in early childhood education.

It started out as a dream with then president Anna Hughes, who is a wonderful leader in our local community, and she set out on a mission for a number of years – after chatting under that historic gum tree that has been there for many, many years – to go about doubling the capacity. It will be 61 places at Elonera kindergarten. And it comes at a time of significant reform in early childhood education in Victoria. We see three-year-old kinder going up to 15 hours placement by 2029, and then we will see pre-prep, with 30 hours of critical, important and rich education in early childhood. We have a shout-out for all our early childhood educators. We have seen a lot of development with the City of Kingston in partnership across our local community, whether it is Acacia Avenue kindergarten, Chelsea Heights Kindergarten or Chelsea Kindergarten recently, and all of the significant investments that have been made. We are really proud of what we have been achieving in early childhood education in the Mordialloc electorate.

### **WorkCover premiums**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (13:01): My members statement is to address to this government the huge crisis that is unfolding as so many of the small businesses, philanthropic groups and others – manufacturers, farmers – right throughout the Polwarth electorate have been walloped these past couple of weeks with their WorkCover premiums that have come out. This is a massive cost-of-living issue for so many organisations and businesses in the Polwarth electorate. As an electorate that has some of the highest rates of self-employment and of small business owners, this is really hitting the hip pockets and the nerves of so many people throughout the Polwarth region.

Over the weekend I spoke to many electricians, sparkies, plumbers, builders, carpenters, farmers and small manufacturers, all of whom have not only had their WorkCover premiums double but in many cases had the equivalent of a wage of a whole extra person in their employ. These WorkCover premium increases are massive. They are way more than what the government said that they were going to do, and in fact in some cases they are 50, 60 and 70 per cent increases. This is a huge hit to the disposable income and to the ability of local businesses to continue to invest and employ in regional and rural Victoria. Most concerningly, when I spoke to some of the welfare agencies – who are absolutely being clobbered as well at a time when their funding for urgent community services is not increasing – this is hitting frontline services.

### Geelong Green Spine project

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (13:02): Geelong's inner city is coming to life, with work underway on the next section of the Green Spine project. The Green Spine initiative is part of the *Revitalising Central Geelong Action Plan*, which is being delivered with the support of the \$500 million Geelong City Deal. The Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation is an integral part of the team delivering the project, ensuring this new public space incorporates cultural heritage features. It will feature native plants, seats, outdoor dining spaces and public art and connect the Geelong station precinct to Johnstone Park and Eastern Park through six blocks along Malop Street. Once complete, the botanic walk and bike lane will be extended and complemented by native planting, better lighting and rehabilitation works off the road.

### First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (13:03): On another matter, Victoria's newly elected First Peoples' Assembly has taken its seat in the Parliament of Victoria for the first time with new members who will negotiate the historic statewide treaty giving Victoria's First People true self-determination in matters that affect their communities. After First Nations Victorians voted in record numbers in the second treaty elections, it was an honour to attend the new assembly's first meeting on Wurundjeri country, congratulating members and newly elected co-chairs Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg. The co-chairs will lead the assembly members work to represent Victoria's First Peoples as equal partners in negotiations towards statewide treaty.

### Roger Boness

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (13:04): I wish to pay tribute to community stalwart and former president of Mount Evelyn RSL Roger Boness, who sadly passed away late June. Roger Boness served our country with distinction in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968 attached to the 106th Field Battery 4th Field Regiment as a forward observer, spending most of those torrid years on patrol in the jungles, providing artillery support. Adjusting to life after Vietnam was difficult, but with wife Julie by his side Roger immersed himself in community life in Mount Evelyn, including playing for Mount Evelyn Football Club and becoming president of Mount Evelyn RSL in 2011, where he demonstrated his immense passion about the rights, benefits and welfare of local ex-servicepeople and their families, creating more ways for members to socialise and care for one another. Roger was instrumental in the improvement of the Mount Evelyn war memorial gardens, installing honour plaques, a howitzer, lighting and seating, and he oversaw Anzac dawn services that came to have attendances of more than 3000 residents. It was tremendous to see Roger duly recognised for his dedicated service, awarded Victorian Senior Citizen of the Year in 2017, RSL life member in 2019 and the RSL meritorious service medal in 2022. Deepest sympathies to his children Alice and Stuart, grandson Riley, his friends and especially his RSL mates. Roger will be dearly missed in the Mount Evelyn community. Vale, Roger Boness.

### Casey Malayalee Onam celebrations

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (13:05): I recently had the pleasure of attending the Casey Malayalee multicultural festival on 12 August with my colleagues the very good member for Cranbourne and the federal member for Holt. I am so proud of our vibrant and very multicultural community and all that they offer my electorate of Narre Warren South as well as the rest of Victoria. Hundreds of local community members attended the event at Arthur Wren Hall in Hampton Park, which recognised Onam. Onam is an ancient annual harvest festival at which Hindus celebrate the return of the legendary King Mahabali and commemorate Vamana. The event has significance in Indian culture, and this celebration through song, dance, dinner and incredible food brought the whole community together.

The Casey municipality has the highest Indian population, at 8.9 per cent, with over 32,000 residents born in India. Casey Malayalee is a union of Malayalam-speaking families residing in the City of

Casey that was formed as a not-for-profit, non-political organisation to assist the Indian community in their cultural, social and educational development. I would like to thank Casey Malayalee for their hard work in putting this Onam event together and their president Girish Pillai for such a warm welcome and for the absolutely wonderful hospitality.

#### **Patricia Smith**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (13:07): I rise today to pay tribute to Patricia Smith OAM, a wonderful lady in my electorate who recently celebrated her 90th birthday. Patricia is a much-loved, well-known and respected member of the community who has spent most of her life serving the community. In 1976 Patricia became the first woman in Victoria to be appointed as a town clerk. Town clerk was equivalent to a current council chief executive officer role, a position she held until 1981. Patricia had 32 years in local government, in which she began as a junior telephonist in 1949 and went on to achieve a very successful career path. Patricia was definitely a trailblazer and ahead of her time. She was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia on 26 January 2004 to acknowledge her service to local government and to the community.

Following Patricia's time in local government, she continued to make a difference in the community. Patricia was instrumental in the establishment of GV Hospice, a wonderful palliative care service established in the 1980s. Patricia established Friends of Hospice and was the president for many years, and she is still volunteering and fundraising to this day. I have known Patricia for many years, and I have looked up to her as a mentor and with such admiration for all that she has achieved and the support that she still continues to give to the community to this day. Patricia plays an important part in history that will continue to inspire other women to follow their desired career path. Happy 90th birthday, Patricia.

#### **Albert Park College**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (13:08): I was very happy to attend the Albert Park College *Local Legends* annual music concert 2023, and I salute the performers: Ruya, Fletcher, Martin, Millie, Jethro, Madeline, Nicholas, Lucy, Tallula, Nikki, Nina, Summer, Radha, Tristan, Saskia, Lila, Shanni, Mila, Felix, Arki, Tommy, Ava, Roxy, Bethany, George, Elise, Juliette, Aaron, Lucy, Gabriel, Mathilde, Jasmine, Indianah, Kaleb, Lachlan, Cameron, Timothee, Scarlet, Henry, Lily, Aidan, Libby, Elias, Johnathan, Max, Zara, Natalie, Mischa, James, Charlotte, Hazel, Hannah, Will, James, Madeline, Matilda, Nicole, Ben, Ashley, Audrey, Harriet, Luke, Seb, Leila, Saurav, Sabrina, Harry, Leah, Dante, Ethan, Ari, Jack, Benjamin, Arian, Rivki, Harvey, Harry, Lleyton, Claire, Gabrielle, Oscar, Leo, Jose, Adeline, Zephan, Ijsbrand, Lucian, Madeline, Sharon, Leif, Owen, Jesse, India, Ruby, Arabella, Lulu and Muqing. Oh, my goodness, I got there. It was the most brilliant performance. It had a terrific variety of music and talent. What a wonderful compilation from the school and a great way for everyone to be involved. You can see from the long list that there were so many students incorporated into this, showing their best and giving it all locally at Memo Music Hall in St Kilda. You cannot beat that. It was truly a privilege to be able to witness it, and a credit to the teachers of the school who were able to put this show together in such a wonderful way.

#### **Government performance**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (13:10): I rise to condemn the Premier and his Treasurer and their Labor government for their inability to manage Victoria's finances. Not only has this government created a crippling \$171 billion debt for Victorians by 2026 but Labor will add a further \$125 billion from its already over-budget Suburban Rail Loop. The Commonwealth Games is but another botched event by Labor. Failing to properly do the costings, Labor have added an extra billion dollars Victorians have to pay for an event they will not even be able to watch or participate in. Labor members might fail to understand how debt actually works, considering how much of it they have accrued. To simplify it for those opposite, this debt has amassed \$22 million in interest repayments a day. That is \$154 million a week that could be going to improve health care, education and the condition of our roads. Instead it is going towards paying for Labor's mistakes. It is clear when Labor mismanages

money, Victorians all pay and Victoria runs out of money. When Labor runs out of money, they come after yours.

### **Preston High School**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (13:11): I rise to acknowledge the wonderful production of *Matilda Jr.* put on by Preston High School last month. School productions are always exciting, but this one was particularly so because it was the very first full school production by the new Preston High School, which was built, funded and opened by this Labor government. I want to thank Sean Butler and all his team there for the great work that they are doing to embed the arts into the emerging progressive culture of that school.

I did get a chance to catch a matinee production. It was absolutely fantastic. I will not, like the member for Albert Park, read out the entire cast list, but I do want to acknowledge some of the great performances. Of course in *Matilda* it is the baddies who are most fun to play, and a credit to Quinn MacCartney as Ms Trunchbull; Nicola, Jasper and Frankie as the evil Wormwood family; and Vinh King for a great cameo as the lead Russian gangster at the end. I also want to recognise the two other amazing leads: Chloe Bellchambers as Ms Honey and Riley Richards as Matilda. I met Riley's grandmother after the show, Ursula Richards. She had flown all the way from Western Australia to see her granddaughter's performance, and I imagine that all of the friends and family who were there would have been very proud of the cast and the crew for their wonderful efforts.

Finally, I should note that this performance took place in the Northern College of the Arts and Technology auditorium, which is a fantastic performance space. We are very grateful to principal Raffaella Galati-Brown and all her team for their support of the performing arts across our community.

### **Rental accommodation**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (13:13): Right now 82 per cent of renters are experiencing housing stress and many renters are just one rent rise away from homelessness. I have with me the signatures of 5000 Victorians who are calling for an immediate freeze on rents, and polling shows us that 60 per cent of Australians actually support a rent freeze. Yet we heard overnight that what national cabinet is considering at their national meeting is they are planning on locking in unlimited yearly rent increases. If this is Labor's big renting reform, I can tell the public now it does not work. I know that it does not work because that is the policy that we have here in Victoria right now, and I hear from renters every single day who are telling me that their annual rent increases are through the roof. Under this policy, Melbourne rents have gone up 14.6 per cent in the last year. That is the biggest annual increase that we have seen since the year 2000. It is almost as though Labor is deliberately locking in failure for renters, because under this plan the housing crisis will get worse. Ahead of their meeting tomorrow, more than 5000 Victorians are urging the Premier to introduce an immediate two-year rent freeze followed by permanent caps on rent increases. Until they do, every time a renter's rent goes up, just remember it is Labor's fault.

### **McClelland College**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (13:14): A huge congratulations to the students and staff of McClelland College in Frankston. Overnight I heard that they have achieved an *Age* newspaper Schools that Excel prize. They are a winner of Schools that Excel among every school in Victoria. McClelland College – the staff, the students and the wonderful parents and carers, through their unwavering commitment to education, in the education electorate that is Frankston – have achieved this award, so congratulations.

### **Frankston RSL**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (13:15): I would also like to pass on my congratulations to Frankston RSL. They have been awarded the prestigious community club award in the metro area for 2023. Frankston RSL was selected from 1000-plus licensed clubs across metropolitan and regional

Victoria, acknowledging their continued contributions to veterans, staff and the wider Frankston community. Well done to the Frankston RSL.

#### **Veterans Card Victoria**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (13:15): I was delighted to join my good friend the Minister for Veterans Natalie Suleyman at the Frankston Naval Memorial Club. We had the opportunity to speak with the club about the new veterans card and the support we are providing for veterans, and don't they deserve it. I encourage all Victorian veterans to sign up for this wonderful card. We went through it on the day, and there were many people who had not yet heard about it or had not had the opportunity to sign up for that card. We have already had many veterans come to my office for a hand just to sign up to this new card, which gives veterans community benefits. We thank them for their service.

#### **Energy policy**

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (13:16): Greenwashing, virtue signalling, scaremongering, dictatorial: this is how Victorians – the living ones, that is, not the dear departed that have signed up for ALP branch-stacking purposes – view this Labor government's asinine ban on new residential gas connections from 2024. We have an abundant supply of natural gas, all bubbling away under mud – no fracking required. Eighty per cent of households are already connected to gas. Each year 40,000 new homes join the gas network. It is how we heat our homes, cook our meals and have hot showers. Yet without consultation you pull the plug. People with gas now fear the future. The uncertainty in households is real. The uncertainty for the industry is palpable. How does this play out with the \$12 million this government has earmarked for a hydrogen gas hub in Wodonga? It is the green future for gas, yet you are ditching the infrastructure it needs.

Let us tell some of the home truths. Natural gas is cleaner than coal-fuelled electricity. Gas home heating and cooking is just 2 per cent of our emissions, not the 17 per cent you spin. It is estimated the switch to electricity will increase demand by 500 per cent. How will the grid possibly cope? You say it is about providing cheaper energy. Is anyone seeing cheaper power bills? Victorians demand the government come up with a better way, a cheaper way, a realistic way. Stop trying to woo the woke, and govern for the whole state.

#### **Bacchus Marsh Country Women's Association**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (13:17): In my electorate we are incredibly lucky to have such wonderful volunteers, both young and old. It was fantastic to get to the Bacchus Marsh CWA last week and spend some time with that lovely group. The Country Women's Association is such a vibrant part of our region, and it is always a pleasure to pop in and say hello, and of course I would never say no to testing some of their baking. Karin does an amazing job with the catering, and I highly recommend a visit. You can turn up any time Monday to Wednesday between 9 am and 12 pm.

#### **City of Ballarat Youth Awards**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (13:18): On Friday night I attended a celebration of the wonderful young people of Ballarat through the City of Ballarat Youth Awards. This annual event pays tribute to young people making important contributions in a whole range of sectors, including community, sport, diversity and inclusion. Keeley Johnson and Jasmine Goon were named as the winners of the major awards for ages 18 to 25 and 12 to 17, but big congratulations to all of the winners and nominees. Congratulations to Albert Mumba, the Delacombe Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Group, Wendy England, Nikki Bell, Mitchell Hardman, Delana Wright, Gabriel Gervasoni, Jasmine Goon and Noah Quick.

#### **Mount Clear College**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (13:18): On Sunday morning I attended an event to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. Well done to Sam from Mount Clear College on your wonderful reading.

**Maureen Leahy**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (13:19): This morning Meadows Primary is farewelling the incredible Maureen Leahy. I first met Maureen as a school mum dropping off my kids at the after-school music program at the Meadows. She always made everyone feel so welcome and special. As a candidate and later member of Parliament I came to learn about the wonderful work she does in our community and the incredible legacy she leaves as the very first community hub leader.

Over a decade ago Maureen saw the need to start a playgroup to assist children from marginalised backgrounds and to refer parents to services. She understood what the community needed and got to work. Based on her model, Community Hubs Australia was born, and there are now 100 hubs around the country. These hubs are incredible resources and respond exactly to the needs of local families and communities. They make people feel welcome and heard and give people a place to belong and learn, especially those who are navigating life in a new country. We will never know exactly how many lives Maureen has made better by her work, her warmth and her wonderful self, but it would be thousands upon thousands. On behalf of the people of Broadmeadows, I thank her for the life of service, her vision, her sense of social justice, her can-do attitude, her determination, her leadership and collaboration and all that she has taught us, always with such humour, humility and grace. Maureen has changed the world for the better, and we are so grateful for her contribution and her life of service to others.

**Simon Crean**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (13:20): I rise to pay tribute to the Honourable Simon Crean, who passed away on 25 June 2023. I first came to know Simon, who was my local federal representative, in 2001. I later met him at local branch meetings. Simon was very supportive of the multicultural non-profit organisations in my area and championed their funding to ensure everybody had opportunities to have a better life. He offered me great guidance and support with my first council election in 2012 for the City of Greater Dandenong, which I won. His endorsements and advice were a blessing. I recall at community events we both attended that people would go up to him with big, open arms, offering a welcoming like he was their family member. If Simon was a sport player, he would be considered a champion of the game. He certainly was a champion in my community, where many residents from Asia and Europe made the electorate of Hotham their home. I send my heartfelt condolences to his partner Carole and family. Vale, Simon Crean.

**Hastings electorate community events**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (13:21): As a new member, I thought the winter break was a time we had a break, but in fact it is a wonderful opportunity to get out in the community, and I want to share a little bit of what I did. I had a tour of Cerberus navy base in Crib Point. I visited the Bittern and Baxter men's sheds, attended a business lunch with the Treasurer at Cptn Jack's in Somerville and gave a speech and raised the flag at the Willum Warrain for NAIDOC week. I opened the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art's new exhibition by First Nations artists, called *Between Waves*, and represented the Premier at the finale of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. I had several briefings about the Port of Hastings and the wonderful opportunities being presented there, became a toy librarian for an hour and did a photo shoot with the new locally built pilot boat at Yaringa boat ramp.

I also had a fabulous visit to the Funky Farm in Hastings. I judged a cooking competition at Padua College and toured Bayside college and also Sparrow Early Learning Centre in Somerville. I reported on the upgrades of the play equipment at Olivia Way in Hastings and attended the playground opening at Yarralumla Reserve in Langwarrin. I met with various organisations from Frankston City Council, Blue Ribbon, Kindred Clubhouse, Mornington Peninsula council, Searoad Ferries, Peninsula Aero Club and Bunurong Land Council. I attended a citizenship ceremony and visited the Coolart historic homestead. I had morning tea with the federal member Peta Murphy and 100 local residents of Langwarrin. There was much, much more that I did, and I have to say I loved every minute being out and about, talking to my community about what matters to them. I thank them.



### Victorian Manufacturing Hall of Fame Awards

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (13:23): The Victorian Manufacturing Hall of Fame Awards night was held on Thursday 10 August, and I was honoured to attend to witness a local manufacturer, That's Amore Cheese, win the award for leader in food and beverage. I was also proud to see a number of companies that operate in the Thomastown electorate that made it as finalists, although not achieving the highest award on this day. But there will be plenty more opportunities to showcase the exceptional quality and innovation combined with handcrafted tradition that mark many of the businesses in the electorate at future award nights. The Victorian Manufacturing Hall of Fame Awards were established under the Bracks Labor government in 2001 and pay homage to Victorian made and those that make it. We are the manufacturing centre of Australia, and it is fitting that we celebrate the skills, dedication, determination, hard work and creativity that make Victorian manufacturing succeed. This is a night to recognise and applaud the 260,000 Victorian manufacturing workers, the 23,000 businesses and the \$31 billion that manufacturing brings to our economy each year. Congratulations to owner-operator of That's Amore Cheese, Giorgio Linguanti, and the team on achieving this award, and for all the passion and care you put into your cheesemaking. I have to say your cafe and deli is very good too; maybe next year we can agitate for an award category for best onsite cafe and deli, because, as a customer, I am sure you would take that one home too.

### Rangebank Primary School

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (13:24): I am very pleased to have had the opportunity recently to visit Rangebank Primary School. It is a really important school and a school we have made a commitment to, but I was delighted to be able to have a tour with not just the principal but also the school leaders. We have such amazing schools in Cranbourne. This school will actually have the resources it needs to bring it up to date to really fulfil the potential of the students. I commend the school.

### Motions

#### Level crossing removals

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (13:25): I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) the government has removed 72 dangerous and congested level crossings;
- (2) in 2018 the government promised to remove 75 level crossings by 2025, and is already two years ahead of schedule; and
- (3) the government will remove a total of 110 level crossings by 2030.

I am absolutely delighted to speak to the motion that I have just moved, and whilst we are in August 2023 I want to take colleagues back to the end of 2013, where at the time – some will remember that time; those in the construction industry remember that time – there was not much going on in the construction industry here in Victoria. There was no infrastructure pipeline to speak of, projects were being promised and never delivered and there was a bit of a sad and sorry state. The industry was crying out for a pipeline from the government of projects that it could not just support and put its resources to but, more importantly, employ people in. I remember at the time unemployment rates were going up, jobs were going out the door, and I also remember that time well because the then Labor opposition was working very hard on putting forward a range of policy offerings to the Victorian community. One such document that we released at the end of 2013 was *Project 10,000*. Now, I know the use of props is disorderly, but I do have it in my hand: *Project 10,000* – trains, roads, jobs. It was a weighty tome, as we can see, and it referred to how we were going to build the metro rail, we were going to invest in roads – I will come back to level crossings – but most importantly we were going to support a pipeline of projects that was going to back in at least 10,000 jobs across the Victorian community, 10,000 jobs. Now, one of the other key –

**A member** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Oh, hang on. I will get to how we went. One of the key elements in *Project 10,000* was the commitment to removing 50 dangerous and congested level crossings, and we actually said that given there had only been seven level crossings removed in the previous 10 years, we set a progressive target. We said that 20 would be gone by 2018 and 50 would be gone by 2022.

**Pauline Richards** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Well, I take up the interjection from the member for Cranbourne, who used that much-loved Dennis Denuto phrase, ‘Tell him he’s dreaming’. That is exactly what the Premier of the day said in response. Well, not exactly, I may be paraphrasing just a little bit; however, he did cast doubt on this commitment around level crossings. Dr Napthine, the Premier of the day, said he did not think it was possible to remove 50 level crossings in eight years. He also went on to say it would cause enormous chaos on our roads and rail: ‘When you do a level crossing you have to minimise the disruption.’ He is a clever lad. He is a clever lad, that former Premier. He was right on that point, but he was not right on the point that it was not possible to remove 50 crossings in eight years, because guess what, it is 2023, we have removed 72 level crossings and indeed we are far ahead of schedule. We removed 17 level crossings in 2018 alone, which took us well beyond the 20, which meant that not only did we get to removing 50 level crossings by 2022, we were so far ahead of schedule. At this point – and I will come back to this point on many occasions in my contribution – this is all thanks to the hard work of the workforce who are working across the construction industry, the manufacturing industry and the engineering industry, but also a shout-out to those other industries that support the construction sector: the catering sector, the hospitality sector and professional services. There are a massive range of professions that work on our level crossings, and each and every one of them, I can tell you because I have met quite a few of them on my journey, are so proud of the work that they are doing to get rid of dangerous and congested level crossings.

But I digress from where I was on the chronological story. As I said, we started off with that commitment to having 20 gone by 2018 and 50 by 2022. When we realised we were so far ahead of schedule, we updated the commitment to make it 75 level crossings by 2025. As I have already pointed out to the house, we have just clocked over number 72 – and I will come back to 71 and 72 in the seat of Caulfield in a moment. Then we got so far ahead of schedule that in 2021 – remember that in 2021, on our original time line, we were only meant to be getting to 50. Well, we have far exceeded that. In 2021 we updated that to be 85 by 2025, and then again we committed last year to getting that program to 110 dangerous and congested level crossings being removed across the Melbourne metropolitan network by 2030.

Because of this work rate, not only have we been able to commit to removing 110 dangerous and congested level crossings by 2030, we have also been able to see commitments to entire lines being level crossing free – entire train corridors – like that of my good friend the member for Sunbury. The Sunbury line will be level crossing free. My good friend – you all have to be my good friends now; we are all good friends on this side of the house. Cranbourne will be level crossing free. Pakenham – our great member for Pakenham – will be level crossing free. Lilydale will be level crossing free. Werribee will be level crossing free as well. And do you know what this also means? It does not only mean that those corridors are safer corridors, it also means that we can run more trains on each and every one of those corridors.

This is particularly important, because do you know what else is happening in the next couple of years? It is something else that was committed to in *Project 10,000*: the opening of the Metro Tunnel. The Metro Tunnel is going to give the Melbourne train network one continuous train line, a 97-kilometre-long level-crossing-free corridor from Sunbury to Pakenham. So the member for Sunbury, if he wants to pop over and visit his good friend the member for Pakenham, can jump on one of our high-capacity metro trains, one of the brand new trains that are made here in Victoria – again, another commitment and another deliberate policy setting of the Andrews Labor government. He can jump on that train, that brand new high-capacity train, and travel all the way through to Pakenham. He could get off at Dandenong and pop over and see the member for Cranbourne, and all of that journey will be level

crossing free. This is what happens when you have a set of policies that back in a local workforce, whether it is in the manufacturing of rolling stock or whether it is in having a program that supports a pipeline. It is also what happens when you have a government that tackles the big and complex projects like the Metro Tunnel, and we are determined to back it in.

**A member:** There are a lot of women.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will come to women; I am coming to women on these projects as well. On the journey, we have not always had the universal support of this place for our level crossing removal projects or indeed for our Metro Tunnel project either. But I am not talking about the Metro Tunnel today; there will be another time for the Metro Tunnel. On level crossings, we, as I said, have removed 72 level crossings right across metropolitan Melbourne, in all aspects of Melbourne. Also, importantly – I said I would come back to this question of jobs – we have had more than 84 million hours worked to date on level crossings. More than 6000 people have worked on the level crossings directly. But also, as I said, there is that indirect employment benefit.

Couple that with our free TAFE program, which is making sure that more young people can go in and get a trade. I know this because I have had these young people tell me this when I have visited the projects: they know that they can go and get an apprenticeship, they know that they can study at TAFE and they know that they can have confidence in their future because there is a pipeline of work ahead for them. I have also, on project after project, talked to workers who have had a continuous pipeline of work. They have worked in Frankston and then they have gone across and worked in the western suburbs. I remember well talking to some who had worked on Skye Road at Frankston and then they went up –

**A member** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** They like their local member too. They also went a little bit further towards the city and worked on the level crossing removal at Toorak Road, so again, a continuous pipeline of work. But it has also meant that we have been able to apply our social procurement policy settings. We love our social procurement policy settings. We have been able to embed policy settings – deliberate decisions the government has made to require certain things of our contractors and tenderers – to do things like mandate the Major Projects Skills Guarantee. It requires a minimum of 10 per cent of all hours worked on our projects to be made up of apprentices, trainees and cadets, which again goes back to that opportunity to study at TAFE – you can then see your pathway into work as well. It ties in with how we have been able to put in place our women in construction strategy. This is not just helping more women come into the industry but also understanding the barriers that exist in the industry that stop them from staying in the industry or progressing to more senior levels in the industry. Something that I am particularly proud of is the way we have applied the social enterprise strategy to the Level Crossing Removal Project. Ours was the first government organisation to adopt a social procurement policy, and this has really made a big difference. For example, the Yarra View Nursery, which is a great –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The Yarra View Nursery. They are a great social enterprise. They have worked on the Bayswater and Heatherdale level crossing projects, with plant and landscaping services. There is Outlook Environmental, who have worked on the Kororoit Creek level crossing removal. We have partnered with the YMCA. We have got the Rail Academy Newport. The list goes on and on of social enterprises who can also plan for their future, who can also design programs that support people with a disability, people from migrant or refugee communities and women coming into our projects, because they can see that there is a pipeline of projects that they can partner with.

All of this comes back to having deliberate policy settings that accompany your construction pipeline to make sure you are driving these outcomes and you are getting that broader benefit: from every dollar that is invested in a level crossing removal you are driving that benefit harder and deeper into the

Victorian community because you have those policy settings. Amongst all the various benefits of the Level Crossing Removal Project, whether it is safer communities, less congested communities or the ability to run more trains, these are the human benefits that come from having a construction policy setting that is tied up with your social policy setting that can deliver these outcomes, and they are some great outcomes.

In terms of making local streets safer – and I know the member for Box Hill knows this well – we have just ticked off the two level crossings in Surrey Hills. They were numbers 69 and 70 on our list of level crossings that we wanted to remove. Two people, two older women, lost their lives at one of those level crossings a few years ago. That level crossing has now been removed and that community has much, much safer and less congested streets to support their activities in that local area.

On that issue of congestion, I have had a lot of feedback over the now eight and a bit years that we have been running this program about how local people have seen local benefits from reduced congestion in their community. I will go to a couple of examples now. Colleagues may recall that we removed nine level crossings on the Dandenong line. We did it by elevating the rail line. We are remembering this now: sky rail was a thing.

**Josh Bull** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** It is funny the member for Sunbury asks me to remind the house of what some opposite described sky rail as. They said it would create ghettos in those communities. When you go down to those communities today, you see a huge amount of open space. Not only have we made those communities safer and less congested, we have also been able to invest in the new open space that has been created where there are all sorts of recreation activities. There are both active and passive recreation spaces that, having driven through there at different parts of the day and night, are active spaces.

**Josh Bull:** Not a ghetto.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** They are far from a ghetto. That is just one example of many – I will come back to this in a moment – where we have had to work incredibly hard and ignore the loud, negative voices of those opposite, who tried to whip up fear and scare campaigns in local communities, and understand that there was something more important here: getting rid of those level crossings, making those communities safer and less congested and bringing broader community benefits as a result.

I got distracted momentarily from talking about reducing congestion, and I was talking about sky rail. I remember well receiving an email from a courier, someone who travels by their very nature. They have got a van and they are travelling around those suburbs of Melbourne every single day. Like many in business, time is money, so getting stuck at a boom gate – remembering some of these boom gates on the Dandenong corridor were down for 87 per cent of the 2-hour morning peak period –

**Paul Edbrooke:** That is a lot of time wasted.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** It is a lot of time wasted. What also was a challenge, if you were in the courier business, was the unpredictability of when you would get caught at a boom gate. I remember well that this courier who wrote to me talked about how the level crossing removals on the Dandenong line had transformed his life. It had taken so much stress out of his work life because he had predictability about the time it would take to do his job, and as a consequence it gave him more time to do the things he wanted to do. For some of us that is time with family and friends, but whatever it is that you want to do outside of work, you get more time to do that.

There is also the example in Glenroy. This is a terrific project where, again, we have had the opportunity to not just remove the level crossing in Glenroy but we have built a new station and created new open space for the Glenroy community to enjoy. The very day that level crossing was removed I received a message from a mum about the time that she was able to save. For those of us who do the school drop-off, particularly if you have got multiple drop-offs, it is a challenge at the best of times. Adding in the stress of getting stuck at a level crossing would just make your head explode at that

particular time of the day. Well, we have removed that stress. But she also said that in the time she saved she was able to stop and get a babycino with her child. So there you go: it is a win for the local coffee shop as well as making that community safer.

We cannot talk about the history of level crossings in this state and how we have been able to progressively get on and remove level crossings without remembering some of the challenges we have had on our journey. I am sorry to say to the house we have had a few. There have been the challenges of making sure we have got a supply of skilled workforce, of making sure we have got an adequate supply of materials.

**Paul Edbrooke:** They sound like opportunities.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Funny you should say that, member for Frankston. One of the opportunities that has come from the supply of materials is of course that other great local content policy that we committed to, which is to make sure that all of the steel being used on our level crossings is 100 per cent Australian steel. 100 per cent Australian steel is used on our level crossings, which again provides for more jobs in our local supply chain, which in turn supports the industry more broadly.

As I said, I was running through some of the challenges. There are the workforce supply challenges, and I have mentioned some of the bespoke programs we have been able to establish to address that, which also bring that double benefit of bringing other groups into the program. There is the resources challenge that I have spoken of. We have worked through some of the procurement challenges by setting up a programmatic approach, which has delivered us enormous efficiency in the delivery of these level crossings and has provided for a significant budget saving, which means that the level crossing removal program is not only ahead of time, it is under budget as well.

**A member:** Extraordinary!

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Which is extraordinary for a project of this size and scale. But, as I said, there have been some other challenges, and those challenges come from being opposed every single step of the way on just about every single level crossing site by those opposite.

**A member:** Who would do that?

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Those who were not interested in seeing their local communities safer and less congested, those who were not interested in supporting a pipeline for a local workforce, those who in government had the chance to remove level crossings and did not, and indeed when we came up with a plan to remove them mocked us and said, 'Tell them they're dreaming; it'll never happen'.

**A member:** 72 in eight years.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** That is right: 72 in eight years, and we are not stopping there. We are not stopping there on our way to 110 by 2030. Let me remind the house of some of the steps that were taken by some to oppose and even stop – can you imagine wanting to stop this sort of activity? Stop the economic activity, stop the community support, stop making streets more safe and less congested? Well, there were some that took us to court. There were some that supported court action against the sky rail project. There were some that wanted to keep some of the most congested level crossings in Melbourne. There were some that supported court action to keep those level crossings in place. That was before the 2018 election. Before the 2022 election there was a candidate for the Liberal Party who launched their own court action to try and stop the removal of the Surrey Hills level crossing. As I mentioned before, and as our fabulous member for Box Hill knows very well, a tragedy occurred at that site. The crossing was dangerous, it was congested and that was a complex project. It was complex from a construction point of view and it was complex in terms of how you could work with the local community, but there were some who would have preferred to have seen that level crossing stay in place and who supported the attempted court action to keep that level crossing in place. Also, and I said this earlier: there were some who said we could not get rid of any level crossings on the Frankston line. The former Leader of the Opposition, who, in that first term, as we were gearing up to get rid of level –

**Josh Bull:** Who was that?

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Who was that? I think you might remember it was the member for Bulleen, member for Sunbury. He went out there and tried to suggest to the Frankston community that we were not going to get rid of any level crossings on the Frankston line. How many level crossings on the Frankston line do you think we got rid of? Eighteen. Eighteen level crossings, on the way to making that train line level crossing free. There are some that say we only get rid of level crossings in seats that are held by the government. Now, we are two-thirds of the chamber, so we do have quite a few level crossings in our seats, in places like Pakenham, making Pakenham level crossing free, and Melton. There is never a day that goes by without mentioning the Melton level crossings. And in Thomastown, at Keon Park – we are getting rid of level crossings in all parts of the city.

As the member for Caulfield knows well, numbers 71 and 72 of the level crossings that were removed were in Glen Huntly – at Glen Huntly Road and Neerim Road. But do you know what? We did not have the full support of the local member for that project. We did not have his support. He was out there writing letters to me about trees and about local complaints. He was attending the community engagement forums, trying to have a crack at people for just wanting to get the information that they wanted to get on these projects. We do remove level crossings across all parts of Melbourne. The fact that the Liberal Party have got a diminishing number of seats compared to the diminishing number of level crossings is a matter for them.

The member for Monbulk has momentarily left the chamber, but I remember that the member for Evelyn was not particularly happy about those level crossings. At the last election, in Ringwood, the Liberal candidate campaigned against it, as they did in Bayswater. The list goes on and on. At every turn the community has had a very, very clear understanding that only Labor removes level crossings and works incredibly hard to address the challenges, to work through the barriers to why those level crossings should be removed, and it is only the Liberals who want to keep them there. And if there are those who have got any doubt, who think that I might be gilding the lily a little bit, let me tell you why at the 2018 election –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Well, let me read you the 2018 Liberal Party policy document that as a cost-saving measure was going to cut the level crossing removal program. You were happy to keep level crossings in place as a cost-saving measure. And I will give them their credit: in 2022 they had seen a little bit of the light of day. They had come up with eight level crossings that they thought they would get rid of – Sandringham and Malvern got a good run in those eight – but not a single level crossing in the west. I want to say this: the west has been talked about quite a bit. The west gets a good run, as it should. The only commitment the Liberal Party had to the western suburbs on level crossings was to keep level crossings in place. They did not make one commitment to remove level crossings in the western suburbs. And of course where does this all come from? It all comes from the fact that when they were in government they did not remove any. They did not fund or finish any level crossings. They mocked the Labor opposition at the time. They said we were dreaming. They said we could not get rid of these level crossings and have tried every single step of the way to block and stop the removal of 72 dangerous and congested level crossings across the suburbs of Melbourne. Well, what we can see is that the Andrews Labor government has been determined to push on and deliver the removal of all of those level crossings and deliver the much-needed construction pipeline that has supported so many jobs. It has also supported a supply chain pipeline. I have not touched a lot on the manufacturing sector, but the manufacturing sector is a big supplier to our program. The concrete industry in particular is a big supplier to our program. I remember going – and actually I think the member for Melton was with me – to a concrete batching plant at Cobblebank –

**A member:** Westkon.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Westkon. I remember it well because this was during those very difficult and challenging years of the pandemic. We were able to continue to support our level crossing removal program at that time. The owner of that business talked to us about how during those really difficult and challenging economic times he was able to not only keep his business going but employ more people because he had a pipeline of contracts associated with the level crossing removal program. And it is that confidence, that confidence that the government is consistent and determined and committed to a pipeline, that means that they can invest in their business and importantly, too, invest in people – invest in their people, invest in their workforce and invest in our community. That is the absolute benefit amongst, as I have said before, so many across our level crossing program. As I have said, we have removed 72. There were 180 when we started. We have removed 72, so obviously there are a few more to go. We have got that commitment to remove – there are a lot of numbers here – 110 by 2030. If you go to Pakenham right now, it is just a hive of activity as we make Pakenham level crossing free, elevate the line and build a brand new station – two stations.

**Emma Vulin** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The member for Pakenham has reminded me of something I have not mentioned so far, and I am glad she did. When we have had the opportunity to do more by getting into the metropolitan train network and removing level crossings, we have grabbed that opportunity to do more with both hands, building new stations and extending track, like we are extending the metropolitan train line by a further 2 kilometres out to East Pakenham with another new station to support the growing community out there. This is something that, again, has been opposed and ridiculed by those opposite. The opportunity to grow Melbourne's train network, to make the biggest investment in decades in Melbourne's brownfields train network, has been another significant benefit from the level crossing removal program, and as I said, we are on track to remove 110 by 2030. I could talk about Melton again and I could talk about the removal at Keon Park, but I have already mentioned the six train lines across our metropolitan network that will be level crossing free as a result of this program of work. This is what you have when you have a government that has done the hard work, has the policy settings, has the programmatic response, addresses the challenges that do invariably come along with projects and has the will to continue to get on and support transformational investment in our train network.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Before I call the member for Caulfield I remind all members that referring to 'you' is referring to the Chair, and I ask that we stay within order.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:55): Let me be clear when it comes to the removal of level crossings. In fact let me be crystal clear that the opposition support the removal of level crossings, unlike the mistruths that the government might want to tell in terms of what we believe about level crossings being removed. Also the opposition absolutely support the vital infrastructure that is needed in Victoria. It is one thing supporting infrastructure and it is one thing supporting removing level crossings, but it is another thing when you waste taxpayers money and you cannot manage major projects.

Now, the Deputy Premier, who is responsible for transport infrastructure, should be called the minister for budget blowouts, because we have seen under the Deputy Premier's watch blowout after blowout after blowout. We have just heard a diatribe from the Deputy Premier about how fantastic the government is. They are patting themselves on the back when it comes to level crossing removals. Let me remind the Deputy Premier and the government that a Victorian Auditor-General's Office report of 2017 says there is a \$3.3 billion blowout when it comes to level crossing removals – \$3.3 billion – with \$5 billion promised and an \$8.3 billion cost. This is not unusual for the Deputy Premier.

The level crossing removals are the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the minister for budget blowouts, the Deputy Premier, and waste and mismanagement of taxpayers money. We just see it time and time again. The Commonwealth Games – the Deputy Premier was responsible for that. How is that going? There is more money wasted and there are cancelled contracts, and it will be billions of dollars to be able to pay for that. This is a government that cannot manage money, this is a government

that wastes taxpayers money and this is a government that, with the Deputy Premier responsible for major projects, is leading the pack when it comes to wasting taxpayers money. This is at a vital time when Victorians are doing it tough. It is at a vital time when we see the cost of living going through the roof and when it comes to Victorians each and every day struggling.

Absolutely, when it comes to level crossings, we support those. But it is one thing to be removing them and it is another thing to be wasting taxpayers money when it comes to doing that. Glen Huntly level crossing – a fantastic advocacy project which, it was said, should have been done many years ago – is one of the 50 most dangerous level crossings, and between the time of 2010 and 2014 we advocated for its removal. Where was the government? MIA. Where was the Deputy Premier? MIA. Why? Because the Deputy Premier put politics over people and removed level crossings where the votes counted and not where the need was, unfortunately, and that has been the concern here.

This government puts politics before people, this government wastes taxpayers money and this government has a Deputy Premier that should also have the title – because the Deputy Premier has lost the title of the minister for Commonwealth Games – of minister for budget blowouts because that is what we have seen. Whether it be the Commonwealth Games; the North East Link, \$13 billion; the West Gate Tunnel, \$4.7 billion; the Metro Tunnel, \$3.6 billion; or the Suburban Rail Loop, \$125 billion, these are budget blowouts. They have all been well and truly mismanaged by the Deputy Premier. The Deputy Premier can stand up today and talk very fondly of how her government has removed level crossings – but at what cost?

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Government integrity**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. I refer to reports that staff employed by the minister have been involved with illegal Labor party branch-stacking activities. Since reports of taxpayer-funded staff being used for Labor party branch stacking became public in June 2020 what actions has the minister taken to ensure her ministerial and office staff have not misused taxpayer funds?

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, I ask that you rule this question out of order. It does not pertain to the minister's responsibilities as the minister for energy, and it is in fact related to internal party matters. And as you would know, Speaker, there have been a number of rulings from the Chair in relation to the use of question time for those purposes.

**James Newbury:** On the point of order, Speaker, the question directly referred to ministerial office staff. If I can refer to *Rulings from the Chair* for the Leader of the House and Speaker Plowman of 23 April 1998, the ruling of that time was absolutely clear that where a question relates to ministerial activity and that link is there – that is at the bottom of page 143 – that link is absolutely well and truly within order.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! It is a fine line between questions on party political matters and a ministerial responsibility here. I will allow the question because it related to the use of taxpayer funds in relation to the minister's portfolio.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:03): I am absolutely pleased to take this question. The reason for that is that those opposite have failed to actually understand or indeed listen to comments that I made at a doorstep this morning that went to these very inferences – inferences, not even claims or allegations. Those opposite are more interested in peddling and exaggerating claims – inferences that have been reported in one newspaper this morning. I make it absolutely clear: inferences are not what I am interested in. I am interested in the facts and actually doing the job of delivering for every Victorian on behalf of this very, very proud Labor government.



**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Following today’s allegations of significant branch stacking by staff in her office, will the minister refer the misuse of taxpayer-funded resources in her office for independent investigation?

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:04): I am also pleased to take this question, and I will explain why: because those opposite are very slow learners and do not listen. The fact is there are several inferences that have been made, every single one of which was addressed this morning by me. Frankly, I do not deal with hypotheticals – never have and never will. I have got nothing more to add.

**Ministers statements: energy policy**

**Daniel ANDREWS** (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:05): I would say normally I am delighted to stand up to give a ministers statement, but this is of concern to all Victorians. As we enter the final stages of winter, everyone – every household and business – knows that their gas bills are coming very soon, and they are quite fearful, I think, of just how big those gas bills will finish up being. Now, apparently –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**Daniel Andrews:** Well, apparently, there are some in the community who are not so fearful of gas bills. They are under the illusion – and illusion is the kind term – that gas is in fact cheaper than electricity. Some people believe that, instead of taking national leadership positions to make sure that new homes that require planning permits, for instance, are not hooked up to the most expensive form of energy, we should instead hook those homes up to the cheaper form of energy – that is, renewable electricity. That is what we should do. Some, however, even when confronted with –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier’s statement relates to connections of houses to gas, and I would say to the house that the Premier is entirely not relevant.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Manager of Opposition Business knows that props are not allowed in the house, and I would ask him to leave the chamber for half an hour. There is no point of order.

**Member for Brighton withdrew from chamber.**

**Daniel ANDREWS:** It is not often the Manager of Opposition Business gets booted from the chamber, so let us just pause and soak that one up. I would invite you around for dinner, but frankly, no. If there is anyone that should not be lecturing people about cooking with gas, it is this mob, this Toyota Tarago outfit over here.

*Members interjecting.*

**Daniel ANDREWS:** Keep yapping – we know where the gas is coming from. I am not sure if it is natural, but that is where the gas is coming from.

**The SPEAKER:** Premier! Order! Through the Chair.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** Electricity is cheaper than gas, and this government knows it, and we will make sure that we do everything we can to have more renewable electricity into homes and to make sure that we support households across the states to make the energy transition, despite all of your yapping – yap, yap, yap, yap.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The house will come to order. I will not call the member for Malvern until the house has come to order. I would appreciate if members at the table could show some respect to the Chair.

I acknowledge a former minister André Haermeyer in the gallery today.

**Government integrity**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (14:08): My question is to the minister representing the Attorney-General, the Minister for Police. It has been reported today that branch-stacking activities within the Labor Party in Mill Park involved forging the signatures of dead people. Will the minister advise the house what is the maximum penalty in Victoria for falsifying documents in the names of dead people?

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:09): I thank the member for Malvern for his question, and I will appropriately refer that matter to the Attorney in the other place.

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (14:09): Will the government now refer today's reports of potentially criminal conduct associated with Labor branch stacking to Victoria Police?

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:09): I again thank the member for Malvern for his supplementary question to the Attorney, and I will be sure to refer his matter to the Attorney for a response, in the other place.

**Ministers statements: energy policy**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:10): I am absolutely delighted to update the house on how this government is delivering the nation's most ambitious climate change agenda and renewable energy. It is National Science Week, and our world-leading target of net zero by 2045 keeps Victoria in line with the best climate science in the world and the Paris agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees.

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** These targets are based on the best advice from the scientific community, industry, consumer and welfare organisations, and our commitment to all-electric new homes requiring a planning permit. The science tells us that burning gas in your home is bad for your health but it is also bad for your pocket, absolutely. In fact the science says all-electric homes will produce lower emissions from day one and save Victorian homes \$1000 a year every year on their energy bills. If they have got solar, thanks to our Solar Homes program, they will save \$2200 on their bills every year. Of course we have had new people coming forward and saying what a terrific announcement this is. The Energy Consumers Australia and CSIRO report released last week absolutely joins in the chorus of welfare groups, housing developers and medical practitioners to say that this is good policy. It makes sense for health, it makes sense for the hip pocket and it makes sense for emissions. There are those of course that prefer to be on the side of the nuclear industry.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** The nuclear industry over there – Mr Nuclear in its pocket – and of the gas producers. There is one thing that those opposite will commit themselves to delivering to every Victorian: higher bills each and every year for decades.

**Daniel Andrews:** Higher emissions.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** Higher emissions, higher bills.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I will ask you to come to order when I call you to order, and I would ask you to not refer to members by their names across the table but by their official titles.

**Government integrity**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): My question is to the Premier. In light of today’s reports of branch stacking in the Labor Party in Mill Park, where the signatures of two dead people were forged on multiple occasions, will you apologise to the families concerned?

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the Leader of the Opposition to rephrase his question to make it relevant to government business. Internal party matters are not a subject that can be accepted in a question without notice in *Rulings from the Chair*, so I would ask you to rephrase it and make it relevant to government business.

**John PESUTTO:** The Premier has previously stated that everything that occurs within the Labor Party under him as Premier falls within his responsibility. Accordingly, is it government policy – in light of today’s reports of branch stacking in the Labor Party in Mill Park, where the signatures of two dead people were forged on multiple occasions – that he will apologise to the families concerned?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The house will come to order. Again, it is a fine line here between what is an acceptable question that refers to internal party matters as opposed to government business. I will allow the question because you did refer to government business, albeit a little vaguely.

**Daniel ANDREWS** (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:14): Speaker, thank you for your guidance. I am really not quite certain whether the question was in my capacity as the leader of the Labor Party, the leader of the government –

**John Pesutto:** Premier.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** Oh, it is as Premier. I just wanted to clear that up. Let me just take the Leader of the Opposition –

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** The Leader of the Opposition has asked his question. He obviously has no interest in an answer –

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for South-West Coast is warned.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** which is why he continues to interject incessantly. Not high-quality interjections either, frankly – like, seriously. Let me just step you through this. I am not a member of the Lalor South branch. I have never attended a meeting of that branch. I do not know the individuals in question. Fourthly or fifthly, I make the point that the Leader of the Opposition is talking about reports.

If you want to make allegations, then you ought make those allegations. In my capacity as the Leader of the Government I am not sure that I can necessarily answer the question. However, I will say this: it is no-one’s intention, I would have thought, across this chamber in the cut and thrust of politics, in the activities of political parties, in the functioning of this Parliament, in the work of any government or any opposition – no-one wants to deliberately cause offence to anybody. And to the extent that anybody associated with the Australian Labor Party has caused offence to the individuals mentioned, then of course we are regretful of that and sorry that that has occurred.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): Is the Premier confident that the signatures of other dead people have not been forged for the purposes of Labor Party branch stacking?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Again, Leader of the Opposition, I rule your question out of order. I will give you an opportunity to rephrase the question to make it relevant to government –

**John Pesutto:** Can I raise a point of order, Speaker?

**The SPEAKER:** You can raise a point of order.

**John Pesutto:** Speaker, the Premier just expanded upon his responsibilities, engaging in subjects that relate to internal party matters.

**The SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**John Pesutto:** With respect, Speaker, you have allowed the substantive; the supplementary must stand. It is within the bounds, I submit. Respectfully, I submit that it is within the bounds. I did not ask the Premier to expand the –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am happy to rule on this. The Leader of the Opposition in his first question referred to government business. In his supplementary he did not. Irrespective of the response from the Premier, the two questions must relate to government business. So I am giving you the opportunity to rephrase.

**Daniel Andrews:** On a separate point of order, Speaker, can I put it to you that the Leader of the Opposition ought not be afforded an opportunity to rephrase his question. He very deliberately asked the question, and he ought not be given the opportunity to try and correct his own error. I answered the question out of respect for families. I did not realise that the Leader of the Opposition had asked the question in an attempt to expand the scope of the standing orders in some tactical play. I thought it was a matter of respect for the families he feigned concern for; now it seems all it was was an opportunity to creep the standing orders further, to rewrite them to his so-called advantage. What a disgraceful performance. And he ought not, because of his cynical, disgraceful attempt to politicise these matters pretending otherwise, be given an opportunity to again flout your ruling. He ought be sat down, and he ought to stay there.

**John Pesutto:** On the point of order, Speaker, I ask respectfully that I be afforded the same breadth in addressing the issue. If anyone has been disrespectful, it has been you – you and your rotten, corrupt government.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I have made my ruling on this matter. I am giving you an opportunity to rephrase your supplementary question.

**John PESUTTO:** In his capacity as Premier, what action has the Premier taken to ensure that the forging of signatures of dead people does not occur again under the party he has said he leads and is responsible for?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I rule the supplementary question out of order.

#### **Ministers statements: women's sport**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:19): We are all spellbound by the Matildas. No other Australian football team has got this far in the World Cup, ever. It is the semifinals; we are all on the edge of our seats. Millions of people watched online, both on streaming services and on TV. Thousands filled Federation Square and other venues. And who can forget the joy of Sam Kerr racing out on the pitch after her injury and Cortnee Vine actually scoring the last goal to get us into the semifinals?

Just a week earlier, people forget that the beautiful Diamonds, in a beautiful display of prowess, won the World Cup against England in South Africa. Do you know what? We had their backs – literally. On the back of their kit was Victorian government support. The pride, the inspiration – these moments

galvanise the country. They galvanise support for women's sport – the athleticism and the exceptional quality of female professional sports.

We have invested in the home of the Matildas – \$40 million there – and \$150 million for AFLW high-performance infrastructure and game-day infrastructure. We have invested \$15 million into the Diamonds, the national netball team. Do you know what? We did not have uniform support. In fact those opposite criticised us. One coalition MP said of that investment into the Diamonds that it was 'nothing more than a cynical vote-buying exercise'. Well, tell the Diamonds, who won the World Cup in South Africa for this proud nation, that that was a cynical vote-buying exercise.

We have invested in other areas – the State Netball Hockey Centre. I have not even touched on the investments by my colleague the Minister for Community Sport that have touched grassroots communities across Victoria. We have always believed in women's sport. We did not just jump on the bandwagon in the last few weeks.

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

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

**Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.**

#### **Rental support**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:21): My question is to the Premier. Recent reports show that 82 per cent of renters across Australia are experiencing rental stress. National cabinet is meeting tomorrow to discuss the housing crisis. There are reports today that Labor are pushing for a policy of allowing landlords increased rents once every 12 months, but this means renters still can face unlimited rent increases every single year. Will the Premier take a strong policy to national cabinet tomorrow to put a cap on rents to ban unlimited rent increases?

**Daniel ANDREWS** (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:22): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. I am not sure whether she has structured the question to avoid using the term 'rent capping', because that is what she is asking for.

**Ellen Sandell:** I said that. I said 'rent capping'.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** Well, okay. Will I take to Brisbane – will I go to the national cabinet and advocate the law of this state, which is one increase per year? That is in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, one of 130 amendments from this party that apparently has done nothing for renters. The Big Housing Build is not something the Leader of the Opposition would know anything about. The Big Housing Build, together with 130 amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act – that is what we have done – and there is a housing statement coming very soon. We will do more, as any good government would. So will I advocate the Victorian position? No, I am not being asked to do that. I am not being asked to advocate the law of our state to other states. I am being asked to – I am not quite sure what I am being asked to do. I am being asked to do something that might potentially –

*Members interjecting.*

**Daniel ANDREWS:** Okay. We should cap rents – is that what we are saying? What they are today – they cannot go up ever again.

**Ellen Sandell** interjected.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** Well, what are you putting forward? You see, this is the problem: 'I'd like you to go to national cabinet. I don't know what I'd like you to do but when you go there, can you quote me.' This is the problem with people who do not want the fix, they just want the fight. If I said, 'Let's have a rent cap,' you would say, 'No, let's have a rent freeze.' If I said, 'Let's have a rent freeze,' you would say, 'Let's have everybody live for free.' It would not matter. Or there would not be enough bedrooms. Whatever the government did, the Greens political party would want us to do more, and

they would have no regard – as they have I think very little regard – in relation to this proposition. They have very little regard for what the consequences of such action might be.

I simply say this: you want to be very careful. And that is the approach of this government, particularly when it comes to intervening in markets. You need to be very, very careful that you do not have precisely the outcome that you claim to be trying to avoid: more people under more stress because there is less housing supply, not more; people exiting the market; projects that have got planning approval but are not yet commenced not being commenced; or, in the event that you had arrangements that were so variable from other parts of the country, that capital, which for argument's sake – because market economics is not necessarily really the strength of those opposite – capital can move, investments can be made somewhere else and people can get away projects in other capital cities. You would want to think through whether what you were proposing was going to make things better, things worse or leave them the same. There is no analysis in this question, none whatsoever.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:25): The Premier says he is not sure what he is being asked to do. He seems a little confused, so I would be very happy to explain in my supplementary. Victoria already has a law which limits rent increases to once a year, and yet even with that law rents have gone up in Melbourne over 14 per cent in the last year alone. So it is clear that just limiting when rent increases can happen is not enough. We actually need to limit how much they can be increased by with a cap – a cap on rent increases. That is what we are asking for. So will the Premier push for this at national cabinet tomorrow to help the 82 per cent of renters across Australia who are in severe stress right now?

**Daniel ANDREWS** (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:26): A couple of points in answer to the member for Melbourne: what does the member for Melbourne say that does to housing supply? What does that do to the renters she claims to be supportive of? Either you do not know or you will not say or you have not bothered to ask. Before you made a change of that nature you would want to be confident that you had done the analysis to ensure that it did not –

**Ellen Sandell** interjected.

**Daniel ANDREWS**: Well, you are putting forward a proposition, member for Melbourne, and you do not know what it does. But it sounds good. And again, you do not want the fix, you just want the fight. You just want to pretend to be the solution. You just want to be an endless critic sitting on the sidelines in the cheap seats. I tell you, with the greatest of respect to the member for Melbourne, I could take these policy debates from the Greens much more seriously if they had built more housing than they blocked, and the case is they have not – they have blocked more than they have built. I was down in Prahan today – 620 people are living in those new homes, and the Greens opposed every one of them.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! I ask members not to refer to 'you' in their commentary in the house. It is a reflection on the Chair.

#### **Ministers statements: schools funding**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:27): I rise to update the house on how Victorian students and teachers are celebrating National Science Week this week. I was really pleased to begin the week here in Parliament just yesterday with the students from Pascoe Vale celebrating Science Week along with the member for Pascoe Vale, who attended as well, to have a look at their mission to Mars project. It was absolutely fantastic. This is the second type of mission to Mars project that I have had the pleasure of seeing. I have also witnessed it with our talented students over at John Monash Science School, who celebrated International Women's Day in science along with the member for Oakleigh just a few weeks ago.

We know jobs in STEM are the careers of the future, and that is why we are preparing our students for pathways into these jobs. That is why last budget we invested \$116 million to build six new tech schools. This will provide an extra 62,000 secondary places and give access to high-tech experiences

and specialised learning environments to our students. We are focused on encouraging the next generation of researchers, engineers, mathematicians and scientists and helping our students to develop a curiosity about the world in which we live.

But not everyone thinks this way. Not everyone believes in our students the way that we do. I just want to read out a quote which says:

Victorian children – who 25 years ago performed as well as kids from ...  
other countries –

now generally have the reading ability of most cave-children ...

Do you know who said that? The opposition spokesman for education in the other place. It does not take a scientist to know that this is absolute rubbish, and perhaps those opposite should get back in their cave.

### Electricity infrastructure

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:29): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. Has the government modelled the cost savings for Victorian power users of the Victoria Energy Policy Centre proposal to upgrade existing major transmission lines in north-west Victoria rather than build the expensive VNI West proposal?

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:30): I thank the Leader of the Nationals for his question. We know that the more renewable energy we build in this state, the more power we create for our state, and that gives us security of energy supply, lower prices, reduced emissions and tens of thousands of jobs for Victorians right across this state. Let me be really clear: you cannot do that, you cannot say on the one hand you support energy security, energy reliability, cheaper power and jobs without having transmission to take the power –

**Peter Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, the question was about the comparison between two proposals to bring renewable energy into the grid. It was not about not having a proposal to bring energy into the grid. I would ask you to bring the minister back to actually answering that question, please.

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

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** One thing is for sure: our government is always on the side of lower power bills for every Victorian, more supply, clean supply and more jobs. On the matter of VNI West, that is a matter that is being managed through AEMO, which is responsible for the planning for this piece of infrastructure. Their job is to take on board the thousands of submissions that have been made to them by a whole range of stakeholders – scientists, farmers and a whole range of people – to decide what the best route will be and deliver the best economic value for money, and not just economic value but jobs, which are really important, and lower power prices for Victorians, and that is what will happen.

**Peter Walsh:** On a further point of order, Speaker, coming back to the relevance of the question, this is about whether the government has done the modelling to do what the minister is talking about, and she has not addressed that question, because ultimately it will be Victorian power users who will pay the costs of this project.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Points of order are not an opportunity to expand on the question. I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question, but she was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** Just lastly, Speaker, it is the role of the market operator to make those assessments. It has been for a long time, and it remains the case for the VNI West project. It is not for

me or my department to second-guess the process that the market operator has in place, so if you have got a view on it, maybe you should make a submission to AEMO.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the minister not to use the word ‘you’.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:33): The Victorian Energy Policy Centre proposal to upgrade the existing major transmission lines in north-west Victoria would save Victorians \$1.1 billion on their power bills each year. Will the minister direct VicGrid to undertake detailed modelling on this proposal against its Victorian transmission investment framework before she commits Victoria to VNI West and even higher household power bills?

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:33): I thank the Leader of the Nationals for the supplementary question. Can I be really clear to the member of the Nationals: these matters are under consideration by the market operator. Can I say that the market operator themselves have analysed every consultation, every submission that has been made to them, including those submissions made by the VEPC, and have determined that they are incorrect on numerous fronts. I would be happy to share a link with AEMO’s summary of that report that you so generously referred to as being somehow some economic final statement on the value of this project. Our government is absolutely committed to a renewable energy future that is going to reduce our power bills and will create thousands of jobs, and of course you need to make sure that you are able to take the energy from where it is generated right across the state through transmission.

#### **Ministers statements: STEM employment initiatives**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:34): Well, I think members of the house are aware that this week is National Science Week, and I am pleased to advise the house of how, through our hundred billion-dollar Big Build transport infrastructure program, we are working hard to support jobs in science, technology and engineering across the state and particularly on how we can support young people and also those already in the workforce to have even more opportunities to work in this critically important area. It is important for us now and into the future.

I want to share with you a couple of examples: in a Victorian first, on the Suburban Rail Loop project we are introducing a traineeship for girls studying STEM subjects. This is for girls in years 11 and 12. They will be doing time at school and also, importantly, time out on the job, which will help them get a pathway into the industry. Our commitment goes to supporting the future work pipeline as well. When we have got the Metro Tunnel, the Suburban Rail Loop, the North East Link and the West Gate Tunnel, we have got to make sure we have got a pipeline of tunnelling workers as well to support that activity. That is why we have opened the tunnelling centre of excellence, which is also an Australian-first facility, and it is already training up to 5000 students a year to support that future activity in the important engineering and science sector.

As I said, it is an opportunity in National Science Week to support training in science and engineering, getting young people into the workforce. And these are young people – they will not have to fake their CV in the future. They will not have to go and falsely impersonate professors around the place. They will have real qualifications – real qualifications – thanks to the Andrews Labor government.

#### *Constituency questions*

##### **Caulfield electorate**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:37): (260) My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, in a rush to open Glen Huntly station, has failed to look after, in terms of access, those with a disability and the elderly. Currently there is no lift operational for the Glen Huntly station. The stairs are very steep, and I have been notified by a number of constituents that the government has failed when it comes to disability access and has failed



the elderly who cannot actually get up and down those stairs. It is appalling that the government would do this. This should be a station that is accessible for all, not just for those that can use the stairs. So I ask the minister to update the house as to how those people with a disability and those who are elderly are able to use Glen Huntly station at the moment.

#### **Ripon electorate**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (14:38): (261) My constituency question is for the Minister for Government Services. Would the minister please provide me with an update on the Andrews Labor government's massive \$550 million Connecting Victoria program? Poor mobile reception and black spots are the bane of so many people's existence in our rural and regional communities. CFA members tell me their local black spots raise serious safety concerns for emergency service volunteers. Businesses in Talbot and stallholders at the monthly market tell me they lose sales due to the town's black spots. Residents in the growing suburb of Lucas cannot get mobile reception unless they are with a particular telco, and others at new housing estates across Maryborough can only make calls if they hold up their mobile phones on their front decks. The Connecting Victoria program will address so many of these issues, fast-tracking improvements to mobile and broadband connectivity through more than 1200 mobile projects and more than 180 broadband projects across Victoria.

#### **Ovens Valley electorate**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (14:39): (262) My question is on behalf of a Wangaratta resident who reached out to me recently, and the question is directed to the Minister for Environment in the other place. He has raised concerns around the new Victorian government waste management rules, where anyone taking excess soil to the waste centres is expected to pay \$770 for a soil test before they can drop the soil at the waste area. This would be acceptable for a truckload of soil or commercial quantities, but when a ratepayer needs to dispose of a cubic metre of soil or very small amounts, they should not be expected to pay \$770 for a soil test. We ask the minister to stop this ridiculous situation and ensure a threshold or a quantity of soil – minimum cubic meters – before the soil must be tested. This will only drive the problem underground, pardon the pun. This will lead to soil dumping in state parks and isolated back roads. We are in a cost-of-living crisis, and we get this.

**The SPEAKER:** I did not hear a question there, member for Ovens Valley.

#### **Sunbury electorate**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (14:40): (263) My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. What is the latest information on construction time lines for this government's commitment to make the Sunbury line level crossing free? This government committed to remove 110 dangerous and congested level crossings by 2030, making the Cranbourne, Frankston, Lilydale, Pakenham, Sunbury and Werribee lines level crossing free. We know that the removal of level crossings slashes travel times for commuters and creates safer spaces within local communities. We were proud to deliver the removal of the Gap Road level crossing in my community last year. I take this opportunity to extend my thanks to the project team and all of those who worked around the clock in the coldest months of winter last year to get on and get rid of this dangerous and congested level crossing. We will all be thanking all of the team within the Level Crossing Removal Project and the construction teams that work so incredibly hard to make our local community safer, to reduce congestion and remove level crossings. Again I take the opportunity to ask the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure for the latest information on the time lines for making the Sunbury line level crossing free.

#### **Croydon electorate**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (14:41): (264) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education, and I ask: Minister, what are the Department of Education's plans for the former Croydon Community School site at 177 Mount Dandenong Road, Croydon? As the minister will be aware, Croydon Community School moved to their new site on Croydon Road, Croydon, in 2022, leaving

the old site vacant. The original building at the Mount Dandenong Road location was built in 1889 and is protected under a Victorian heritage overlay. It has significant historical and architectural significance to Maroondah, and therefore it needs to be preserved. To avoid this site being the target of vandalism, it is important that it does not remain vacant much longer. Minister, I ask again: what are the Department of Education's plans for this site?

#### **Broadmeadows electorate**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (14:42): (265) My constituency question is for the Minister for Veterans, and my question is: how many service men and women have signed up for the new veterans card in my electorate? It was great to catch up with Minister Suleyman at the Fawkner RSL on the weekend and talk about the benefits of the veterans card with the dedicated Michael Brennan, president of the club. Michael volunteers so much of his time, along with other community members, to make sure local veterans are supported. We enjoyed hearing about renovation plans and how the \$37,000 veterans capital works grant to install solar panels will reduce their running costs. Importantly, it was really moving to talk to Michael about the struggles his comrades face and exactly why the veterans card is so important. It will not just give a \$100 discount on rego and free recreation opportunities; it shows how much we value the sacrifices of our service men and women and is an important way for government to ensure they have the information about services and assistance they can access.

#### **Brunswick electorate**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:43): (266) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Despite being a small proportion of Melbourne's heaters, wood heaters contribute around half of Melbourne's PM2.5 fine particle air pollution. The fine particles from wood smoke enter the lungs, where they can cause asthma, and are absorbed into the blood, where they can cause heart attacks and strokes. Walking around inner-city Brunswick on cold winter mornings, you can smell the smoke from wood heaters in many streets, and in some streets the air is difficult to breathe. Wood heaters are driving demand for the illegal firewood harvesting that Parks Victoria recently reported to be increasing. Following the welcome announcement that the government will end new home gas connections from next year, does the government plan any action to limit the impact of wood heaters, which are as bad for the climate – and worse for the lungs – as gas heaters?

#### **Glen Waverley electorate**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (14:44): (267) My question is for the Minister for Police. How are police keeping the Glen Waverley community safe? Last month I visited the Glen Waverley police station on Ferntree Gully Road, where I met with Acting Inspector Ronelle Quin, the Monash police service area's local area commander, as well as other officers who work across our community. The officers at Glen Waverley police station are doing an excellent job serving our community, which I am sure is something that the Glen Waverley and Wheelers Hill residents appreciate. I also recently visited the Forest Hill police station on Springvale Road to meet with Inspector Lisa Gilham, the Whitehorse local area commander, and hear about the great work that the police at Forest Hill do to serve our communities of Blackburn South, Burwood East, Forest Hill, Vermont and Vermont South in my electorate, as well as the broader Whitehorse area. I also got to talk to Superintendent Matthew Baynes, who oversees the eastern region division 1, which covers the local government areas of Whitehorse, Monash, Boroondara and Manningham. I would like to thank all the dedicated, selfless and professional police, all of whom are trained up at the police academy in Glen Waverley, and thank them for looking after our community 24/7.

#### **South-West Coast electorate**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:45): (268) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport. A parliamentary inquiry into regional school buses from 600 days ago recommended the Andrews Labor government commit to installing CCTV on all new school buses. The findings were

crystal clear: CCTV on buses acts as an important tool for preventing antisocial behaviour whilst ensuring the safety of our bus drivers and children. We now know the government is ignoring their own committee's recommendations. Children in South-West Coast often travel much longer distances to get to school. I have been in contact with a constituent from Nullawarre whose daughter was badly injured in a bus crash and who has been tirelessly working for increased safety on our regional buses, but it is clearly not a high priority of this government. Minister, I believe the safety of school students across Victoria is priceless. Considering the minimal costs reported for this to be implemented, it is a disgrace. Can the minister explain to my constituents why she refuses to commit to the committee's recommendations?

### Monbulk electorate

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (14:46): (269) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. It concerns the Andrews Labor government's recent announcement to introduce 100 neighbourhood batteries across the state. Since the Solar Homes program was launched, this government has assisted more than 230,000 Victorian households and businesses to install solar panels. The enormous growth in rooftop solar has helped thousands of Victorians access cheap renewable energy while reducing emissions, and that is a terrific result, but even greater benefits can be made possible through neighbourhood batteries. They will store the cheap renewable solar energy when it is abundant during the day and feed it back into the grid when it is needed at night, keeping the lights on and the power bills down. The announcement of \$42.2 million for this program in this year's state budget was very well received across Monbulk, and my constituents are eager to learn more. So my question for the minister is: could she please outline the process for determining the location of neighbourhood batteries and the time frame in which this process will be undertaken? I will be delighted to share that information with my constituents.

### *Rulings from the Chair*

#### Member conduct

**The SPEAKER** (14:47): Just for the house's information, on Thursday 3 August a point of order raised by the Manager of Opposition Business was referred to me by the Acting Chair. I understand the matter has been resolved privately by the two members concerned, as is appropriate. I therefore consider that no further action is necessary. I would like to remind members that we all share the obligation to be fair, objective and courteous in our dealings with each other, and we should be mindful that our conduct in this place impacts not only other members but the many wonderful staff who work hard to support us.

### *Motions*

#### Level crossing removals

#### Debate resumed.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:47): As I said from the outset, the opposition support level crossing removals, but like all major projects they have got to be done properly and they have got to be done without an unlimited chequebook, because we do not have unlimited money, as we can see in terms of the financial crisis that Victoria is currently in. It is the debt capital of the nation. We have seen the Deputy Premier, who is responsible for budget blowouts – the minister for budget blowouts – has again presided over another project, the level crossing removals, with a \$3.3 billion blowout. Therefore I would like to move an amendment to the current motion before the house. I move:

That all the words after 'house' be omitted and replaced with the words:

- (1) notes that two successive Auditor-General reports have found flaws with the business case put forward for level crossing removals, leading to billions in budget blowouts; and
- (2) calls on the government to release costings for every level crossing removal project it has undertaken.'

This is absolutely crucial because like household budgets, we do not have unlimited dollars. There are so many Victorian taxpayers that are struggling to just keep the lights on, pay the bills, get their groceries each and every week and balance those really important budgets in tight economic times, whereas the Deputy Premier just believes that an open chequebook means that we could pay absolutely everything and sign Victorians up to billions and billions of dollars of debt, which generation after generation will have to pay. We have seen the Deputy Premier preside over so many blowouts after blowouts, and that is why I have moved an amendment to this motion. We must manage major projects properly, and there has not been one major project that the Deputy Premier has managed that has been on budget.

They have been blown out time and time again. Therefore whether it be the Commonwealth Games that have now been cancelled – which will cost Victorians billions of dollars and which the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, the Deputy Premier, was responsible for – or the level crossing removal project, it is just no coincidence. It is no coincidence that everything the Deputy Premier touches – North East Link, West Gate Tunnel, Metro Tunnel, Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) – each and every one of these projects has just blown out.

We have had airport rail, Geelong fast rail and Melton and Wyndham Vale electrification – they are all gone. There is absolutely a big cross through those. When we asked about the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines electrification – to ensure that people of the west get fast and reliable services like everyone else does, within 5 minutes – what did the Deputy Premier say? ‘Well, we’re removing level crossings.’ You cannot just remove level crossings without electrifying those lines and duplicating those lines to provide regular transport services for people in the west. The west has been neglected, and all the Deputy Premier does is provide spin.

We do need connectivity, we do need to ensure that everybody across Victoria gets reliable transport and we do need to ensure that we do not just look after our mates. What we have seen with the level crossing removals is that they have been prioritised according to the seats that Labor needed to win, as opposed to seats that actually had the most dangerous and congested level crossings. I know that the minister when she was on her feet was referring to a document and saying she was not using props, and I will not use a prop, but I will refer to a document. We had a campaign back in 2015 which called for Glen Huntly to be included in the 50 level crossings. It said ‘Fix Glen Huntly Road level crossing’. There were 50, and within the 50 – guess what? – Glen Huntly was neglected. So I led a campaign with the traders –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**David SOUTHWICK:** I would ask the member for Bentleigh to go back in my social media to refer to countless –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Bentleigh and member for Eltham, you are not in your allocated seats.

**David SOUTHWICK:** debates in this chamber, where I stood up alongside the Glen Huntly traders association and said ‘Remove the dangerous level crossing’. And guess what? In 2014 Glen Huntly was left out. In 2018 Glen Huntly was left out. It was only after advocacy from locals –

**Nick Staikos** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bentleigh, you will be removed from the chamber.

**David SOUTHWICK:** and from traders that we finally got Glen Huntly on the list. So I am very proud that the Glen Huntly level crossing has been done. It has been done with advocacy by constituents, by residents and by traders, and it should have been done a long time ago. The Deputy

Premier talked about Surrey Hills. Surrey Hills, where we had a fatality, was also a dangerous level crossing that should have been done in the first tranche – within the 50. That was left off the list and only done sometime later. That is why you have got to put people before politics. Do not do it when it suits, do it when it is needed. This government has a bad reputation for looking after their mates, ensuring that those that need to win in marginal Labor seats get prioritised over those that need those important projects done first.

Now, I have talked about waste and I have talked about mismanagement, but I do want to draw the government back to my local patch, to Caulfield and Glen Huntly in the electorate of Caulfield, because of the credit that the government is now claiming for that wonderful project, which Glen Huntly well might be, that is still falling short. As I mentioned today –

**Nick Staikos** interjected.

**David SOUTHWICK:** The member for Bentleigh keeps interjecting from out of his seat, and I remind the member for Bentleigh of this: currently we have an open Glen Huntly station, which has been opened prematurely, and we have a lift that is out of order. Currently if you have a disability or if you are elderly, you need to go down very steep stairs before you can access that train station. It is appalling, member for Bentleigh, that you would open a station and do it without considering those with a disability and the elderly.

**The SPEAKER:** Through the Chair, member for Caulfield.

**David SOUTHWICK:** I will refer the member for Bentleigh, who keeps interjecting, to what constituents are saying, including Mike Probert, who wrote to me and said:

Hello.

Today I visited the newly opened Glen Huntly railway station and i must say i was definitely gobsmacked. Who on earth were the architects? I thought we lived in the 21st Century now?? There were stairs down to the platforms; why?

I accept the lifts are not operational as yet but nonetheless why are there stairs when there should have been ramps? Or even better escalators!! It makes me wonder why the State Government continues to construct outdated technology? The risk of trips, falls etc on stairs is far greater than falling/slipping risks on ramps. Whoever was responsible for installing ramps at Elsternwick Station back in the 20th Century definitely had the right idea!

This all makes me wonder whether the architects/designers ever think about using the rail system themselves, especially as one gets older in age!! i believe this lack of consideration has been very short-sighted of the government.

That is by a constituent. I have got a number of others if you would like to give me more time, but I have got other things to raise.

I would say to the member for Bentleigh that I would need about 4 hours to talk about the constituents that have been let down by Labor's waste and mismanagement. There are countless constituents from the seat of Bentleigh who talk to me all the time about the waste and mismanagement under this government. They talk to me about the fact that this government is not able to manage money, and they are disappointed in the way they have been let down. We see that. So for the government to pat themselves on the back when they could have done this project properly – and I do remind the government that the last level crossing that was done very close to the member for Bentleigh's actual patch, in fact across the road, was Ormond. Ormond, I remind the member for Bentleigh, has a lift and Ormond has access, whereas what we are seeing now is not the same situation. Ormond is a lot more accessible than, at the moment, is this new station in Glen Huntly.

I would say it is the same with Balaclava. In Balaclava, that station upgrade was done to ensure that the ramps were kept available so those with a disability could access them. It is very, very important when we are in this Parliament to be advocating for all. This government is very, very quick to use platitudes when they talk about people and when it comes to accessibility. I think they have been left

short when it comes to prematurely opening the station and patting themselves on the back and having a lift out of order. It is a disgrace that a lift is out of order, and if you are old, if you have a disability, where do you go? You certainly do not go to Glen Huntly station.

I will come back to a number of other issues in this particular instance, and I would like to refer the government and those opposite to what the Auditor-General reports said right from the very beginning, because this goes to the absolute core of why we have moved the amendments: to actually get to the bottom of how much these things are actually costing, how much they have blown out by – and where is the business case in a lot of this stuff? We heard the Level Crossing Removal Project (LXRP) business case was finalised in April 2017, almost two years after the program had commenced. Now, this is a familiar story. This is very familiar. The government do not have a business case. Does SRL ring a bell? No business case: ‘Let’s just get on with it and have a crack and build something, get early works done, but have no business case as to what it’s going to cost.’

I could not imagine just actually going out, buying a piece of land and not even having architect drawings but ordering the bricks, laying the concrete and just having a crack – because that is what this government does: they have a crack without a business plan. And then they wonder why we keep blowing out budgets. Why do we keep costing taxpayers more money? Because you have not got the actual plan in the first place. You do not have the architect drawings and you do not have the builders cost; all you have is a pie-in-the-sky idea. And that is what we had in this particular instance, where the program started without a business case.

We then had site selection issues, which were also identified by the Auditor-General:

As a result, the April 2017 approved business case does not include any analysis or rationale for why the 50 level crossings were selected as higher priority – or demonstrate that they were more dangerous and congested – than other level crossings across Melbourne. The 50 ... level crossing sites include a number of sites that have not been identified as dangerous and congested.

Now, what we do know is that VicRoads actually did do some work on the most dangerous level crossings. They had their 50, and the Andrews government, they had their own 50 – and if you match the two 50s, they are not the same; they are quite different – one of which was Glen Huntly, one of which was Surrey Hills and one of which was Mont Albert. There are a number of level crossings that were left off the first 50 list. As the Auditor-General quite rightly pointed out, this was all about votes and not about need.

We had a follow-up report by the Auditor-General back in 2020. It found the issue was also that the business case was not complete and the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority did not complete a cost-benefit analysis for the full 75-site project. It states:

Cost-benefit analysis is a valuable tool for government decision-making that quantifies the economic benefits of an investment decision.

That is also crucial, because there is no economic benefit, there is no idea about why you prioritise one level crossing over another and there is no idea about how much these things cost. We have just seen so many flaws in all of this. We have seen, again, local communities across Melbourne – and I have had texts coming in as I have actually been speaking here. We had a situation in Surrey Hills where there was actually a court case because there was a scenario where you had two stations consolidated into one. I know Acting Speaker Hamer is actually part of this area. The businesses in Union Road and Hamilton Street, as a result of the prolonged level crossing works and the lack of consultation, are struggling to survive as the works are still not finished. You have got 20 small businesses that have closed their doors.

Now, this is appalling. This is another case of waste and mismanagement. If you go into Mont Albert and Surrey Hills – we had a person by the name of Lance Wilson. This was a Victoria Level Crossing Removal Project executive and former Shorten staffer who was caught on camera threatening the livelihood of small business owners after they displayed a poster in their shop. They displayed a poster in their shop and they got bullied. This particular individual said, ‘This doesn’t earn you any money.

## MOTIONS

Tuesday 15 August 2023

Legislative Assembly

2819

This does you nothing. It costs you money. I'm just saying, by putting that sign up here in your shop, you've got about 200 people working up here who now feel they can't buy food here. The state government never pays compensation. Putting up this sign won't get you compensation. It won't get you anything. The only thing you will get is that workers won't be coming into this shop. We want to work with you, and we are making money. That sign doesn't help.' So pretty much what they said is we are boycotting this store, and they went in there and effectively bullied the poor fish and chip shop owner to take that sign down. Absolutely appalling. If that was not enough, in the Mont Albert part of the project it was alleged that a contractor with the LXP headbutted a local bakery owner and a longstanding figure in the community. So you have got a situation where a baker has been headbutted – a small business owner, headbutted – and a fish and chip shop owner has been bullied. You have got appalling behaviour.

You go back into Glen Huntly – the Deputy Premier was so proud of giving me a bit of a whack about one of my own level crossings. One of the staff from the level crossing removal went and stole a vape from a small business on camera – stole it on camera. They said, 'We'll investigate.' Do you know what? The next day that employee was back. We keep seeing the government looking after their mates. You see ghost shifts. This government, this Deputy Premier, is presiding over the Big Build. The Big Build is the big bill, it is the big blowout. The Deputy Premier should have the ministerial title of Minister for Big Budget Blowouts. The Minister for Big Budget Blowouts is continuously wasting taxpayers money each and every time. We just see it time and time again. The best example of that, as we read, is ghost shifts. You have got people signing on but not turning up – they are signing on to multiple jobs and sitting at home. Could you imagine that? For those people sitting at home – well, they would not be sitting at home, but for those who are watching this after they have done a hard day's work, could you imagine that you have got governments condoning that kind of behaviour: allowing those union mates to effectively put in a dodgy invoice and not do any work.

We already hear of the hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars a year that people are being paid. We do not mind people being paid for a fair day's work, but not for no work at all. That is dodgy. But we see this government absolutely up to their eyeballs in dodginess, and again the Deputy Premier completely ignores the kind of behaviour that is happening in her own portfolio. The Deputy Premier neglects the bullying and intimidation that is happening on the LXP and Big Build projects. She is ignoring it – doing nothing. The Deputy Premier is ignoring the waste and mismanagement on her projects, and the Deputy Premier is ignoring the pain and suffering of the small businesses that got nothing when they shut down their businesses during the time of the level crossing removals.

Acting Speaker Hamer, you know about those people in Surrey Hills – 20 businesses are no longer there. They did not get a dollar of compensation. I contrast that with people that have been relocated. I spoke to somebody that had been relocated just the other week. He said to me that it was wonderful, and he should be relocated. He said to me that they got relocated to a hotel in South Yarra, a \$300-a-night room – \$9000 on the taxpayer – while the level crossing was being removed. That is wonderful. How much did the small businesses get while we literally had a war zone in the middle of some of these level crossings? In Glen Huntly, right in the middle of it, businesses were locked down completely. I went through one of the cafes there outside a workshop. You could not hear yourself speak. They had drilling literally outside the front of a shop, which you could not operate in, and those businesses were meant to stay open during that period. How much did those businesses get? Not one dollar.

I ask the Deputy Premier to have a look at some of the Facebook sites that have been set up. There is the Glen Huntly Businesses Suffering Facebook page. There are so many Facebook pages and websites that have been set up. At the moment they talk about the pain and they talk about the suffering. They talk about the fact that they got no support whatsoever from this government in terms of trying to keep the doors open. We have asked the government, we have asked the Deputy Premier to go and meet them. The Deputy Premier has been to these level crossing removals. She cuts the ribbon and ignores the small businesses. They are the backbone, they are the heart and soul, of many of those communities. The level crossings are important to remove, but do not turn your back on those

communities that are there each and every day. It is all very easy for the government to wheel themselves in, wheel themselves out and leave behind those businesses that are effectively the train wreck – if they survive at all. And we have seen so many of those businesses that have not been able to survive. We have had businesses, again in Glen Huntly, I can tell you, that have been there for 20 years that are literally on death's door trying to survive, trying to pick up the pieces. So this government absolutely wastes money. They waste money; they mismanage.

I know Brian Duggan, a convener of the northern suburbs community group Save Buckley Street, applied under the freedom of information laws to VicRoads and the LXRP in 2021 with anger about the community road under rail used to remove the level crossing at Buckley Street, Essendon, which effectively prevented the future removal of nearly two high-risk level crossings in Puckle Street and Park Street, Moonee Ponds. Dr Duggan requested all data relating to how the Andrews government had selected and ranked level crossings for removal. VicRoads indicated that while it had taken carriage of the project in the immediate aftermath of the 2014 election, the locations of the first 50 removals had been determined as part of an election commitment by the Labor opposition and it did not possess the relevant documents. So this was all done on politics, not on people and not on need.

These are dangerous level crossings. Whether you look in Essendon, whether you look in Surrey Hills and Mont Albert or whether you look in Caulfield and Glen Huntly, these are dangerous level crossings that were left off. So for the government to pat themselves on the back when we know that these level crossings were not done on need but were done according to politics, when the government were patting themselves on the back when we know that the government business projects, these major projects, have blown out of control – the government really has got a lot to answer for.

The Deputy Premier – we have called on the Deputy Premier to resign, particularly after the way the Deputy Premier has mismanaged the Commonwealth Games. We will all be paying billions of dollars in cancelled contracts and in projects that many people do not need or do not want now we do not have the Commonwealth Games. There is untold hurt and suffering in terms of our global reputation on the Commonwealth Games. This is part of the Deputy Premier's portfolio of responsibilities. Whether it be the Commonwealth Games, whether it be the level crossings or whether it be the Suburban Rail Loop, every single project that the Deputy Premier has touched she has made an absolute mess of. The Deputy Premier could not manage a chook raffle. The Deputy Premier would not know how to be able to even count to 10. Unfortunately, the Deputy Premier, when it comes to managing money, is missing in action. The Deputy Premier is the Deputy Premier waiting to get the top job of being the Premier, and I have got to tell you, you cannot be the Premier if you cannot manage money. The state is already broke. The last thing we need is an incompetent premier-in-waiting that is again going to send the state even more broke than we currently are.

**Colin Brooks:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member well knows that it is out of order to reflect on other members of this place, and it is well off the motion before the house that is being considered.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** The member's time has expired.

**Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:13):** I am really pleased to have the opportunity today to contribute to this motion. It was a really tough 30 minutes, those 30 minutes listening to story time with the member for Caulfield. I think, member for Footscray, you and I were searching for a pillow and an eye mask and just settling in there, ready for story time with the member for Caulfield. I just want to go to some of the comments that the member made in his fine 30-minute contribution. I think there were a couple of comments, the first being that we – as in we, the Andrews Labor government – must manage major projects properly. Well, firstly, we are, and secondly, for those opposite, you cannot really reflect on your ability or your management of any major projects because of course –

**Michaela Settle:** You didn't do anything.



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**Josh BULL:** Well, that's exactly right; you didn't do anything. You didn't do any. The member's complaint about level crossing removal –

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I actually have a lot of time for the member on his feet –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** Is there a point of order?

**David Southwick:** I do ask you to ask the member to address his contribution through the Chair. There are a lot of 'yous' going on here, right and centre. Could he just address the comments through the Chair.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** The member for Sunbury did use the word 'you', and I ask him to not make reflections on the Chair.

**Josh BULL:** Thank you very much for your guidance, Acting Speaker. The issue of cost was raised significantly, yet we on this side of the house know that with the 72 level crossings that this government has removed since it has been in office, those opposite have made additional requests on nearly all of them. Bizarrely, for nearly all of those level crossings, those opposite have asked us to increase the budget, for nearly every single one of them. Let us just look at some examples.

On Caulfield to Dandenong they wanted billions more to put the corridor in a trench; on Surrey Hills and Mont Albert, they insisted that we build two new stations, which would have destroyed homes, businesses and parklands and cost hundreds of millions more; at Carrum they insisted on a trench under the Patterson River. At Toorak Road they insisted on a trench through a flood plain, which would have cost many more millions; at Buckley Street, a rail trench, half a billion dollars. The list goes on. At Pakenham they wanted an expensive trench to cut Pakenham in half; at Lilydale they opposed the project proceeding but then called for more money, for us to increase the budget. At so many of these opportunities, so many examples, they have called for the government and for the Level Crossing Removal Project to spend more money, yet they come into this place and on this motion make these claims around cost. We know and understand that an investment within a local community to get on and remove a dangerous and congested level crossing is an investment around safety, it is an investment around reducing congestion and it is an investment that goes to something that we know the vast majority of Victorians support.

We have taken our commitments to remove level crossings to three elections now. While those opposite do nothing more than oppose them, we know the importance of getting on and getting rid of these level crossings. We know there are more than 165 road and rail projects happening right across our state, with employment of 20,000 direct jobs and over 50,000 indirect jobs. Not in words but in action the Andrews Labor government will continue to be committed to getting things done, to making local communities better, fairer and safer. That is our focus today, and that will be our focus for the remainder of the term –

**A member** interjected.

**Josh BULL:** and hopefully, member for Frankston, many terms after that. We know that the removal of the 72 level crossings, as we chase down 110 by 2030, is a bold, visionary, strong and ambitious plan, but we know that this is a task that is, again, supported by local communities and supported by those who travel each and every day on our transport network. It is supported by commuters and supported by road users.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Level Crossing Removals, I do want to take the opportunity at this moment this afternoon to thank each and every member of the Level Crossing Removal Project, formerly the Level Crossing Removal Authority. I want to thank them for their dedication, their passion and their commitment to supporting local communities and for their professionalism and their passion for getting things done. You simply do not achieve the outcomes that have been achieved right across the program without a high-quality team, so this government formally recognises the work of

the sensational team in construction and design, in landscaping and in communications. It is a massive workforce with a massive responsibility. I do want to acknowledge all of the local communities that have seen level crossing removals within their local patches. We know and understand that significant construction causes significant disruption. We know and understand that these processes are not easy for local communities, but the outcome goes to safety, it goes to saving lives and it goes to reducing congestion and having an opportunity to run more trains more often.

We as a state are growing by more than 1 million people per decade. The minister at the table, the Minister for Housing, I know is acutely aware of these growth pressures. Of course this government, through the Big Build – whether it is the Metro Tunnel, whether it is the West Gate or whether it is the North East Link, the Suburban Rail Loop or the subject of today's motion, the removal of 110 dangerous and congested level crossings by 2030 – knows and understands that this is incredibly important to making sure that we are moving people around our suburbs, around our city and around our state each and every day.

We know that investment in level crossing removals of such significant size and such significant scale requires successive budgets to ensure that we are investing. The 2023–24 budget continues to deliver on the Big Build, providing an additional \$7.3 billion to keep delivering transport projects and give Victorians the great transport network they deserve. We have spoken, and the minister spoke at length, about adding to the level crossing removal program – those additional level crossings from when the commitment was to remove 50, then 85 – to now 110 by 2030. We know of course that this list is incredibly important, but we know and understand the investment. Certainly, Acting Speaker Hamer, as a local member you know and understand the investment and the importance of making sure that we are continuing to invest.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Level Crossing Removals I have had the opportunity to visit many of these level crossings sites through the course of this year. I want to acknowledge the workforce, the incredible team, that works around the clock to get on and get rid of level crossings across our state. Whether it is Parkers Road in Parkdale in the seat of Mordialloc; Narre Warren North at Webb Street; Beaconsfield at Brunt Road; Station Street in Beaconsfield; Croydon; Sydenham; Preston; Pakenham; of course Box Hill, Acting Speaker Hamer; Union Road, Surrey Hills; or Mont Albert Road; we know and understand that it is incredibly important to make sure that we as a government are investing but also working with local communities to get the very best outcome. What we know is that as we have gotten on and removed 72 of those level crossings and as we march towards that incredibly important target of 110 by 2030, the workforce continues to need and require that confidence of investment and a strong and sustained pipeline to make sure that we are supporting each of those local communities and we are making communities safer and less congested and supporting communities as we go.

I did hope – and I am certainly conscious of the less than 40 seconds that I have now got remaining – to be able to rattle off the very long list of indeed 72 crossings that we have been able to get rid of. But I do want to finish, in the final 30 seconds, by saying that this government, since day one, since November 2014, has set a bold, ambitious and strong plan to get on and get rid of level crossings. We know how important it is for local communities. We know how important it is for the train network right across our state. Again, we will continue to invest, we will continue to work with local communities and we will make sure that we get on and remove dangerous and congested level crossings – 110 by 2030.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (15:23): I am staggered that I am rising on the first day of a sitting week to speak on a government motion patting the government on its back – a motion, not even a bill, not even a piece of legislation, just a motion.

**James Newbury**: Is it the budget papers?

**Danny O'BRIEN**: It is not the budget papers. No, it is not about talking about the budget. The government does not want to talk about the budget.

**Jess Wilson:** I wonder why.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** I am not quite sure – well, I am quite sure why. I am very sure why they do not want to talk about the budget. They want to talk about something else that they have spent a lot of money on and had cost overruns on. I am going to do a favour for the member for Sunbury, because the member for Sunbury ran out of time, obviously. He said he did not have time to go through all the level crossing removals, so I thought I would list for everybody all the level crossing removals outside of Melbourne.

Okay, that is done; let us move on. When I looked at the list, I had a bit of a look and saw there are some on the Sunbury line, and I thought, 'Well, I think the Country Party held the seat of Sunbury in about 1943, so maybe that is as close as we will get to something actually being spent in the country.'

**Colin Brooks:** Walshy was leader then, wasn't he?

**Danny O'BRIEN:** I am going to tell him you said that, Minister. Walshy was not the leader in 1943. I think Kim Wells was in the Parliament, though. My apologies to the member for Rowville, because I am going to cop it for that one too.

Personally, I support in principle what the government has done in removing level crossings. Many years ago when this was underway I was alerted to the fact that there are virtually no level crossings in Sydney because the then government in Sydney removed most of them during the Depression years as Depression work jobs. It is a good thing that the government is doing it, but what I am concerned about is the cost and the fact that this is a multi, multibillion-dollar project that has been entirely metropolitan focused and those of us in regional Victoria have seen none of the benefits – indeed we have seen plenty of disruption and delay and costs heaped on us from this.

When I talk about costs, I am not actually sure what the final costs are. We saw a Victorian Auditor-General's Office report in 2020 that indicated that the program then had gone from \$8 billion to \$14.8 billion with the addition of additional crossing removals, so \$14.8 billion. If you add up the two pages in the budget papers this year – if you go to the *State Capital Program*, budget paper 4, 25 more level crossings is a new project being funded at \$6.522 billion, and the 85 by 2025 listed under existing projects is listed at \$8.8 billion – we are talking a figure of some \$15.3 billion, which is getting up to about \$140 million in total for each of the projects. What I am concerned about is the spending on that.

We have had arguments for a long time about the waste in this particular program. The Auditor-General has raised concerns about that because the government, as the member for Caulfield indicated, had not done the research, had not done the benefit–cost ratio and had not done the business cases when it launched into what was a very political campaign early on. In the 2020 update, the *Follow up of Managing the Level Crossing Removal Program* audit by VAGO, the Auditor-General stated:

However, DoT and MTIA did not complete a full business case for LXP2. As a result, the government did not receive advice about the project's expected economic benefit before it made its decision to fund LXP2.

That is where I say it is one thing to support the removal of level crossings in principle; it is another thing to do it in an economically rational and responsible manner, and there is definitely a question as to whether the government has in fact done that.

That is in a situation where we in regional Victoria cannot get decent rail services, cannot get our roads fixed, cannot get our road projects done, and the government is spending \$15.3 billion on the level crossing removal program. And I will go beyond that, because if you add to it the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel and the North East Link, all of which have blown out to some degree in cost – the North East Link, we still do not know how much it has blown out in cost –

**Jess Wilson:** It's \$16 billion.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Well, it is at least \$16 billion, I think, on the budget papers, but in a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing last year I asked what the cost of it was. 'We can't tell

you that, Mr O'Brien, because there's currently a live tender process' – 12 months later we got exactly the same answer from the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure: 'We've still got a live tender process and we can't tell you how much it costs.' I reckon possibly by 2026 we might know how much the North East Link is actually going to cost, but anyway, I digress. Those four projects, including the level crossing removals, are \$54 billion – 54,000 million dollars on four projects alone, every one of them in the city.

You would think after that the government might say, 'Well, we've spent a lot of money in Melbourne, we need to do some more for the regions', but what is the next big thing we are going to do? We are going to do the Suburban Rail Loop. The government then adds a project that is, what, \$125 billion? Who knows? It is at least, even on the government's own numbers, \$33 billion on the first stage. We know that will blow out. Here we are: we have a government with potentially \$180 billion of spending on just five projects, and that is not even the full Suburban Rail Loop. Yet here in regional Victoria we cannot get our roads fixed, we cannot get our trains to turn up on time – and that is part of the issue I have with the Level Crossing Removal Project as a Gippslander, that we have seen massive disruption on the Gippsland line because of the works on the level crossing removal on the Cranbourne–Pakenham line.

Everyone understands that when you are doing infrastructure works there is going to be disruption, but we have put up with a hell of a lot of disruption now for eight or nine years, and we get no benefit from that. The minister often says, 'Oh, you know, you'll get more services, you'll get less disruption on the line.' Well, no, sorry, the train has precedence. The train does not stop at the road; that is the whole point of a level crossing. So the trains are not going to go any better from Gippsland because the government has removed a couple of level crossings on the city part of the Cranbourne–Pakenham line.

Indeed it is actually worse than that, because Gippsland has one of the worst performing train lines in terms of punctuality in the state, largely because we have no dedicated track. I caught the train to Parliament yesterday, as I often do. As is always the case, you rocket along pretty quickly to Pakenham, then you hit Pakenham station and it is a stop–start, slow go from there because you regularly get stuck behind a Metro train, unlike if you are in Geelong, Ballarat or Bendigo. If you are in Geelong, Ballarat or Bendigo, you have got the regional rail link, which by the way was delivered under budget and ahead of schedule by the former coalition government, something that is very rarely acknowledged by those opposite. Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong have the regional rail link, a dedicated line. Gippsland does not get that. We get stuck behind the metro trains repeatedly.

The level crossing removal program has actually made that worse, because it was already a pretty narrow corridor, and the government building sky rail – elevated rail lines – for the level crossing removals has meant it is virtually impossible now to put in a fully dedicated Gippsland line. When I ask the minister repeatedly to at least do a feasibility study on it, at least look at putting in maybe a couple of additional passing loops, maybe a tunnel through the worst, most congested area, the minister virtually laughs at Gippsland and says, 'No, we're not interested in even doing that'. The works that the government has done on sky rail have absolutely wrecked us. What does that mean? Well, the Rail Futures Institute did some work on Gippsland rail needs a few years ago, and it showed that Warragul–Melbourne is 10 to 15 minutes slower now than it was in 2001 and the Bairnsdale trip has not changed since 1990 – indeed it got better in 2009, when you could get to Bairnsdale in 217 minutes, but it is now 224 minutes. So our regional rail services have got worse, and the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure has now made that situation even worse because she has built something that effectively precludes us from actually ever having a decent, dedicated Gippsland line. So it is very nice, I am sure, that some metropolitan Victorians are not having to wait 5, 10 or 15 minutes in the morning. We in country Victoria would just like a bit of funding to absolutely fix up our roads. We have seen another cut to the roads budget this year. With the money that has been spent – over \$15 billion – on this program, just a bit of spare change from that would have been good to fix country roads as well.

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh) (15:33): It is a pleasure to contribute to this motion on level crossing removals, because my electorate was first cab off the rank; ours were the first three – I remember it like it was yesterday, but it was not yesterday; it was seven or eight years ago – Centre Road, McKinnon Road and North Road. I will talk more about those level crossing removals, but I do want to start by doing something pretty unorthodox, and something I have never done – I am going to quote the *Herald Sun* from 19 November 2013:

Casting doubt on Labor's core promise on level crossings, Dr Napthine said he didn't think it was possible to remove 50 crossings in eight years.

And we have removed how many?

*Members interjecting.*

**Nick STAIKOS**: 72. And during that time we have also removed – I think I have tallied it up correctly – 21 Liberal–National MPs. The communities in those electorates are very grateful for that, just as the communities in those areas where we have removed those 72 level crossings are very grateful indeed.

I did say that Centre Road, McKinnon Road and North Road were first three, and indeed they were. I do remember it like it was yesterday, particularly that intense five-week period of construction on Centre Road, McKinnon Road and North Road when a bit over a thousand workers worked around the clock, 24/7, and they removed 250,000 cubic metres of soil from the three trenches. We measure things in MCGs, and in terms of the MCG comparison, that amount of soil is enough to fill the MCG up to the second tier. It was very, very significant. In fact that five-week rail occupation back in 2016 was the longest such rail occupation since the city loop tunnel was built. Such was the scale of this investment and this very, very important job, this massive infrastructure upgrade, for Victoria that we had not seen anything that big since the construction of the city loop, at least in a public transport sense.

We have so far removed 72 level crossings. We are going to remove 110 by 2030. We have pledged to make the Frankston line level crossing free, and that does include level crossings 71 and 72, which were Glen Huntly Road and Neerim Road in the member for Caulfield's electorate. As it stands today, from Moorabbin to Flinders Street on the Frankston line there are no level crossings at all. A number of them have been removed in Mordialloc, in Carrum and in Frankston – right up and down the line. We are removing I think at least two in the Shadow Treasurer's electorate, Wickham Road and Highett Road. As I said, by 2030 the Frankston line will be level crossing free, and not only the Frankston line but the Cranbourne line, the Lilydale line, the Pakenham line, the Sunbury line and the Werribee line will all be boom gate free by 2030. That is a great thing because we are about to open the Metro Tunnel, another project opposed by those opposite, in 2025, which will untangle the city centre. It will ensure that we are able to run more trains more often. It will mean, for instance, that the Frankston line trains will be able to resume services through the city loop tunnel just like they used to, because the Pakenham–Cranbourne line will be going through the new tunnel. We will be putting more trains on the line. We needed to make these lines level crossing free, and that is exactly what this government has done.

The member for Caulfield was trying to put to us that of course they support level crossing removals. I have to say I did not see any support seven years ago when we were removing those three level crossings in my electorate. In fact the chief opponent in the Bentleigh electorate of these level crossing removals was one Georgie Crozier from the other place. You know, before she started chasing ambulances, she had another career. She was marching up and down Centre Road with a petition. Remember, in those days there were a lot of petitions flying around against the Level Crossing Removal Project. But apparently they support it – you know, sign this petition against it, but no, we support level crossing removals. What absolute garbage. The people of Victoria saw through that absolute garbage. I cannot talk about Georgie Crozier without talking about David Davis. His job was to oppose the level crossing removals on the Dandenong line, in the member for Oakleigh's electorate. I hate to do it, but I am going to quote from the *Herald Sun* again, this time from 2016. I am going to quote David Davis:

This is a hideous imposition on our community that nobody voted for. If it was such a great idea Daniel Andrews should have told the community before the election. He hoodwinked the community.

David Davis made that statement 18 months out from the 2018 election. They threw everything at Oakleigh. They thought, 'Sky rail; we're going to win Oakleigh.' What happened at that election? A 7.6 per cent swing to the member for Oakleigh – that is what happened at that election. They have been on a hiding to nothing opposing this government's level crossing removal program, because it is overwhelmingly supported by the Victorian community.

Even today, you know, the member for Caulfield should be grateful that two level crossings – no, three level crossings have been removed in his electorate by this government, if you include Ormond. But instead, halfway through his contribution the best he could do was talk about a lift at a station that is not yet complete. The lift is there; it will be operational soon. The project is not finished; we are still going. It will be finished soon. But that is the best he could do.

This government has just got on with it. We are removing 110 by 2030. We have already removed 72. We are making several of these lines level crossing free because we are building that Metro Tunnel, which will open in 2025. This is infrastructure that is creating jobs. In the Deputy Premier's contribution, when she moved this motion, she pointed out to the house that over 6000 people had directly worked on the level crossing removal program. This thing has a long way to run, so that is a lot of jobs. But then when you think of all of the engineering cadets who have gotten their first gig on the level crossing project, when you think of all the trainees, all the apprentices, the many Indigenous Victorians, First Nations Victorians, who have worked on these level crossing removals, including a number of First Nations Victorians who worked on the Dandenong line, and also the number of returned service men and women who worked on these projects – this is an infrastructure project that has a long way to run, and all along the way it is creating jobs and opportunities for Victorians, which has been this government's central mission since day one.

I am not surprised that those opposite to this day oppose the Level Crossing Removal Project, because all they do is oppose. They oppose everything this government does. You cannot say, 'Oh, no, we support level crossing removals, but sign this petition against it anyway' because a lift at a yet-to-be-completed station does not work or because we have had to have some disruption while we literally dig out 250,000 cubic metres of soil to remove a level crossing. If their argument is we should have removed these level crossings without disrupting the Victorian community or motorists or commuters for a single day, they are living in fantasy world – absolute fantasy world. Well, we are pushing ahead with the Level Crossing Removal Project because our communities overwhelmingly support it. Those opposite just languish in the irrelevant place that they have languished in for the last nearly nine years. We are getting on with it. All the level crossings are gone from the Bentleigh electorate, but I certainly continue to look forward to the day that our Frankston line, which cuts right through my electorate, is completely level crossing free. I commend the motion to the house.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (15:43): I rise in relation to the motion put forward by the Deputy Premier around level crossing removal, and I will be focusing mostly on my electorate. I will note to the member for Bentleigh that it was very important that he did state that obviously we are sitting over here in these irrelevant seats. I think that is what you were referring to – saying that the Berwick community is irrelevant. I do not believe they are irrelevant; I think they are a very important community. During the time that I have opposed some of those level crossing removals, and one that is still underway, we have still had a swing to the Victorian Liberal Party. So there are people out there – not everybody thinks it is a fantastic idea, level crossing removal. However, what I do say is that with level crossing removals overall there have been some good results, so I will not deny that. I do note in the motion, though, they seem to skip anything about cost: about the cost overruns, about some of the issues with some of the prices on it, about how it has impacted on the housing prices, about the changes from the Big Build and what it has done to building a house in Victoria, about the change in the way of trying to find a tradie to get a house built.

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I look at some of these things about choices, and the government had choices about what level crossings they have done. Again, I will not focus on how the majority are in Labor seats, but I will say there is one in Beaconsfield which will probably be my main focus. It is currently under construction, the level crossing removal in Beaconsfield. It is at the Beaconsfield railway station. I note that the member for Sunbury, who is at the table, said he has been there. So he would have noted whilst there, I hope – and if he has not, I am more than happy to do another tour if he would like to come out and have a look through – that at the Beaconsfield railway station people living with a disability cannot get the train unless they go to the end of the railway station on a platform, whether rain, hail or shine, where there is no cover and they have got no option other than to get wet or sit out in the extreme heat whilst they are waiting for a train. That is simply not fair, and that is what I am saying when it comes to choices. The choice from this government is to do a level crossing removal on a road that no-one is calling for, that no-one wants and that is not going to fix a problem because the problem does not exist. It is going to take away parkland. It is going to cost over \$100 million.

They have just torn up 360 car parks at Beaconsfield railway station – 360 car parks that this government, with the feds, funded as recently as two years ago. They are tearing all of that up – what a waste of money. Our community is a sensible community, and they will talk about it continuously. They will look at some of the ones in Pakenham – I know the member for Pakenham will probably speak on this – and they will say there have been some changes that are positive with the level crossing removals through Pakenham. There have been some positive changes along the whole Pakenham line, in terms of how you can go into the city, to make it safer. I think that is fantastic. But that one at Beaconsfield is a poor choice.

If we go to Station Street in Officer, they will not be doing a level crossing removal, they are just going to take away the boom gates and close the road. Again, that is not an option that I think should be used. It should have either been a level crossing removal or, in my view, remained open. But for the one in Beaconsfield, they are going to go through the oldest house in Beaconsfield. If this was a house in the middle of Hawthorn, in the middle of Malvern or in the middle of Toorak, people would be up in arms. It is the original stationmaster's house. However, they are going to be taking off the back end of that house, a house rebuilt by Ian Cole, which is one of the most stunning properties in Beaconsfield. The family that lives there is obviously getting paid out by the government. They would have loved to have spoken up, but in the position they were in, due to employment, they could not do that, so we were their voice. Next to it is a tree that we have had to fight and fight and fight to keep because the original plans took out that tree along with the house.

In the Berwick electorate it will cost \$100 million-plus. If we are talking about some of those choices, I will give the government some options for what they can do with that money: an MRI machine at the Casey Hospital, so people who are waiting at the moment do not have to go on a waitlist to go down to Dandenong. There are people there at the moment that have to wait four or five days for an MRI scan, even in urgent cases. They have to travel to Dandenong. There is our road network, which I invited the minister to come out and have a look at. Thompsons Road and Berwick-Cranbourne Road is an intersection that needs to be upgraded – it must be upgraded – and that is five years away. When you look at sports facilities throughout the area, there are many kids that cannot play sport because there is no access to facilities. There are not enough ovals. The land space is there, but there are not enough ovals. There are not enough facilities. As we will see shortly – and we will be very proud to see shortly – more and more young participants, particularly girls, are playing soccer. How amazing will it be to get them involved in their local sports club? But when they get down there, they will be told, 'We're really sorry. We haven't got the ground for you to play on.' That just should not happen in a growth corridor when the government is spending \$100 million fixing a problem that does not exist.

We asked for the number of cars that travel through there. What is the count? How many vehicles travel through? When do they travel through? How long do they have to wait? Any person who has had a level crossing removal in their area would understand that that is probably pretty important data, because that is how you identify what the problem is at that intersection. The numbers came through

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from that. When they came through, we asked: what was the timing of when they were done? The road count was done before the O'Shea Road triangle was turned into an O'Shea Road diamond and when Clyde Road was shut due to upgrades and the main way through was this intersection.

But if you take that intersection out, and if you speak to any person on Kenilworth Avenue, if you speak to any person on Station Street opposite the railway station or if you speak to them even at the school, which probably creates the most traffic in the area, the maximum wait would be a couple of minutes during school time – at the beginning and end of school. Without being rude, on the Princes Highway, which is two lanes each way with no obstacles in the way, it is 3 or 4 minutes to get past Haileybury because traffic happens from 8 o'clock to 8:30. It is exactly the same as every school. This level crossing will not alter that at all. It will not change it at all.

But it has to come back to what we are going to do with that money. On top of that, why is it that those in Berwick and Beaconsfield have had to wait so long to get the car parks upgraded? They have had to wait so long to get the funding that it actually took a federal Liberal government to get the final funding in there to get those car parks done. Now it is getting torn up – 360 car parks. It was probably \$50 million, so we have now got \$150 million thrown down the drain – \$150 million in a growth corridor.

Now, I know there are other members here that would all drive along Clyde Road occasionally, and Clyde Road/Berwick-Cranbourne Road is woeful. There are delays on Linsell Boulevard. It should be, in my view, probably a 12-month project. It has been going now for two years, and they have just closed it for another four months because of their incompetence in trying to get these projects done. The developers are doing their section and duplicating parts of the road – and every time that happens there are more delays – but the government are not putting their funding in to duplicate the road in between the two intersections, and they should. If you drive from Clyde North into the city now, the longest part of the drive is the first couple of kilometres from Clyde North, just to get on the freeway to come into the city. Out in that area people do not have railway stations close to them, so most families that move in there are now three- or four-car families. That means that there are more and more cars on a road that cannot take it. They are going onto a freeway that we continue to expand and widen, whereas what we should be doing is investing that money into extra rolling stock so there are more trains available at Beaconsfield.

Finally, if I had my way with this \$150 million or a very small margin of it, I would upgrade Beaconsfield railway station because, as I said to the member for Sunbury before, it is only fair. People with a disability do not have the opportunities that we have, and they must use public transport. To put them in a position where they have to go to the end of that platform is simply unfair. I say to the government: it is your choice; it is your call. You have decided not to upgrade Beaconsfield station at all, and I think you should hang your heads in shame about that. It has been called for for a long period of time. People with disability deserve respect so that when they get to the railway station they will be treated the same – when it is raining, when it is extraordinarily hot or when it is windy – as everybody else is. We can stand under a shelter; they cannot because they have to be at the end of the railway platform as the train pulls up, and it is simply not fair.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (15:53): Goodness, what an absolute pleasure it is to make a contribution on this motion. You know what, I not only have a tremendous amount of faith in engineers, but I have a tremendous amount of faith in architects and I have a tremendous amount of faith in the amount of planning that goes on in our departments, particularly when it comes to the level crossing removal program. The intersection between so many great government initiatives – the forethought, the planning and the timing – and everything else has to come together to ensure these projects will be to the benefit of every single Victorian, not only for the coming years but for well into the future. It is not only about the Level Crossing Removal Project, but it is about the intersection with the Metro Tunnel as well. We have the Sunbury line with all of those level crossing removal projects taking place, and on the Pakenham line we are seeing them take place as well. I suspect later my colleagues the member for Pakenham and the member for Cranbourne will also be making contributions, because the Cranbourne line too is getting to that point of being level crossing free.



When it comes to regional rail – I had the great pleasure just a week ago to go into Bairnsdale. I took my two girls. We caught the train at Dandenong and went out to Bairnsdale, and it cost us less than \$15 for a return trip out to Bairnsdale. Catching the train at Dandenong and being able to see all of the level crossing removal works that were taking place at Pakenham – it really was quite truly a sight to behold. Yes, there is so much more construction work that is taking place on that Cranbourne line, but to be going out through Pakenham and seeing all those works was just absolutely incredible.

I cannot believe that the member for Berwick was talking about Beaconsfield but did not talk up what we have done over at Clyde Road in Berwick. We have removed the level crossing there – that was done back in February 2022 – and we have built a fantastic road underpass underneath the rail line. The level crossing, incidentally, was the 12th to be removed along the Pakenham line, with about nine more at that time to go to make it boom gate free, and it paved the way for many, many more services for commuters in Melbourne's south-east. In addition to removing the level crossing, that whole Berwick station precinct was upgraded, and there is a new bus interchange there with more sheltered seating, a drop-off area, bicycle storage and new pedestrian connections as well. All of this makes it much easier for members of my community to be getting about. The old bus interchange was transformed into a new car park where there are 140 new car spaces, making it easier for commuters to get to the station, to park their car and then to move freely where they need to and a lot faster on a rail network that is getting closer and closer to being level crossing free.

In terms of consideration of the environment around the immediate precinct, there were some 37,000 trees, shrubs and grasses which were planted in that new pocket park on Clyde Road around Berwick station. The project also included new open space and the development of a new shared-use path, which has opened to the community. The path runs from Berwick station bus interchange, and it provides better walking and much better cycling links to nearby residential, health and education precincts. It is not only about beautification of the area, it is also making it easier for people to travel, whether they are walking or whether they are cycling. Removing that dangerous and very congested level crossing has made journeys safer for the community, including the 22,000 vehicles passing under that rail line every single day.

At Hallam Road a level crossing removal has taken place, and there is the fantastic new Hallam station, which is technically in the member for Narre Warren North's electorate. That is a fantastic station too – something that really looks like it is out of the 22nd century. It is really terrific. The way our new bus timetable is working in that area – the way that those buses are coming into that precinct in time with the train timetable – is making it much easier for people to commute and for people to travel around the neighbourhood. In Narre Warren the big project that is taking place at the moment is the Webb Street level crossing removal project, and that is a massive project. Construction work started in September of last year. They are big works, because not only is the level crossing being removed, there is also an elevated rail bridge over the road being constructed. It was really terrific to be out there with the Premier and the member for Narre Warren North about six weeks ago, I think it was, to check on the progress taking place out there and to speak to the many workers who are ensuring that that construction is taking place safely and taking place swiftly.

The community will enjoy more seating and shelter, including a new air-conditioned waiting room; new elevated platforms will be accessed by lifts and stairs; and the station will include new toilet facilities as well as an updated ticket office and kiosk. Removing the crossing will improve safety, reduce congestion and allow for more trains to run more often. It will also create a level-crossing-free Pakenham line, which will change how locals live, work and travel, with faster journeys and safer roads. At the moment some 13,200 vehicles cross over the Webb Street level crossing every single day, and with those boom gates down for up to 40 minutes in the peak time, it makes it very, very difficult for commuters in the morning. During that time some 25 trains will pass through. It really is terrific to see the major construction that is underway on Webb Street, and I am very, very happy that that level crossing will be gone by 2025.

As the Deputy Premier mentioned, the Level Crossing Removal Project has supported some 6000 jobs at peak construction, and we are now seeing something like 79 million hours that have been completed on the whole project. Hundreds of thousands of vehicles travel through level crossings in Victoria during the morning peak each day, and boom gates can be down for 30 minutes or more. That is gone, and it means our road users are travelling around our road network much more freely. It means people who are travelling on our public transport are also getting to their destinations faster. We did promise originally to remove 50 level crossings. We have smashed that target; we are currently at 72 and we are on track to remove 110 by 2030.

The Level Crossing Removal Project, as I have said, is just one in a suite of many different projects along our rail network. It is assisting communities in our regional centres, but it is also assisting our city travellers. When that Metro Tunnel opens – currently slated for 2025 – it is going to help the two busiest train lines, being the Pakenham-Craigieburn line and the Sunbury line, by utilising that tunnel and also taking the through traffic that comes from those trains. It will make it easier for trains that are travelling through the city loop, removing congestion from the loop, as well. I thoroughly commend this motion. It is an excellent motion.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (16:03): What a pleasure to rise and talk on a motion moved by the manager of government business. I looked carefully at the motion put by the manager of government business, and I draw the house's attention to point (3) of the motion, which reads:

the government will remove a total of 110 level crossings by 2030.

I do take issue with that, because I would like further clarification from the member on the word 'remove'. Why I would like clarification on that is because I can think of one example in my community where the government's intention is not to remove the crossing by replacing it with either an overhead or underground option but to remove the crossing by closure. Later in this contribution, which I hope everyone in the chamber takes some enjoyment from, I will further articulate the concerns of residents at Latrobe Street in my community.

Now, this particular matter of level crossing removals in my community has been there for some time. I think back to the removal of the Cheltenham and Mentone level crossings, and I think back to the community campaign that was run at the time to convey to the government the strong community sentiment that they did not want sky rail through their community; they wanted a rail-under-road option. On this occasion I am pleased to say that the government listened. At both Cheltenham and Mentone a rail-under-road option was delivered. I think of the Mentone community now where that solution has been delivered and that level crossing has been removed, and I look to the community infrastructure that is in and around that precinct and think that it is a wonderful thing. There are some issues that have been raised with me by local traders and by local residents. Of course one of the principal reasons for removing a level crossing is to reduce congestion within a community, and in the case of Mentone arguably that has not been the case, with there being five sets of traffic lights within a 1-kilometre distance between the Woolworths to the south side of the crossing up to Nepean Highway to the north.

At Cheltenham again residents and some local traders have raised concerns with me about the land that is earmarked for development in and around the level crossing removal project and the fact that that development has not taken place, and there is great uncertainty in the community about what that development might look like in the future. Are we talking about densified development within the Cheltenham community? Along Charman Road it is already very busy at the moment.

Then my mind turns to the level crossings in my community which have not been removed, which I have been forthrightly resolved to having removed, and the options that are currently being considered by the Andrews Labor government. I speak of course of the Highett Road and the Wickham Road level crossings in Highett. For some time – for more than five years now – I have been advocating for these level crossings to be removed. Highett is a wonderful part of the world. It is a wonderful part of the state of Victoria. It is a wonderful part of my community. It is a growing area. It is a vibrant area.

There are restaurants, there are community activities and there are young families moving in wanting to be part of the wonderful Highett community. But here is the thing: we have got a level crossing that needs to go and after many, many years of strong community advocacy – which I would like to say, in humility, I had a part to play in, having committed to the removal of that level crossing during the 2022 election campaign before the government made their commitment – the government is not actually considering the full implications of development within the Highett community. You see, at the intersection of Bay Road and Nepean Highway you have got what the government proposes to be the start of the Suburban Rail Loop. Before Joan the boring machine makes her way down to the Sir William Fry Reserve and does her work, there is contaminated soil there which needs to be remediated, so I see that that is a medium to longer term project. I cannot see that happening anytime soon.

You look further up Nepean Highway and you have got the Gas and Fuel land there, 6.3 hectares of state government owned land currently under the auspices of Development Victoria, also earmarked for development. You look just behind the Woolworths on Highett Road and you have got 1100 dwellings being built there, as approved by Bayside City Council, and right on Highett Road you have got a level crossing which should have gone a long time ago. This is why on 23 February this year in this place I requested that the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure consider establishing a cross-agency working group so, frankly, my community would not be impacted as much as they possibly could be if you had the Suburban Rail Loop authority, the level crossing removal authority, Development Victoria, Bayside council, Kingston council, the Department of Transport and Planning and other agencies all fighting for the independence of their own institutions without care and consideration for the impact of decision-making on the community. That is why I called for that working group to be in place.

When it comes to the Highett Road and Wickham Road level crossings my strong preference, and I believe our community's strong preference, is for rail under road. When the minister made her announcement shortly before the starting gun was shot at the 2022 election campaign, she made a commitment on behalf of the government to remove the Highett Road and Wickham Road level crossings, which caused a massive sigh of relief for my community. But the reason that was given for not preferencing rail under road and instead preferencing sky rail – which in my view would be an eyesore for the community which would permanently divide my community and the Highett community in a way that I think is unacceptable – was she did not want the Frankston line closed for three months, but that was kind of it. Frankly, if there is no good reason other than we do not want the Frankston line closed for three months, and this piece of community infrastructure is going to be there forever and a day in my community, I think we should be doing it once and we should be doing it well.

In the time I have remaining I turn to the Latrobe Street level crossing. I will finish off where I started. When the government made this announcement they said, in reference to the third point in this motion, that they would remove these level crossings, and the government wanted to make the Frankston line level crossing free.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** Sure, member for Mordialloc, I would love to get on board, if only the government would listen. I will not take up any more interjections, Deputy Speaker, because I know that is disorderly.

However, when it comes to the Latrobe Street level crossing removal, the government wants to close it. Now, closing something is not removing it. Closing it is closing it. When the minister made this announcement, my gut feeling on this – being a resident all my life in the community which I now have the privilege of serving – was to say, 'This is wrong; there's got to be a different way. There's got to be a better way. We won't close it'. But instead of just relying on my gut, I went to the community – something which the government never did. I went to the community and surveyed some 1500 households within close proximity to the Latrobe Street level crossing. Lo and behold, 98 per cent of respondents – some 400 respondents within about 10 days of putting out that survey – said that

they were never actually asked by the government if anything should be done, would be done or could be done to the Latrobe Street level crossing. This is an issue that I have: instead of just simply saying, 'We're going to rule. We're going to rule from on high and dictate a solution to the community that they may or may not want', and for it to be a lasting solution in the eyes of the government, they should speak to the community that it affects before they impose it on that community.

I think the saving grace that my community has here is that – and in contact with the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, she has confirmed – for reasons that may be familiar to the member for Mordialloc, the Highbett Road and the Wickham Road level crossing removals and the Latrobe Street level crossing closure have been pushed by this government into the never-never, not in the foreseeable future, later down the track. It is my hope that there will be an election between now and that period and that I will take to the next election a commitment, as I did in previous elections, to remove those level crossings with a rail-under-road solution and not close the Latrobe Street level crossing – and let the people of my community decide.

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (16:13): I rise today to support the motion under consideration. I want to talk about the vast difference the Level Crossing Removal Project has made to my home suburb of Glenroy. The level crossing in Glenroy was the bane of many people's existence. It was the number one issue raised for so many years. My younger sister even went to a different school than the rest of us because Mum and Dad just could not cope with that crossing every day. When my youngest was about 18 months old we once again heard the 'Ding, ding, ding' and from the back seat we heard words that are not parliamentary and definitely not our proudest parenting moment but set in perfect tone and context – so the boom gates even frustrated toddlers. I wish we had taken the collective blood pressure of Glenroy residents before 2022 and again afterwards. I think we might have found that the level crossing removal was also a health infrastructure project.

It was always the number one frustration of Glenroy residents. And it was not just the unreasonable delays when the boom gates were down 40 per cent of the morning peak hour, but it was the fact that the boom gates split the community in two. If you were in a wheelchair, you could not safely get from one side of Glenroy to the other. The underpass was too steep and not Disability Discrimination Act 1992 compliant. I will never forget accompanying my dad over the level crossing when I was pregnant. Because I could not push him in a wheelchair through the steep underpass, we decided to cross at the actual railway crossing. His wheels struck one of the tracks and jolted him out of the chair. So we were stuck on the railway crossing, he was out of his chair and I was trying to get him back in, and there was a train on the way. It was a really dangerous crossing, and that no longer happens, because it is fully DDA compliant and you can easily get from one side of Glenroy to the other now.

Every year the Glenroy level crossing came up in the RACV's Redspot surveys, and there were regular safety issues with people driving around the lowered boom gates out of frustration at wait times. When Christine Campbell asked me to work for her back in 2000 I kind of hesitated but then decided it was going to be the only way we could get rid of that crossing. After working for her for a few months I found there was so much else we could do and help people with to improve the local area. The crossing was also one of the reasons I ran for council in 2004, and much of the structure planning work and advocacy we undertook was to achieve level crossing removal. I am sure the other councillors got sick of me banging on about it – until they got stuck there themselves and were late for yet another kinder pick-up or appointment. I also joined the ALP transport committee, and I and others agitated for a level crossing removal program just like Sydney had undertaken. A shout-out to all the comrades in the policy committees, who work really hard to have good policy for government.

I cannot tell you how pleased I was when Labor was elected in 2014 with the commitment to remove 50 level crossings. So many thought it would not happen and certainly that Glenroy would never be done, but it has been so delightful to prove them wrong. I sincerely thank Lizzie Blandthorn for her tireless dedication to the crossing project and the great outcomes that were achieved in Glenroy. It was wonderful to join her and Minister Allan as we removed the blasted boom gate, which was the 60th removal. They even made an artwork at the station in honour of the boom gate. I think it is lucky the

sculpture is not made of wood or it may have ended up a one-night bonfire homage to the boom gate. It was wonderful to be with Minister Carroll and Lizzie at the opening of the station to witness the two sides of Glenroy being linked for the first time in over 100 years.

It is not just the reduction in wait times and in frustration at the delays that have improved the day-to-day life of so many in Glenroy. We now have a magnificent, award-winning station with a wide walkway and beautiful waiting and gathering area that connects the two sides of Glenroy and gives a focal point for our community. It is hard to explain what this has done for the Glenroy community, but there is a real uplift in attitude. They feel valued and have a station they are proud of. I even still feel like skipping through it on my morning walk. In chatting with the local Merri-bek CEO the other day, she recalled a young boy at the station on opening day. She asked him what he thought of the station, and his answer was 'I just feel so proud'. Well, I am proud too, and so proud to be part of a Labor government that not only has done the 50 originally promised but has now promised 75 by 2025. We have already removed 72, two years ahead of schedule, and we have committed 110 by 2030.

I am proud of what this has done for jobs. We have created thousands of jobs for Victorians and are diversifying the workforce, with more opportunities for women and people with a disability. In my electorate of Broadmeadows this government's commitment to free TAFE and Big Build apprenticeships has allowed for more than 23 infrastructure-related TAFE courses. We supported local traders. We are driving more customers to local businesses through shop-and-save initiatives. The increase in construction activity at level crossing removal sites brings hundreds of additional workers to the area, and they are encouraged to shop locally and support traders as much as possible. We saw this play out in Glenroy during the Glenroy level crossing removal project, when businesses in my electorate thrived from the increased venue. You really did not want to get stuck behind the bunch of tradies and wait 45 minutes for your coffee, because there were so many tradies ordering coffee. It really kept a lot of the businesses afloat during COVID, so we are really grateful for what the Level Crossing Removal Project did for businesses in Glenroy through what was a really tough time for business.

We cannot ignore the benefit of creating safer, more efficient transport not just for motorists but for pedestrians and cyclists as well. When this government removes a level crossing, we do not just move the tracks and call it done, we revitalise the entire area. We do not just transform the way commuters travel, we improve the safety and amenity across the community and transform the way locals live. As part of the Level Crossing Removal Project this government upgraded the entire Glenroy station precinct. We now have a modern train station for a modern Glenroy. The new Glenroy station provides accessible transport for Glenroy residents, bringing it up to date with Disability Discrimination Act compliance. Now people who require a mobility aid can easily access our public transport network. The upgrades have provided a permanent, open walkway between the eastern and western sides of Glenroy. Before the removal, the arrival of a train would split the suburb in half. Now, for the first time in 100 years, people on the western side of Glenroy can walk to the post office or head to the shops at all hours of the day, and they can do it without needing to worry about dangerous traffic. People can walk around the area at night and feel safe thanks to the new open areas and lighting, and it does all of this with an award-winning design.

Across the projects we have delivered approximately 20 MCGs worth of open space and created bike paths for local communities to gather on and enjoy. I am so proud of our social procurement policy, which engages Victorian Aboriginal businesses, Victorian social enterprises and Australian disability enterprises and gives more opportunities for more Victorians to contribute to the economy. Our local disability employment service Brite has a contract to provide all the wonderful plants at the station projects, and they do a marvellous job. From design to the construction of level crossing removals we are leading the way in innovation with a focus on sustainability, using recycled material and installing solar panels. The only drawback is that we can no longer use the excuse of being stuck at the level crossing when we are running late, but it is a small price to pay.

This government gets things done because this Labor government is a government of infrastructure, a government that sees the importance of building up and improving our great state, and the people of

Victoria know how important infrastructure is. We have taken the level crossing removal, along with our Big Build, to multiple elections and we have been given a resounding yes each time by the Victorian people. Those in opposition do not understand that; they campaigned on scrapping the level crossing removal along with the benefits that come with it. Now, in 2023, we have completed 72 out of 110 projects; we only have 38 left. I want to especially highlight that we are delivering these projects under budget. In 2022 we spent \$400 million under budget across the entire level crossing program. That is why we need to get on with the job on not only the level crossing removals but all aspects of the Big Build.

As part of the Big Build the Metro Tunnel will be open in 2025. This is another infrastructure commitment from this government that will be delivered on schedule. With the opening of the new Metro Tunnel there will be more trains running across the Melbourne network, which will add congestion to the existing level crossings across metro Melbourne. If we do not continue the level crossing removals, we will bring traffic to a standstill during important peak hours.

I am proud of this government's commitment to remove a massive 13 level crossings on the Upfield line and along the way upgrade the signals for future projects and future upgrades along the line. With five level crossings already gone and eight more to go by 2027, it will have a significant impact on the safety and efficiency of transport along that corridor. Our Big Build is putting \$7.3 billion into much-needed transport infrastructure, and each level crossing removal is done in collaboration with the local communities it affects – that is, the local residents, schools, businesses, emergency services and people that actually use the roads and trains.

I have already mentioned the Metro Tunnel, which will add capacity for new trains throughout the network. Last month we completed the upgrade to the Sunbury line, adding almost 6 kilometres of new track and upgrading stations along the entire line. I particularly love the pedestrian crossing overpass at Sunbury with the Aboriginal artwork on it; it looks magnificent. When the Metro Tunnel is complete, these upgrades will allow 113 extra passengers – (*Time expired*)

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (16:23): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution on the level crossing removal motion. I am pleased to hear the member for Broadmeadows say that there are only about 38 to go; hopefully they will be on budget for the last 38. I mean, you can only use that excuse so many times. After 110 level crossing projects, one would hope that by the time they get to the end they might actually be on budget.

Now, it is fair to say that the government for Melbourne is solving many of the Melbourne problems. I understand that, and I understand why level crossing removals are important in Melbourne. But Victoria is 227,000 square kilometres and Melbourne is only 10,000 square kilometres, so we are talking one-23rd of the state being Melbourne. When you invest this amount of money into metropolitan Melbourne without countering it on the other side, that is what frustrates us on this side of the house. Some have tried to say that we are anti the removal of the level crossings. Well, that is not the case at all. It is about being fair about what we invest in metropolitan Melbourne, which we understand, and being fair with what gets invested into regional Victoria. What we need in regional Victoria is roads. I think everybody on this side of the house, particularly in regional Victoria, continues to say that the roads that we drive on are literally unroadworthy. They are certainly not carworthy. In terms of level crossing removals, how many were removed in the Ovens Valley – none. I see the member for Narracan is here. I just wonder how many were –

**Wayne Farnham** interjected.

**Tim McCURDY**: None. We will get there; we will get there eventually. Well, in the meantime public transport is not as high a priority for us in regional Victoria, but roads are. If only we could get the value of one level crossing. I mean, there are a lot of smoke and mirrors that go on with the cost of these removal projects. I understand with the blowouts that they do not want to disclose exactly what they are. But I see that the three at Pakenham cost about \$844 million, from memory, so that is just

shy of \$300 million per level crossing. I am not saying that is the case everywhere, but that was the example I saw at Pakenham. If we could just get the value of one level crossing, \$300 million, invested into our roads in regional Victoria – you talk about 110; I am asking for the value of one or the cost of one to be spent on our roads – that would be a massive win for regional Victoria. We know the original cost was \$5.6 billion, and that blew out to \$8.3 billion very early on in the piece. That was for the first 50, so as time goes on we will see what the blowouts cost, because we know Labor cannot manage money and I think even Labor know they cannot manage money. As I said, do not get me wrong, it is not that we do not want to get rid of those crossings, but we have got to be careful with our funds and we have got to live within a budget. Those communities who want to get rid of their level crossings, if you ask them, will tell you probably 100 per cent they want to get rid of them. But I am saying we just need to be fair, we need to be reasonable, because 25 per cent of Victorians live in regional Victoria and they are not getting a piece of those 110 level crossing removals and the billions and billions of dollars that are being spent on public transport.

We have public transport in regional Victoria, but as I said, we rely on our roads. We rely on them to be safe, and that is what is important to us – to have safe roads. We know the regional roads maintenance budget was cut. You know, it was not that long ago that \$250 million was invested in road maintenance funding – a few years ago. Then that dropped down to \$150 million, and now I see it is down to about \$30 million. As I said earlier, the cash out of just one of those level crossing removals would do enormous things for our regions and make our roads safe again. People say to me that our cars have got to be roadworthy, but where does it say that our roads have to be carworthy? Clearly, they simply are not. You would have to be living under a rock if you could not see the state of our roads and how they have deteriorated over time, and we just cannot accept it, because they are unsafe. If those same unsafe roads were in metropolitan Melbourne, they would be dealt with.

As I said, we do not have the luxury of jumping on the number 96 tram and going from one suburb to the other or from one side of the electorate to the other on a train. Nobody is complaining about that, but what I am saying is that we are frustrated with the roads that we use to carry our school buses and carry our kids from Milawa to Wangaratta, our roads that our ambulances use from Burruminee to Yarrowonga, our roads that we use to carry our freight from Myrtleford to Bright and of course our roads that we use to carry our tourists anywhere around Victoria and Australia, to places like Cobram on the Murray River. That is what needs our investment. We are happy to see a level crossing not get removed in our region, but make that same investment into the roads, because that is what is important to us. This is why we are totally frustrated that again we continue to be overlooked. It is not just that we are concerned about the state of the roads, they simply are unsafe. If you need any evidence of that, come to my electorate or go to any regional electorate and you will see that they have really deteriorated.

Again, Victorians are tired of the cost blowouts. I met a bloke just recently, a couple of weeks ago, and he said, 'I think I know why the blowouts happen on these level crossing removals.' I said, 'Why?' He said he lived right next door to one of the level crossing removals and there was a jackhammer going at 10 o'clock at night. He wrote a letter to the minister and said, 'This is unacceptable. How long's this going to go on for?' They offered him three months accommodation in a hotel. He did not ask for three months accommodation. He wanted to go in with the government and say, 'Let's put up a noise reduction wall for \$2500.' Instead he got offered damn near \$20,000 worth of accommodation just at the drop of a hat. As I said, he did not ask for that. This could have been solved much more easily and cheaply than by saying, 'Well, here's \$20,000 worth of accommodation.'

Again, we can see where the blowouts are. We can see why the blowouts are there. But I think it is just important that the government, with their 38 still to go, if that is what the number is, have to start reeling in the spend, because the Big Build that they talk about does not have a D in it, it is actually spelt with a double L – big bill. It is a massive bill, a bill that is unsustainable, a bill that generations will pay for and a bill that is not money well spent. I have mentioned our roads. That was just one

example – one level crossing removal on our roads. But if we spent the same – another level crossing – on our ambulances, on our hospitals or on our schools it would be money well spent.

Now the Andrews Labor government has discovered finally that we are broke. They could not see it at the election; it was not that long ago. They could not see it when they were spruiking airport rail. I mean, everyone else in Victoria could see we were running out of money, and you would have to be running out of money when you are throwing it around like a drunken sailor. Now airport rail has gone, the Commonwealth Games have gone, Geelong fast rail has gone and Victoria's reputation is now destroyed. So this big bill has compromised every aspect of Victorians' lives, and now they start reducing specialist teachers. That is the most recent one we have seen – the visiting teacher service decimated. It does have an effect. I heard the Deputy Premier today talking about the Big Build and how exciting it is and how many level crossings there are, but none of them on the other side talk about the cost. They do not talk about the cost blowouts. We know we are headed towards a \$171 billion debt, but the reality is that will probably be more like \$200 billion. Because we know that if that is what the current figure is – \$171 billion – it always goes up. It will not go down, and it is frightening that the government has still not learned.

The Andrews Labor government continue to waste our money – waste your money – on their pet projects while they ignore health, roads and the cost of living. The cost of living is not just a regional thing, it is all through Victoria. This is where we need investment, because we are in a cost-of-living crisis. There is no doubt about that, and that needs to be dealt with as opposed to just continuing to do the same as we have done over the last eight or nine years. Something has to change. We have to stop the debt spiralling further out of control, but we have actually got to invest in services that are going to make our communities better. As I say, the Victorian Deputy Premier is really using Victorian taxpayers' funds as a personal ATM, and I am quite frustrated with that and so are many people around regional Victoria. She could invest in health, invest in schools or invest in our roads. By all means do some level crossing removals. Is 110 the right number? It might be 70; it might be 80. But at the same time you have got to be fair. Twenty-five per cent of Victorians live in regional Victoria, and if you want to be fair and you want to be serious, you need to spend that same investment not in level crossing removals but in something else in regional Victoria like our roads, like our hospitals or like our schools and make an investment that we can be proud of rather than just another big bill.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Koroit) (16:33): I rise to speak in support of this motion, and I must say I am very excited to do so, not just as the former secretary of the mighty Rail, Tram and Bus Union; not just because I see it as an opportunity to spruik the union movement and the incredible work the thousands of Victorian construction union members have done to ensure that this project is completed safely, on time and under budget – two points that I will come back to later; and not just because this project is an amazing step forward for all Victorians but because this project has already had such a major impact in the electorate which I represent with the most recent Mount Derrimut Road crossing removal. This level crossing removal on Mount Derrimut Road, otherwise known as the new Deer Park station, is a major thoroughfare between Deer Park and Derrimut. Now, I want to paint a picture for each of you about the area – a picture that I do not need to paint for either the Deputy Premier or the member for Sunbury, who have both visited my area and this removal on a number of occasions, and I will reflect on those visits shortly. However, for everyone else, please give me a moment.

In Derrimut we have got roughly 9000 residents. We also have a major industrial hub employing a few thousand people, primarily locals. In Deer Park, just 3.7 kilometres up the road, we have roughly 18,000 residents as well as a major shopping precinct, community centres, sporting clubs – you name it. The main road in and out connecting these two areas was none other than Mount Derrimut Road. The removal of this one level crossing has saved members of my community countless amounts of time – time that can be better spent with family and friends. I cannot begin to explain the number of families who have thanked me for the removal of this level crossing. I remember driving from Deer Park to Derrimut for a community meeting. This is a drive that would usually take about 6 minutes. However, on this occasion it took me 22 minutes because of the trains – 22 minutes – which is



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something that the member for Broadmeadows clearly understands. This has happened to me not just once but on a number of occasions. I am, however, pleased to say that this is no longer an issue for us in Kororoit thanks to the hard work and dedication of the Andrews Labor government.

While works continue at the station temporary access arrangements have been made. The hardworking level crossing removal team – with whom I have met on a number of occasions, and I can say they are very diligent and do a great job – alongside Victorian construction workers are making it a priority to have Deer Park station complete by no later than the end of this year. When complete, this station will include an air-conditioned waiting room, 150 new and upgraded car parks, a multibay bus interchange, pick-up and drop-off zones, landscaping around the entire precinct and improved connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists, including a north–south connection between both sides of the new station – something that we never thought we would see in Deer Park. The Mount Derrimut Road boom gates were down for up to 60 per cent of the morning peak. This delayed up to 23,000 vehicles along the road daily. As you can imagine, it caused major traffic disruptions on a daily basis to my community. To say that this project is good is clearly just an understatement – it is bloody brilliant and something that we have needed for a long time.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the thousands of Rail, Tram and Bus Union workers who assisted with this project both in the infrastructure space and also near completion. At Deer Park station works are continuing; however, the station is open. Thank you to the Rail, Tram and Bus Union members who have assisted throughout these phases, but especially to the customer service members, who assist hundreds of thousands of passengers every single day. Whether they be customer service officers or authorised officers – you name it, they are there to help you and let you know which way to go when you are at a station.

Being former secretary of the union – for the past 10 years – I can genuinely say that rail workers are salt of the earth people. They are absolutely brilliant, and I have always been proud to stand with them, day in, day out, when I was the secretary of the union and now that I have moved into this place. I am still proud to stand with Vik Sharma and the entire executive and membership of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union. These workers do an incredible job and are often at the coalface, facing an angry passenger at the end of a bad day. Thank you to each and every one of you.

It is not only the Rail, Tram and Bus Union that should be mentioned; I need to mention the thousands of Victorian construction union members who have done the heavy lifting to deliver these removals – safely, on time and under budget. The member for Sunbury and I were visiting the site earlier this year. I think it was March, if I remember correctly. We were on our official visit with the level crossing removal team. Then I ran into some comrades of mine from the CFMEU. I was over the moon as Atif Anwar, the delegate at Deer Park station, ran over to me and said, ‘Luba’ – first of all, he wanted a selfie – ‘can you come and meet with all the men and women and the workers in the shed’. So the member for Sunbury and I went off the official tour and into the shed, and we sat with the men and women who made that station what it is today. Thank you. It was there that we sat with them, and we were proud to do so.

As we know, this project aimed at eliminating 110 congested level crossings across metropolitan Melbourne by 2030. As we have heard, we are already ahead on each and every one of our targets. In 2014, after four long and dark years under the Liberal Party, Victorians witnessed the birth of a transformational vision: the commitment to eliminate 50 level crossings. This was, as we know, a brave move. Fast-forward to today and we not only have met this goal but have gone beyond it, with a whopping 72 level crossings removed, and we are now pushing to have 110 of them gone by the end of this decade – a whole two years ahead of schedule. This accomplishment is a testament to the dedication and diligence of the Level Crossing Removal Project and the Andrews government, a government which I am proud to be part of.

Victoria’s Big Build is an extensive project that embraces our state’s ambitions for a thriving and interconnected future. This agenda includes a wide range of projects, such as the Metro Tunnel, the

West Gate Tunnel, the North East Link, the Sunbury line upgrade, the Hurstbridge line duplication and upgrades to both the Monash and the ring-road. The Victorian 2023–24 budget reinforces our promise to undertake this transformative initiative, allocating \$7.3 billion to ensure the continued expansion of our transport network. As of 30 July we had removed the 71st and 72nd level crossings. Our journey began with a promise of 50. The praise for this achievement belongs not only to the government but to the Victorians who supported this program across three successive elections. Our constituents recognise that this project is not just about road congestion, it is about the safety and prosperity of the communities. We have witnessed unprecedented population growth in Victoria, and this growth has brought us both challenges but also opportunities. As my good friend the member for Melton can attest, and as I mentioned the other week, the Melton LGA was recently named the fastest growing municipality in the country, with an average of 58 babies per week born. This means more families are coming to Melbourne's west, settling and growing families. Our infrastructure must reflect this and be equipped for the soaring number of residents.

As you have heard, this year we removed the level crossings at Mount Derrimut Road by elevating the rail line to reduce congestion and we opened the new station, creating a safer, better connected Deer Park. In Deer Park – and for the 23,000 vehicles that travel on that road daily – it is huge for us. In Kororoit this is one of three projects. We have got Mount Derrimut Road, which is complete; we have Robinsons Road, which is complete; and I am very pleased to say that the residents at the other end of the electorate near Hopkins Road are very, very excited about the project there starting. In finalising, I again want to say what a bold and brave move this Andrews Labor government made. Last but not least, I again want to thank the Victorian construction unions and the members of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union. We must be reminded that they helped deliver this project safely, ahead of time and under budget.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (16:42): I rise too to speak on this motion around level crossing removals. You know that the Andrews Labor government finds itself in trouble when it wheels out the level crossing removal program. They do not want to talk about their brutal budget; they do not want to talk about their tracking towards \$171 billion of debt – a record debt that they are leaving our children and our grandchildren to pay; they do not want to talk about the nearly 50 new or increased state taxes; they do not want to talk about their polling going south; they do not want to talk about the multiple integrity issues and the multiple corruption probes that the Andrews Labor government are subject to at the moment; they do not want to talk about the Commonwealth Games, which they have stripped from all of the athletes and Victorians who would have otherwise enjoyed that, because of their financial incompetence and mismanagement; and they do not want to talk about their budget blowouts, their nearly \$30 billion – or is it \$60 billion, \$90 billion; we are not sure – budget blowouts, so they wheel out the level crossing removal program, because they think it has been a winner for them.

I listened very carefully to the minister for budget blowouts in her contribution – I mean, the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure – and I listened very carefully to what she had to say. She talked about costings, and she said that the level crossing removal program had come in under budget. If that was to be the case, why is it such a hard task for the Andrews Labor government to actually reveal the costings? Why aren't they transparent about the costings for the level crossing removal program, because they have not been to date? At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee – PAEC after PAEC, year after year – they fail to demonstrate how much the total program has cost. Has there been a blowout? Is it under? If it was under, I am sure they would be talking about this from the rooftops, but they are not. They have not been clear about the cost of each of these programs, and that just goes to show that they are hiding something.

When we talk about costings we talk about financial competence, but there is nothing of that from this Andrews Labor government. They will talk about removing the crossings – and lest there be any doubt, the Liberals and Nationals support removing dangerous level crossings – but when it comes to getting value for money we also need to make sure that we do these infrastructure projects sensibly and with value for money. I would ask the question again: why haven't these costings been revealed? You look

at my community, in Lilydale and Mooroolbark, and my good friend here next to me the member for Croydon – we share the Mooroolbark train station and the line.

**David Hodgett:** I opened it.

**Bridget VALLENCE:** Sorry, the member for Croydon opened it. The Andrews government spent half a billion dollars to remove the level crossings and upgrade the stations there at Lilydale and Mooroolbark, but they have not been able to specify how much each project was. It is just this sort of random half-a-billion-dollar figure for both of them. Of course we supported these programs. In fact back when I was a candidate in 2016–17, I was advocating for the Lilydale level crossing to be removed and for that to be made underground. We know now that that is an overground crossing and a new station. It has been an interesting project and one that the Andrews government celebrates. I always say to the transport and infrastructure minister that perhaps she come back out to the community at the Lilydale level crossing removal to ask the members of the community what they think of the level crossing removal at Lilydale, because they are not happy. In fact I refer to a media release by the Andrews government, which was released back in November 2021, revealing that the crossing works had been completed, two more level crossings gone for good at Lilydale and Mooroolbark. I refer to the former Deputy Premier's attributable comments:

We're thrilled these dangerous and congested level crossings are now a distant memory – they'll slash travel times and make roads safer for 53,000 motorists that use them each day.

If you actually come out and talk to the people in Lilydale and surrounds, they will tell you that the traffic congestion is worse now than it ever has been before. The boom gates were removed, and they were replaced by traffic lights – not one set of traffic lights but two – and a strange traffic treatment underneath the new sky rail, which is two lanes going into one in the middle of an intersection between two sets of lights. So they removed the boom gates to allegedly remove congestion, but they replaced them with not one but two sets of traffic lights, and the congestion through Lilydale is worse than ever before. It has been compounded by the fact that another one of the level crossing removals that this government says they have done, which is just down at Cave Hill Road, was actually just a road closure. They did not remove the boom gates and they did not make the crossing safer; they just closed the road. Many local residents are completely flabbergasted by this. There was no consultation. Even our local emergency services – the ambulance, the police and the fire brigade – are all very concerned, because this has restricted the movement in and out of Lilydale and is going to put our community at risk in times of need. It has been a botched project, and that is why, when the transport and infrastructure minister raises the level crossing removal programs, I always say how is Lilydale, because it has not worked well – the traffic is worse and emergency services are concerned now. It has just been a complete shambles, and she will not reveal quite how much it has cost.

Apart from all of that, it was a massive, massive missed opportunity, because one of the other things that the minister said in her contribution was that these level crossing removals 'enable them to run more trains'. That is what the minister said in her contribution to the motion. But on the Lilydale line let us not forget that between the Mooroolbark and Lilydale train stations it is a single track. It is a massive missed opportunity to remove the level crossings at Lilydale and Mooroolbark but to fail to duplicate the train line between Mooroolbark and Lilydale. It means that there is no increased frequency. So half a billion dollars spent to remove the level crossings at Lilydale and Mooroolbark has not improved by one second the frequency of trains on the Lilydale line. That is not just for the people who live in Lilydale or Mooroolbark, that is for people right down the Lilydale line, through Mitcham, through Ringwood, down through Box Hill and into the city, because for the trains that go out the Lilydale line there is a bottleneck at Mooroolbark and only one train can go at any one time between Mooroolbark and Lilydale. That means – the statistics show – that the Lilydale train line services are notoriously bad when it comes to cancellations and poor punctuality. It is one of the worst on the metro line because that single track between Mooroolbark and Lilydale, about 4 kilometres, is the longest section of single track. This Andrews Labor government talks about transport infrastructure, improving train services, trying to encourage people to get on the train to get out of cars

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and reduce emissions – it is all for the headlines and no actual work. When it comes to our community, residents and Victorians in Mooroolbark, Lilydale and the Yarra Valley are completely ignored and left behind because the Andrews government failed that opportunity to duplicate the line between Mooroolbark and Lilydale, leaving us behind in our community.

More people would use the train, but they cannot because they are so uncertain. There is just no reliability of the trains on this line, which is why last year in 2022 in the lead-up to the election we made what I think was an excellent commitment: a \$5 million pledge to undertake a feasibility study to kickstart the works, the scoping works and scoping study, for duplicating the rail line between Mooroolbark and Lilydale. It is certainly something that should be done to ensure frequency and punctuality of that train line, because you might have boom gates removed, you might have flashy new train stations, but they mean nothing if there is zero improvement in the frequency of the train services. That is not to mention all the problems that we have got: the Parkiteer where you park your bike is not working at Mooroolbark; the leaking of the station at Lilydale and the fact that the lift has not been working – it has been flooding, dripping – I mean, the list goes on. So what we want is for the costs to be revealed for the Victorian public.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (16:52): Today I rise to contribute and speak on the level crossing removal motion. We have had many speakers before me, and I am very grateful to the Deputy Premier for the lovely trip down memory lane earlier. Of course unfortunately there were some dark times in our history – that handful of years when we sat opposite on that side of the house and had to watch the successive premiers cancel contracts. Certainly at the last election those opposite did not even bother to come up with any public transport policy and plans out in the western suburbs, whether they be funded, underfunded or not.

We have a long list of achievements and commitments that have happened in the west and in particular in Melton, and I delight in the opportunity to inform and in most cases remind the house about them. Of course it is not only about convenience, it is also about easing our roads burden. The level crossings at Hopkins Road at Truganina and at Ferris Road, Coburns Road and Exford Road in Melton are all slated for removal – to be completed by 2026. It is not just about smoother traffic flow, it is about enhancing the quality of life for the over 73,000 vehicles and vehicle drivers that are navigating these routes on a daily basis, and obviously making the place a lot safer – and as I say, that number of 73,000 is projected to grow rapidly as the population grows in Melton. Removing level crossings makes our train rides smoother, makes our roads clearer and makes our stations function better. We are not just talking about hypothetical change in the distant future; this is a reality that will be achieved by 2026 out in that Melton corridor and also in the electorate of Kororoit. It is a whole two years sooner than what was previously anticipated, and I thank the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure for bringing this project forward by two years and note the importance of that.

I have got to say, in my past history as a paramedic – I do not know whether anyone else in this house has done it – I wish back in the 1980s and 90s we had had level crossing removals, because one of my first train incidents as a paramedic working out in the Sunshine branch was a pedestrian versus train at the Anderson Road level crossing in Sunshine. Unfortunately, when pedestrians take on trains they generally lose. This was an elderly gentleman that had been down at the local shop to pick up some kerosene to put into his heater to keep him warm, and on the way back he walked across the Anderson Road level crossing, and unfortunately he was struck by a freight train.

We had to respond from the Sunshine ambulance station, which was only probably a kilometre away, and this gentleman was deceased under the train. Of course our job in those days was to retrieve the person from under the train. There is one thing that you make sure of, and that is that you have the train driver near you when you are under a train trying to drag out a body from under the train, because you do not want the train to move when you are under it and create more fatalities. I attended many train fatalities as a paramedic in the 1980s and 90s, and all of those level crossings that I attended fatalities at in the western suburbs, in particular in the Sunshine and St Albans areas, have been removed: Furlong Road, Main Road West and, as I say, Anderson Road. Then we talk about the Deer

Park level crossings, as the member for Kororoit alluded to, and I have got to say to you this is a fantastic project, probably one of the best projects that has ever been introduced by any government, because it directly saves lives in many different ways, not just by protecting people crossing level crossings but also preventing car accidents with trains and also just for the safety and the movement of cars in those particular areas.

Along with the removal of the level crossings in Melton, all of our level crossings are on the major road grids. We have three roads in Melton that are key roads that all of our other smaller roads run off, and the three level crossings obviously happened to be on those particular roads. Notwithstanding that, we are building other infrastructure in Melton that will rely on these level crossings being removed, and I allude to the new hospital that commences being built next year. We are in the process. We have shortlisted two building consortia, a tender process will occur later this year to determine who the builder will be and that building will commence next year. That hospital is only down the road from the Ferris Road level crossing probably by about a kilometre. This is how important that level crossing in Ferris Road is, which will be the first one in Melton to be removed. Already work has commenced in regard to all three level crossings, geotechnical and surveying work that is going on at the moment. As I say, I thank the minister for bringing this project forward by two years.

We also have – and I alluded to the hospital – the community group that was the consultative group. They have done all of their work, and through their work they have contributed to what will happen in regard to the relationship of the level crossing, the traffic flow and the build of the hospital, and I thank that community consultative group that did all that work in regard to the hospital and its relationship to the level crossings.

Of course the commitment to removing level crossings for us on this side of the chamber really should have been met with enthusiasm and support from those opposite, because it is a public safety issue, and I alluded to that with my history in ambulance. Dangerous or congested crossings at their best are an inconvenience and at their worst kill people, and we have got evidence of that in most of those level crossings that have been removed, where there have probably been a number of fatalities, some worse than others. I know it is not a great look for the opposition to side with government on projects, but I would have thought that this is a project that you would enthusiastically side with the delivery of on the basis that it is a safety issue for the general community, regardless of whether they live in Melbourne or whether they live in rural Victoria. I am sure rural Victorians travel around Melbourne when they come to Melbourne for a visit, and while some have alluded to the fact that 25 per cent of the population live in rural Victoria, that is fine, but we see that the greatest volume of traffic through level crossings is through these high-density areas and major growth areas of Melbourne, and rural Victorians come to Melbourne regularly.

No other party has committed to removing dangerous level crossings, and in fact at times those opposite have opposed certain level crossings being removed. It is disappointing that they have done that through different projects and different sites, I should say. Sky rail was a clear example of that some years ago. The member for Bentleigh is at the table here, and he would remember it very well in regard to the battle over the sky rail.

If you google what is the most beautiful train station in Melbourne, the answer is Flinders Street, which I am a bit surprised about. But if you scroll down a little bit, Cobblebank comes up, which is in my electorate. Cobblebank is a new station. We opened it up in 2019. It was one of the first things I did after being elected in 2018. It is a lovely station. It delivers a ticketing office, a holding cell for PSOs, and it has a Parkiteer cage, which my staff tell me is somewhere you can park your bikes. I would not have called it a Parkiteer cage, but anyway. It has got male and female accessible toilets, an accessible pedestrian overpass, lifts, ramps – like all these new modern stations that we are building, it is a fantastic station. It is a popular station. It has a big car park, and we have added additional car parking spaces to it in recent times. So that has been fantastic.

We have also duplicated 18 kilometres of the track between Deer Park and Melton. As part of the *Western Rail Plan* it will be integrated into the metropolitan rail network at some stage, but you know what needs to happen. There was a big debate recently about electrification, or a suggestion that it was not going to happen out in the west. A lot more things have to be put in place before we can even start anything in regard to electrification to Melton. We have got to free up capacity out of Sunshine. We are upgrading the Melton line, with a \$650 million injection to upgrade that line: longer platforms, longer trains, higher capacity, more passengers, greater regularity of train services. So we will continue to build and grow with not only level crossing removals but by providing good, reliable rail services to the west along the Melton line, through the Melton electorate and through the Kororoit electorate. I acknowledge the member for Kororoit for her contribution. It was fantastic to hear her contribution, in particular the passion around the level crossing removals at Hopkins Road and Mount Derrimut Road. I commend this motion to the house.

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (17:02): I rise this afternoon to contribute to this motion put forward by the government. This government has a nasty habit of trumpeting big numbers with very little meaning, and I am afraid today this motion draws to the house's attention and to the Victorian people as a whole yet again that this government is talking big, delivering little, and their performance is really quite an embarrassment. It says a lot to the most vulnerable in the state. I refer specifically to what this government has trumpeted now, at huge cost to taxpayers: the removal of 75 level crossings. Let us talk about another set of figures to do with public transport that this government is not too keen to talk about today, and that is upgrading the disability access on our tram network.

Of course there are just shy of 2000 tram stops across the state and across the city, and this government committed through the discrimination act that they brought into this Parliament that they would upgrade those tram access points so that those needing fair access to our public transport network could in fact benefit from it. Now, this is not a multi-multibillion-dollar upgrade, it is not in the order of a suburban rail link gobbling up hundreds of billions or the overblown Level Crossing Removal Project, this is just good, simple public infrastructure that a modern city should be proud to invest in and proud to do.

So let us talk about the numbers not of level crossing removals but of upgraded disability tram stops. Back in 2019 this government was rocketing along, and they did 10; they managed to do 10 so that everybody could access a tram. In 2020 they did 13. Then, lo and behold, the chequebook started drying up because, as we know, the old debt and deficit of the state kept growing. This government did not wind back its overblown, out-of-control level crossing project; no, it decided to target, as it so often does, the most vulnerable – those that actually really need the support of a well-organised, compassionate government – and it has given them the flick.

In 2021 they just did two. Across nearly 2000 to upgrade, they managed to do two. And then in 2022 they did another two, so over the last three or four years they have done four. And guess what: last budget they actually said they were going to do six, but they did two. This budget, they did not even bother lying to the disability sector or those needing fair access to transport. In this budget they have not budgeted for any disability access or all-access public transport in the great city of Melbourne. That means that from a commitment that has been in this Parliament that by 2023 we would have all-access tram services here in the state – an urgent and necessary public transport service – after 10 years of this government, 11 years of this government, they have done 400 out of a possible 1800 – 400 – and they have not done any and they have got none planned for this year. They only did two last year and two the year before. Quite frankly, to be standing here and saying, you know, 'Look at the success of a government that gets things done' – we have done 75 level crossing removals at some exorbitant amount overblown. I mean, even the Auditor-General cannot come at how they have managed to spend so much money and only get 75 done. Under normal circumstances they should have had 150 done with the amount of money that has been spent.

But in order to achieve these types of goals, they have completely cut the most vulnerable in the public transport system out of the equation. They have just forgotten about them, left them behind, and just

inexplicably cut them from the budget. They have walked away. This government has walked away and abandoned its commitment to those that need access to public transport more than any other group in our society. They have just cut them free and said, 'Sorry, guys, we're not even going to mention you in the budget. For the last eight years we have been mentioning you in the budget and just misleading you. Now we're not going to mislead you anymore, we're just going to cut you out completely.' I think that that is an almost intolerable cost for Victorians and the most vulnerable in Victoria. To think that they are the ones carrying the burden of the largesse of this government, who has thrown the kitchen sink literally and figuratively at trying to prove a point about level crossing removal just at any cost. We have heard the Premier say many times now, 'Whatever the cost, I don't care; we'll do it', and it is such a terrible way to treat and manage public funds.

We talk then about what the cost of the Level Crossing Removal Project is under this government. Well, the problem is we do not actually know. We know the Auditor-General produced a report back in 2017, and he found that he could not really get a straight answer from this government and that everything was secretive and not really able to be revealed to the community. I know as a former member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that for three years in a row we asked how much the level crossings are and the minister for non-delivery of the Commonwealth Games and inability to stick to a budget would reply, 'Oh, well, we can't quite tell you yet: we haven't put this together, it's commercial in confidence, we're doing secret deals and raiding the budget to do it, and don't you worry about that', and we do not actually know. But we do know that back in 2017 – it was reported at the time – the more modest project that the government had started out with in 2014 had already blown out by \$2.3 billion, a project that the government had told taxpayers would cost about \$5 billion. If we are to believe the budget papers – and they are probably questionable from time to time – we are now up to somewhere in the order of \$16 billion for this project.

Victorians need to know how much these projects are costing, and we need to know in what order and what priority, because there is no shortage of examples, particularly when you go out in the west – the talk of level crossing removals and making train lines and things safer. But the Auditor-General has constantly reported that the government has not stuck to any independent advice on what level crossings should be removed. They have in fact, as we know they so often do, sort of pork-barrelled their way through level crossing removals.

They have decided to pick crossings that they think will win them votes, not necessarily save lives. That is one of the great shames of this project, the lost opportunities. We are looking at the government basically using the taxpayers chequebook to try and continue to win and maintain votes and support for them, but at what cost? The cost has been incredible budget blowouts. It has come at the expense of the most vulnerable in the complete axing and canning and abandonment of disability access on our public transport network.

As we go forward, the government claim that they are going to continue on their merry way with the level crossing removals, and I guess Victorians can now quite rightly ask: will they actually in fact continue in that vein? We have heard repeatedly now that sometimes with the level crossing removals when they close a road, they do not actually remove it. They remove the access for traffic on that road, and that counts in their count of 75. More concerningly, I guess, Victorians will be asking: where does this program go in the future? We know that because we are running out of money and we are going broke here in Victoria, we have cancelled the airport rail link, we have cancelled the Geelong fast rail and we have given up on hosting the Commonwealth Games. We once all thought we were a First World economy and state that might be able to manage such an international event, but we now know that it is beyond the capacity of the state to manage that. We have cancelled that.

We also know that country roads and others have copped a huge cut to their ongoing funding and support, and that of course worries every country Victorian. We have seen today in fact hundreds of farmers from across my part of the world, western Victoria, come to rally. Because this government have run out of money, they can no longer commit to the best infrastructure and the best choices and the best options for country Victorians, and because of that country Victorians have to settle for the

least effective, the least appropriate and the most damaging forms of electrical infrastructure, simply because this government is unable to invest for Victoria into the future – in technology and transmission lines that would in fact provide the best of both worlds, the best thing for renewable energy and the best for local regional communities.

So it is not something we should be excited about, this level crossing removal project. It has come at a huge cost. It has come at the cost of our state's budget, and it has come at the cost of providing essential transport services for our most vulnerable, and it is just a reflection of how parlous the state of Victoria has become.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (17:12): It is a real pleasure for me to rise today and talk about the motion that is before the house and particularly that the government has removed 72 dangerous and congested level crossings. I do want to spend a fair bit of time on level crossing 69 and level crossing 70, being the Union Road, Surrey Hills, and Mont Albert Road, Mont Albert, level crossings. Just reflecting on the program as a whole, as many speakers on this side of the house have reflected, when this program was announced in 2014 there were many people on the other side that said it could not be done. The commitment was 50 level crossings to be removed by 2022, and as has been demonstrated by the fact that we just completed 72 a month or two ago, we have clearly far exceeded this expectation.

The 69th and 70th level crossings in my electorate have a fascinating history, and it is a history of Liberal Party opposition to removing level crossings in this location for 50 years. If I can take you back to 1974 – so we can celebrate the 50th anniversary of this event next year – the Country Roads Board in fact proposed a solution to remove the Union Road level crossing, and in 1979 the Liberal government and the then Minister of Transport removed the project from the works program and basically killed it for a generation. Come 2014, originally we thought 'This is a good change' – they were not on the first 50 list obviously, 69 and 70 – and the initial response from the local Liberal MP at the time was very positive. If I can just find his quote from that period – the member for Box Hill at the time Robert Clark said:

In the Box Hill electorate, removing the Union Road, Surrey Hills crossing was ranked a high priority by – the study –

and was also ranked as the 14th highest removal priority in a 2008 expert study ...

With many other crossings now having been removed or funded ... this crossing should now be high on the list for future removal.

And indeed it was. In the 2018 election campaign this Andrews Labor government did make a commitment that the next 25 crossings were to be removed by 2025. Indeed Union Road and Mont Albert Road both did find themselves on the list. At that point in time the Liberal opposition began again. There are almost too many articles to refer to here. This is from 2018. I am quoting from the local *Leader* newspaper at the time, and it says in the headline:

SURREY Hills and Mont Albert's time-wasting level crossings will finally be scheduled for removal if the Andrews Labor Government is re-elected next month.

We have not got the quote from the local member, but I do remember at the time, going into the election, that while the then member did welcome the announcement, he was already putting up opposition. He said, 'Oh no, but it can't be sky rail. The community won't accept sky rail.' And what did we see? We did not see the Liberal opposition matching that commitment. So it was pretty clear how the level crossings were going to be removed. It was only going to be removed if an Andrews government was elected. It was re-elected in 2018.

I know there has been some discussion about where these level crossing removals are going and how they are helping and supporting Labor members of Parliament. Well, I must say, in 2018 there were no Labor members of Parliament in those seats. In fact, I think if you look at the margin heading into the 2018 election, I dare say that there was not much expectation that it would be a Labor-held seat



after 2018. But we do know the result of the election. Thankfully, the good people of Box Hill did see fit to elect me in 2018, and before long the project was indeed underway.

But let us not stop there on the Liberal opposition, because no sooner had the project plan, the design plan, been released – and this was in late 2020 – than a petition was launched against the design of the project. And we had the usual suspects in the upper house launching the petition. Now, if you try and look for that petition on the website, it is nowhere to be found. It was a brief moment in time that the petition was put out. What did they want to change? They wanted to change the design, which would have, as the member for Sunbury has already pointed out, created a much greater impact on the surrounding neighbourhood, with far more trees being removed. It would have led to a deeper and wider trench, and it would have led as well to the compulsory acquisition of many homes and businesses. So this is what the Liberals were trying to advocate for in their petition – trying to cloud and muddy the waters. This has been a consistent theme throughout this project.

I want to turn to one other element in the genesis of this project – and it was brought up by the Deputy Premier and the responsible minister. There was legal action launched against this project. It was launched by a community group who were upset by the level of consultation, but if you read through the paper, who is the first named proponent as part of this community group? Well, it happens to be a person who later became the third candidate on the upper house ticket for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region for the Liberal Party – funny about that, how these developments continue to occur to try to put up barriers, to hinder and to stop the development of this project.

Now, 22 May was a milestone date for the Box Hill community. The roads had reopened a week or two earlier, but that was the day that the new Union station opened, and it was the first time that traffic could pass through the roads with the trains also going without causing congestion. It was a fantastic day for the community, a huge, huge effort by the entire workforce, an immense project. It was on a huge scale. I know people like the numbers, particularly me, given my civil engineering background: 213,000 cubic metres of material was removed as part of this project. I know people do love it in more customary units, so that is equivalent to 80 Olympic swimming pools – that is the more standard measure, I know.

**Michael O'Brien:** How many MCGs, Paul? That is the real measure.

**Paul HAMER:** Member for Malvern, I do not have the conversion factor from swimming pools to MCGs.

**Michael O'Brien** interjected.

**Paul HAMER:** No, the accepted measure of volume is Olympic swimming pools, the accepted measure of area is the MCG.

**Michael O'Brien** interjected.

**Paul HAMER:** I will welcome that debate outside of the house, member for Malvern.

It is a 1.3-kilometre trench, with 1242 piles to form the walls of the rail trench. It does make a civil engineer weep, on those figures. It was over 500,000 hours of work – so can I thank all of the staff who put in an enormous effort, and can I thank the community and the traders. They did go through an enormous amount – almost three months of closure. I commend the motion to the house.

**Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (17:22):** I am pleased today to rise on this motion and talk about the level crossing removals. I have been sitting here and listening for quite a while, and I tell you what, I really agree with what the member for Ovens Valley said about regional Victoria. I understand why the government has done this. I get it. My sister lives in Carnegie, and it was a nightmare to get through that intersection, so I understand why it removed that – it used to take about 20 minutes to get through there.

We went to the last election with a 25 per cent regional infrastructure guarantee. There was a good reason for that, because 25 per cent of Victorians live in regional Victoria, and the member for Ovens

Valley said that earlier. When we talk about level crossing removal, none has happened in regional Victoria. I am glad the member for Narre Warren South went on a beautiful train trip down to Bairnsdale in the Gippsland East area. Gippsland is a beautiful part of the country –

**A member** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Gippsland East, thank you. What I was interested in in your contribution is when you spoke about the level crossings at Pakenham. I did yell out, which was a bit rude, and said ‘Did you see any past that point?’ The answer would have been ‘no’, because in my community are the rail towns of Nar Nar Goon, Tynong, Garfield, Bunyip, Longwarry, Drouin, Warragul, Yarragon and Trafalgar – not one has been removed. The sad part of this is in Bunyip in 2002 a six-year-old died at that level crossing. Now, when talking about level crossing risk, you would look at that level crossing and you would say, ‘This should be removed. A child has died’. What annoys me about the government at the moment is that it is so city-centric that it is not worrying about regional Victoria. It is almost like our lives do not matter; we do not matter: ‘As long as it happens in the city, don’t worry about regional Victoria. They’ll survive’. Well, regional Victoria does survive, because we are a resilient bunch.

The member for Kororoit talked about a level crossing in her area that took 22 minutes to get through. There is a level crossing in Warragul known as Gallaghers Crossing. I can speak from experience on this. It takes 25 minutes to get through that crossing every morning and every night. So why is that member’s crossing more important than the crossing in my electorate? Twenty-five minutes they sit there when dropping kids off to school. There are three schools, so you can imagine the amount of traffic at school time that is trying to get through this level crossing, and once the boom gates go down, all the traffic jams up. And what is even worse is whoever did this, in their delusional mind, built an ambulance station right there, so the ambulances cannot get through. So when we talk about being fair, be fair to regional Victoria. There has not been one level crossing removal in regional Victoria, and to be honest it is disgraceful. It is absolutely disgraceful.

I have heard the members talk today about the Level Crossing Removal Project – it is \$400 million under budget. Well, thank goodness something is under budget, because you have had \$30 billion of infrastructure blowouts – \$30 billion. I am glad it is not \$30.4 billion. I am glad we are only at \$30 billion. But I can tell you what, as a man who has been in private business his whole life and as a builder, if I had an estimator come to me and say, ‘You know what, Wayne, the West Gate Tunnel’s going to cost \$5.5 billion’, and then they came back and said, ‘Sorry, it’s cost \$10.2 billion’; then for the next project, which would be North East Link, ‘Wayne, it’s only going to cost \$5 billion’, then it has cost \$18 billion; and then we have got the Metro Tunnel, ‘Wayne, it’s going to cost \$9 billion – no, it has cost \$12.6 billion’, they would be sacked. If you continually had the budget blowouts on construction that this government has had and if you were in private business, you would not have a job. You would be gone. Something this government needs to do is actually take note of what they are doing, how they are spending the Victorian taxpayers money and where they are going to get the best bang for buck, because at the moment this government is not doing it.

As we move forward with level crossing removals, will it stay on budget? That is the big question. I doubt it, because you know what? You have got the CFMEU going for a 7 per cent pay rise. Have you factored that in?

**Tim Richardson:** How good is that, though? What a great union, hey?

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Oh, yes, they are really good union, that mob. The member for stamp collection over there is giving me a hard time, but I doubt very much that this government will bring the remaining of these level crossings in under budget or on budget because they just cannot get it right. I am still flabbergasted by the Commonwealth Games – how you can go from \$2.4 billion to \$7 billion in 15 months? How do you do that? How does the government function like this? How do they do their estimation? I think they get a dartboard and they just stand back and they go, ‘Okay, let’s

just throw a dart, and we'll just multiply that by a billion and maybe we'll get it in the ballpark.' I mean, the government now are giving us estimations like real estate agents give ranges on houses: 'This house might be \$650,000 to \$750,000.' I will give you the example of the West Gippsland Hospital: the government commitment was \$610 million to \$675 million. Is that so when you have another budget blowout and it costs \$770 million, you can sit back and say, 'Well, it only went \$100 million over budget'?

**Michael O'Brien:** If it was real estate, it'd be underquoting.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Absolutely. It really, really baffles me how this government continually blows budgets on every project it does. You are \$30 billion over budget on projects, and it is the Victorian taxpayer that pays for that. We are going to be paying the debt down in this state – our grandkids will not even get rid of this debt. I am absolutely flabbergasted by this, but what concerns me more is the lack of investment in regional Victoria and why the government will not even step foot into regional Victoria.

As the member for Ovens Valley said, one level crossing in his electorate would make the world of difference. One level crossing in my electorate would get rid of congestion. Two level crossings in my electorate would probably fix all our roads. It would fix all our roads in regional Victoria, because we have that much traffic, that many potholes, and if you look at what is happening in Melbourne's Big Build, okay, so Melbourne gets the legacy, but the legacy for regional Victoria is our roads are absolutely stuffed because of it. At Tynong North quarry they come out; there are over 200 truck movements a day at Tynong North quarry. It is dangerous, it needs an intersection upgrade, and I cannot even get an answer off the Minister for Roads and Road Safety on it. I cannot get an answer. If you are going to create a legacy in Melbourne, have a legacy in regional Victoria that supported that legacy. The legacy we need in regional Victoria is better intersection upgrades and better roads. We need road studies done in my community because it is one of the fastest growing communities in Victoria, and I want this government to actually invest in regional Victoria and leave us with a legacy, rather than just roads that are totally decimated because we have got trucks and trailers of rock going up to Melbourne's Big Build. It is absolutely shameful that there is not one level crossing in regional Victoria that is being removed.

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (17:32): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

### *Bills*

#### **Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023**

##### *Council's agreement*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Bronwyn Halfpenny)** (17:32): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023 without amendment.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (17:33): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with notice of motion 2, government business, today and I ask that it remain on the notice paper.

**Orders of the day**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (17:33): I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Bills****Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (17:34): It is a pleasure to rise on the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023. I have to say this is the first bill I have had responsibility for, and it is an exciting one to start with. The Leader of the House did say she was looking forward to an exciting debate on this, an interesting debate, and I think we will be able to do that today. I am not sure that I will be able to fulfil the full 30 minutes, but I will certainly give it a go.

This bill should be a straightforward matter of legislative housekeeping to ensure that all laws in this place in Victoria make correct references to the sovereign following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The main purpose of this bill is to amend the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 in relation to references to the sovereign and to amend the statute law of Victoria to revise language referring to ‘the Queen’ and ‘Her Majesty’ as a consequence of the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the accession of His Majesty King Charles III as head of state, Victoria’s statute book requires amendment to reference ‘His Majesty’ where previously ‘Her Majesty’ was referenced.

Can I take this opportunity, given the impetus for this bill, to acknowledge the legacy of Queen Elizabeth II, a pillar of strength and a constant for many of us. Her unwavering grace and dignity provided strength and hope to millions throughout a period of great change and turmoil. Her Majesty’s contribution to Australia, to the Commonwealth and beyond will forever be revered.

Back to the bill at hand: while the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 does provide that references in legislation to the sovereign are ‘to the Sovereign for the time being’, the actual wording of each statute on its face is still incorrect. Therefore these amendments are meant to ensure that the state’s laws remain relevant and accurate. Unfortunately, this bill goes well beyond this simple remit, a point I will return to shortly.

The bill updates Victorian laws to replace ‘Her Majesty’ with ‘His Majesty’ as well as other similar terms and references, such as ‘Her’ to ‘His’ and ‘Queen’ to ‘King’. I should note that the bill will update 38 acts but does not propose to update a number of provisions in the Constitution Act 1975 due to the need for compliance with important manner and form passage requirements in the constitution. These include the need for a referendum to amend some provisions and absolute majority and special majority passage requirements to amend other provisions. These provisions are expected to be updated at the next available opportunity when there is a future change to similar provisions in the constitution. In the meantime the principles in the Interpretation of Legislation Act will apply to those provisions to ensure they are read as being references to His Majesty.

If all that this bill did was ensure Victoria’s laws remain relevant and accurate, it would be a simple piece of legislative housekeeping. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The bill goes quite a bit further than the points I have just outlined, and the government has not provided an adequate explanation as to why. In fact this bill seeks to effect a significant shift in the way in which the sovereign is referenced in the state of Victoria. A number of the amendments to the Interpretation of Legislation Act and the state laws of Victoria that are contained in this bill appear to remove references to the sovereign for

no valid reason. I say there is no valid reason to alter or remove references to the sovereign because last time I checked Australia remains a constitutional monarchy and any future change to our system of government is a matter for the Australian people. It is not a matter for the Andrews Labor government to unilaterally alter our statute books.

I do accept that some of the amendments contained in this bill are necessary and reflect the need to modernise Victoria's statute books – for example, the removal of references to the term 'esquire', which is no longer in use – but this bill contains many amendments that seek to alter historically significant connections between the sovereign and our legal system. For example, in the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General Act 1972 the bill does not replace the formal titles of 'Her Majesty's Attorney-General' and 'Her Majesty's solicitor-general' with 'His Majesty's Attorney-General' and 'His Majesty's solicitor-general' respectively. In fact it removes the references to the sovereign altogether so that the roles are simply referred to as 'the Attorney-General' and 'the solicitor-general'. Further, it replaces 'Her Majesty' with 'the Crown in right of Victoria' in reference to the functions of the solicitor-general. As you can see from these examples, these are not simple like-for-like substitutions. It is a similar story in the Crown Proceedings Act 1958, where again the full title of the sovereign is removed and not replaced with a reference to King Charles III.

I understand that many of those opposite wish for Australia to become a republic, but unfortunately for them Australians are at best divided over the issue, with a *Guardian* Essential poll taken after Queen Elizabeth's passing suggesting a 50–50 split on the issue of supporting King Charles as Australia's head of state. Of course the last time Australians were directly asked the question in a referendum back in 1999 the answer was a resounding no, although I do not accept that in our state of Victoria the majority voted yes some 24 years ago. But the statute laws of Victoria are not the place for the Andrews Labor government to express their republican fervour or the desire for an Australian head of state. It is not for the Labor Party to dilute or diminish the role of the sovereign across Victoria's statute books.

I will give you two more examples of this overreach. In the Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Superannuation Act 1968, this bill again removes 'Her Majesty's' in reference to the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Where previously they were referred to as 'Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition' and 'Deputy Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition', this bill simply removes the references to the sovereign completely. If it was a matter of simple legislative housekeeping, the reference to 'Her Majesty' would simply be swapped for 'His Majesty'. Removing the reference is a very pointed way to remove the historical and legal connection between the sovereign and members of Parliament.

Perhaps even more significantly, the bill changes the words in the oath of affirmation given by police officers, protective services officers and special constables as they are contained in the Victoria Police Act 2013. The bill amends all three oaths to omit all references to 'Lady the Queen' and substitutes all references to 'Her Majesty's peace' with 'the peace'. This is a significant symbolic change and will result in officers taking a different oath to those that have come before them, despite no change to our system of government actually taking place.

Again, these are changes that seek to diminish the role of the sovereign in our political and legal system. Sure, the Andrews Labor government may think these references to the monarchy are old-fashioned, but the fact is Australia remains a constitutional monarchy and will remain one until such time as the majority of Australians in a majority of states express their will for a change in a referendum. The reason that these decisions must be taken in a referendum is because changing our constitution is not something that should be done lightly. Changing our foundational document is significant, and a robust, productive and respectful debate is an important part of our democracy. We cannot simply wish the role of the sovereign away because we consider it inconvenient or cumbersome to reference it in our statute books. Modern legal drafting practice, as has been described to me by the government, is not an excuse to diminish the role of the sovereign, which is still currently fulfilled by the monarch.

Now, I will be honest with you: my enthusiasm for Australia's system of constitutional monarchy is significantly boosted by knowing that Prince William and Princess Kate are the next in line for the throne. Their grace and humanity are plain to see, and Australia could do far worse than having Prince William as our head of state in the future. The reality is that systems of government do matter. Constitutional stability really does matter. Equality before the law, the separation of church and state, the common law system and liberal democracy – these are all the foundations upon which modern Australia has been built, and we have inherited them by virtue of our deep and ongoing connection to the Commonwealth. To seek to whittle that connection away without the direct affirmation of the Australian people that they wish that connection to be ceased is legislative overreach on the part of the Andrews Labor government. It is for that reason that I move:

That all the words after 'that' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government has provided clarity on the rationale of the amending provisions'.

Also under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

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

**Jess WILSON:** Also being circulated with the reasoned amendment are the simple textual amendments to this bill that seek to limit it to its true intention. My amendments seek to update the bill to reflect what should have been brought before this Parliament – a simple substitution of terms to reflect the accession of King Charles III in our statute books. If this bill is passed with the amendments, I move it will be in keeping with its true intent, which is a straightforward matter of legislative housekeeping to ensure all laws in this place in Victoria make correct references to the sovereign following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The relevant acts will be amended only insofar as to switch references to 'Her Majesty' and 'His Majesty' like for like.

I strongly encourage those opposite to consider supporting the amendments. I will remind them that Australia's constitutional monarchy is no less current or valid as a result of the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, which was the trigger event for the introduction of the bill. If they cannot support these amendments, they need to ask themselves why. Do they object so strenuously to our current system of government, as affirmed by the Australian people at the last referendum, that they feel the need to chip away at it from behind the scenes in our statute books?

We do not need to shy away from the fact that Australia is a constitutional monarchy and that we are part of the Commonwealth. Our system of constitutional monarchy has allowed us to maintain remarkably stable government in our country, and we have all benefited from the rule of law, from liberal democracy and from free markets, the great living legacies of the Westminster system. Being part of the Commonwealth is a foundational element of Australia's political heritage, and it should not be swept under the rug under the guise of modern drafting practices. As Dan Hannan wrote in his book *Inventing Freedom*:

Elected parliaments, habeas corpus, free contract, equality before the law, open markets, an unrestricted press ... jury trials: these things are not somehow the natural condition of an advanced society. They are specific products of a political ideology developed in the language in which you are reading these words. The fact that those ideas, and that language, have become so widespread can make us lose sight of how exceptional they were in origin.

In other words, the Westminster institutions we have inherited are in large part a pivotal factor in Australia's success story. All the things we are rightly proud of in Australia – equality before the law, religious pluralism and freedom of expression and from tyranny – are no happy accident, but rather the enduring legacy of all Commonwealth nations. Indeed being part of the Commonwealth remains key to our continued economic growth. Lundan and Jones first documented what they termed the 'Commonwealth effect' in 2001. They describe the Commonwealth effect as the high propensity, on behalf of Commonwealth member nations, to trade and invest with each other, meaning that the Commonwealth as a set of institutions and traditions can add economic value. So as well as our

institutional and political heritage our constitutional monarchy and our membership of the Commonwealth continue to lend very relevant advantages to Australia today. Unfortunately we will not be celebrating all that the Commonwealth has to offer, given the Andrews government's cancellation of the Commonwealth Games.

It is legitimate for Victoria's statute book to be updated to reflect the accession of King Charles III. In the main the bill reflects good legislative housekeeping. It is also an important opportunity to appropriately modernise language no longer in use. However, it is not appropriate to dilute references to the sovereign or remove references to the sovereign in entirety. There should be a simple substitution of terms, and my proposed amendments reflect the true intention of the bill. If the government cannot support the bill with the amendments, the Liberal–National coalition will be voting against this bill for going well beyond its stated remit. Once again, I encourage those opposite to reflect on why they have felt the need to turn what should have been a straightforward piece of legislative housekeeping into an attempt to diminish our system of constitutional monarchy.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (17:48): It is a pleasure to rise on the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023, and methinks the opposition doth protest too much in their accusation that somehow this bill is an attempt to substantively reform Victoria's system of government. As the member for Kew rightly said, constitutional arrangements for this country are entirely and properly a matter for the Commonwealth and the people of Australia, given our constitutional arrangements and the need for referenda to alter those.

Language evolves and changes. The provisions in this bill in no way change the arrangements of a standing official opposition. It was Sir John Hobhouse in 1826 who first coined the phrase in the Westminster Parliament of 'His Majesty's Opposition'. Before that the term had not been in use. Language evolves and changes, and appositely, I think, the first time that phrase was used it was met with laughter in the House of Commons, much as the accusation against the government that somehow we are clandestinely reforming and destroying ancient systems of government through this bill has been met with today. The nature of official opposition has also changed – the clarification of that sort of contrast between treason and opposition was a relatively recent development. In the 17th century, civil wars were fought over the premise that one could not oppose the monarch, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the changes to the Westminster system of government through the 18th century led to a situation where an opposition could oppose the government without it being construed as a treasonous act that opposed the body of the Crown.

The point of this is that language evolves. I wish to take some exception to the comments of members on both sides during the government business program earlier today that this is somehow an irrelevant bill and not in any way interesting. I could not disagree more. It is an extraordinarily interesting bill that does chart changes in language and social norms and customs and our institutions over time.

*Members interjecting.*

**Iwan WALTERS**: Extraordinarily, member for Albert Park. And I would, member for Sandringham. It may not make profound changes to the lives of Victorians, as I believe the member for Monbulk may have said earlier, but it does capture profound changes which have taken place in Victoria over the life and long reign of the late Queen.

I just want to go back to the original purpose of the bill momentarily and to reassert that the bill does amend references in Victorian legislation from 'Her Majesty' to 'His Majesty' and other similar terms following the death of Queen Elizabeth and the assumption of the throne by King Charles III. There have only been four occasions in modern Victorian history when the gender of the sovereign has changed following the death of the monarch: in 1837, when Queen Victoria assumed the throne, I think after her uncle William IV died; when Edward VII assumed the throne in 1901; when Queen Elizabeth assumed the throne in 1952; and then 70 years later, in September of last year, when King Charles assumed the throne on the death of his mother. It would be, as some have suggested, easier to

simply switch to non-personalised, non-specific, non-genderised language and include simply references to the sovereign and the Crown. However, that would actually create a lot more difficulty; because the Crown can refer to the person of the monarch as well as the Crown in light of Victoria, not all references to Her Majesty in the 35 acts that this bill seeks to amend can be so easily altered.

I do want to touch upon that point of language, and I think the bill does give us an insight into the language of an earlier era. Those terms like ‘Our Lady the Queen’ in the Crown Proceedings Act 1958 is replaced simply with ‘the King’ to reflect and better capture the relationship that citizens have with their government and that that kind of florid, obsequious language probably does not play a role in the lives of Victorians today. It does not mean that this bill is somehow a clandestine republican plot in disguise, but it does I think capture modern evolution in language – as I say, as language has always evolved and as institutions of government within the Westminster system have always evolved, so that when Sir John Hobhouse in 1826 made that first reference to the official opposition, it was deemed so shocking as to warrant laughter in the House of Commons. These things evolve in time; it does not alter the concept of an official standing opposition and its important role within our parliamentary system and our constitutional system, whereby there is an opposition that forms a core part of our parliamentary processes. But it does mean that changes in language and changes in social norms are properly captured in a way that renders them relevant to Victorians.

I was really struck, in reading this bill – as I know members were in many areas – particularly by the changes to the Veterans Act 2005 and to the Shrine of Remembrance Act 1978 and the reminder that our armed forces were referred to as ‘Her Majesty’s naval, military and air forces’. Obviously the change will be made to ensure that they are called ‘His Majesty’s naval, military and air forces’. It is a reminder of how our parliamentary democracy has evolved since the 17th century and the English Civil War, when the person of the monarch was so inextricably linked with the armed forces.

Now, in a titular sense, that relationship still exists. There is still a personal and, one could say, *de jure* relationship between the head of state and the armed forces. But because of changes to our system of government, Parliament and the people are sovereign – sovereign with a small ‘s’, not the Sovereign with a capital ‘S’. The sovereign is vested with vast powers, which in Victoria are obviously exercised by the Governor in Council, and at a national level by the Governor-General. In Victoria’s case, it is upon the advice of her ministers, which reflects those changes over time – that Parliament is sovereign, that the people are sovereign, that the people and Parliament fundamentally exercise the power and the decision-making over the armed forces, that it is a civilian-led military. However, it is interesting to recall the history and the origins of those terms and the fact there is still that enduring link between the monarch and the armed forces. It is captured in the Shrine of Remembrance Act 1978 and the Veterans Act 2005.

I had the opportunity to be at the Shrine last Tuesday for a commemorative service that remembered the service and sacrifice of many thousands of Australians on the Western Front at the Battle of Amiens in 1918. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of all of those at the Shrine of Remembrance – its trustees sustain the memory of every single Victorian, and indeed Australian, who has ever served in a conflict and also in peacekeeping service. But it did also prompt me to think: why did Australians serve in the Great War? Was it that concept of king and country, which is arguably captured in that terminology in the 2005 Veterans Act and the 1978 Shrine of Remembrance Act?

One of the profound challenges for historians of the First World War is to understand how and why so many Victorians volunteered with such alacrity at the outset of war and served with distinction overseas in a voluntary capacity. It was almost never questioned that Australia would join the First World War when Britain did – when the Empire, as it was, went to war there was no distinction. But within two short years of August 1914 those questions around motivation and the role of government and the relationship between the people and their government really came to the fore, in Victoria most notably of all Australian states, through the conscription debates of 1916, when, as those on this side of the house will be all too aware, our party split in one of the great fissures of 20th-century Australian politics, with lasting consequences. But the essence of those referenda – they were binding plebiscites



rather than referenda because they did not effect constitutional change – was that it was not right for men and women to be conscripted to potentially, and in some cases in all likelihood, lose their lives when capital was not being conscripted in the same way. It was also of course overlaid by the politics of Ireland at the time.

I invoke these examples just to show how language does evolve over time. This bill has been worked through very carefully by the minister's team. It does affect, as I say, 35 separate pieces of existing legislation. A lot of care and effort has gone into the drafting of this bill just to ensure that it does not substantively change any of the constitutional arrangements of Victoria but that it does modernise language, that it makes sure that it is contemporaneous and relevant to modern Victoria.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (17:59): I rise today to speak on the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023. The purpose of this bill is to amend the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 and to amend the statute law of Victoria to revise language and references to the sovereign as a consequence of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.

During the more than 70-year historic reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, much of Victoria's statute law referenced 'Her Majesty' or similar terms. With the accession of His Majesty King Charles III as head of state, these references now require amendment. The bill will update Victorian laws to replace 'Her Majesty' with 'His Majesty' and similar terms such as 'her' to 'him' and 'Queen' to 'King' as relevant. This bill should be a straightforward piece of legislative housekeeping. However, the amendments contained within it go beyond this original remit and intention. The coalition is moving a series of amendments to this bill to bring it back to its original intent.

The member for Kew has clearly outlined the many issues within the bill and that Labor appears to have seen this bill as an opportunity to diminish the role of the monarch as our sovereign. As an example, in the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General Act 1972, the bill does not replace the formal titles of Her Majesty's Attorney-General and Her Majesty's solicitor-general with His Majesty's Attorney-General and His Majesty's solicitor-general respectively. In fact it removes the references to the sovereign altogether so that the roles are simply referred to as the Attorney-General and the solicitor-general. Further, it replaces 'Her Majesty' with 'the Crown in right of Victoria' in reference to the functions of the solicitor-general. This bill should have been predominately based on process. If it were simply a matter of legislative housekeeping, a reference to 'Her Majesty' would simply be replaced with 'His Majesty'. There is no valid reason to alter or remove references to the sovereign, because Australia remains a constitutional monarchy, and any further change to our system of government is a matter for the Australian people.

Queen Elizabeth's reign is embedded in history, and that is where it must remain. As a woman who served with commitment and grace for the people, she is remembered for her incredible sense of duty and her devotion to a life of service. She has left a lasting legacy. For my electorate of Shepparton it was her first visit to Australia back in 1954, which was commemorated with a rose garden at Monash Park gifted by the women of the region. The Queens Gardens, which are located in the heart of the city, are also named in the honour of Queen Elizabeth. During her visit, onlookers had come from surrounding towns and from across the New South Wales border to catch a glimpse of the relatively new Queen, who had only been crowned two years prior. She was accompanied by her husband Prince Philip. It was an event that tens of thousands of people attended and about 9000 school students from the region attended. There had never been anything quite like it, and many years on, that that historic visit is still talked about today. There would have been many months of preparation, including the closure of streets and navigating the crowds.

Historically, during Queen Elizabeth's visit to Shepparton, the Queen's procession passed by a stretch of flood plain between Shepparton and Mooroopna where the Aboriginal people of the Yorta Yorta nation had made their home along the banks of the river after walking off the mission known as the Cummeragunja and now known as The Flats. Local authorities thought this was too unsightly for Her Majesty's eyes, and mesh was placed to block out the Aboriginal people living along the river. I

recently spoke with my friend and local elder Uncle Ruben, and we talked about that historic Queen's visit, which is now known by the community. Uncle Ruben really enjoyed revisiting the Queen's historic visit and the story he continues to share with many. Queen Elizabeth did see the Aboriginal people living on the river. She went on to instigate them being moved onto the land, and small hubs were built on the adjoining land of Rumbalara. She served with compassion, and this story is embedded in history. If you go to The Flats today, that history is acknowledged on an honour board.

While she was the Queen, she was also a wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, and it is hard to imagine the sacrifices that Her Majesty made and the impact that must have had on her family. Her intense loyalty and duty truly are commendable. While the references to 'Her Majesty' may be replaced by Victorian law, we must protect her place in history and her legacy and respect the monarch.

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (18:03): I am very happy to take this opportunity to speak on this bill. We know that this bill needs to pass in order for our future legislation to accurately reflect the death of Queen Elizabeth II and King Charles III assuming the throne. We will not of course talk about King Charles I, the Puritans and his grisly end. British history, as you would expect, is quite colourful, but it is not our history. It is the history of another country and another world. I have very little English blood, and the monarchy means very little to my Irish, German and Swedish ancestry. However, this debate does give us the opportunity to have a conversation in our Parliament about the role of the monarchy in modern Australia.

Of course I am a republican. We know that in Australia an Australian cannot be head of state. Despite our opinions on the institution of the monarchy, members in both this Parliament and in the Commonwealth Parliament pledge their allegiance to a foreign monarch, which I have done and will continue to do while it is required. Of course my loyalty is true, but it does not mean that I cannot express my belief as an Australian that we need to have an Australian head of state. We must reflect on our head of state's influence upon our domestic politics and, in extreme cases, their influence on the very leadership of our nation, as was highlighted during the 1975 constitutional crisis.

I have been riveted by *The Palace Letters*, a very good book by Jenny Hocking, which I would recommend that many people in this place read. Many of us on this side – in fact all of us on this side – celebrate the win of the Whitlam government. We absolutely love the amazing transformative policies that that government brought in, the wonderful change that came with the Whitlam government which transformed our country into the modern place that it is now with so many things that we take for granted – I will not digress, because I do want to talk about a couple of the things that he did, such as getting rid of the British honours system and introducing Australian honours.

We finally had our own Australian national anthem rather than *God Save the Queen*, and in 1974 he removed the words 'God save the Queen' from the official proclamation dissolving Parliament. Eighteen months after his second election victory in 1974, we found Whitlam removed from office by the Queen's representative in Australia, Governor-General Sir John Kerr, without warning and despite Whitlam maintaining a clear majority in the House of Representatives at all times.

**Michaela Settle**: Shame, Fraser, shame!

**Vicki WARD**: Absolute shame, Fraser, shame – yes. I grew up with that mantra too, member for Eureka.

We know that Whitlam was dismissed on 11 November 1975, and Sir John Kerr wrote to the Queen's private secretary that he had done so, and I quote, 'without informing the palace in advance'. But we know this is not right. We know because of the wonderful work of Jenny Hocking and Gough Whitlam's son, who was a part of the legal team to help get access to the palace letters from the Australian archives, who were doing everything they could to protect the Queen. The Australian archives were doing everything they could to protect the Queen of the United Kingdom and this country but not to protect the historical integrity of our own nation. That in itself is an absolute shame.

In a letter sent to the palace on 3 July Kerr enclosed a clipping from the *Canberra Times* which raises the possibility of dismissing Whitlam. So Kerr is already talking to the palace in the middle of the year, four or five months before he dismisses Whitlam, that it is a possibility, right? He starts putting it out there. But what is incredibly distressing is the involvement of the current King in this conversation. The Governor-General is aware that he has powers to check an elected government, right? He knows that he can get rid of Whitlam. He is at a dinner party with the Malaysian Prime Minister and Whitlam, and Whitlam makes a joke about well, it's you or me. That freaks Kerr out, and Kerr goes on a pathway to working out how he can protect his own job and how he can then get rid of Whitlam if he needs to. He talks with the United Kingdom and he war-games this. There is this sense that, 'Well, we don't want the Queen's representative being dismissed by a Prime Minister' – a Prime Minister, no less, who has dared to take on the British establishment by getting rid of things like *God Save the Queen* as our national anthem. This was something that absolutely angered the powerful aristocracy, the powerful chamber, around the royal family – that us colonial upstarts would actually stand on our own two feet and demand to be seen as our own nation.

**Jess Wilson:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Eltham I think is shining a light behind the true intention of this bill by the Andrews Labor government, but I do ask you to bring her back to the bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison):** The member for Eltham will continue and will keep thinking about the statute law amendment in her contribution.

**Vicki WARD:** Yes, absolutely, Acting Speaker, because as we know, in the ranging debate that came from the member for Kew, she even spoke about the referendum that we had in 1999, which I am working my way to and sadly will probably run out of time for.

In *The Palace Letters* Jenny Hocking says the letter from Charteris – and this is the private secretary to the Queen – confirms that Kerr told Prince Charles in mid-September 1975 that he was considering having to dismiss the government if supply was blocked and that Charles discussed this with the Queen and with Charteris.

**Richard Riordan:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it appears that the member for Eltham is revelling in the fact that she has clearly watched all episodes of *The Crown* and is using that as the basis for her contribution today. I am wondering, Acting Speaker –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison):** Member for Polwarth, what is your point of order?

**Richard RIORDAN:** if you could counsel her to get back to the bill at hand and assist the house in understanding the government's logic for such proposals and move on, because if we want to understand *The Crown*, we can subscribe to Netflix and discover the benefits of such a series.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison):** As someone who had Jenny Hocking as a lecturer during my masters, I am very interested in the contribution of the member for Eltham. It has been a wideranging debate, and I ask her to continue for the last 2½ minutes, referring back to the bill.

**Vicki WARD:** Thank you, Acting Speaker. To go and engage with the member for Kew's contribution, the monarchy's involvement in the 1975 constitutional crisis raised many questions about Australia's system of governance that can be said to have catalysed the republican movement and the 1999 referendum. While I appreciate the member for Kew's positive character reference to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, I would love to know who they will support this week when the Matildas take on the British soccer team. And who did he support in the Ashes? Did he support the Diamonds' crushing of England? And what does he know of us? What does he know of our culture and of what indeed matters to us and what we care about as a sovereign nation? But most disappointingly with the republic referendum, as with the yes plebiscite and along with the current Voice to Parliament referendum, the Liberals have historically used referendums to divide this nation, and that is shameful.

The member for Kew has raised the 1999 republic referendum, which posed two questions, the first being whether Australia should become a republic and the second being whether Australia should insert a preamble to the constitution. We know that this referendum failed in part no less due to mischief and deliberate misinformation. Analysis suggested that voters were divided and confused by the proposal, factors which can be attributed to misinformation spread by the no campaign. The no side's common arguments included claiming the supporters of the yes campaign were elites, despite many leading figures supporting the monarchy also having their own elite backgrounds. No campaigners also called for further consultation without specifying what steps were needed to ensure such consultation – and I am sure people will start to see that there is a familiarity of approach here with the current referendum. I also have to say how upsetting it was to even have a future Prime Minister in Tony Abbott say that you cannot trust politicians to select a president. This person then became Prime Minister.

**Daniela De Martino:** And Minister for Women!

**Vicki WARD:** And Minister for Women indeed. And so we know that this kind of behaviour is something that is regularly engaged in, where there is a whole bunch of misinformation and where there is shameful activity to try and confuse people in our community so that they do not vote yes. We are seeing it with the current referendum, we saw it with the marriage plebiscite and we saw it with the 1999 referendum. We see elites sowing division in this country so that they can reduce the power of the people in this country who want to assert themselves, whether it is us trying to assert our own national identity through becoming a republic, whether it is us asserting the identity of our rainbow community so that they can marry who they love or whether it is us asserting the authority of Indigenous peoples in this country wanting to have a Voice to Parliament.

**Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (18:13):** I rise to speak on this bill as someone who has spoken publicly as a republican. I feel that I can rise today as someone with republican sentiments in contrast to the previous speaker the member for Eltham, who wanted to regale us with some sort of great conspiracy and desire by the current Labor administration to actually change our constitutional way of being not only here but presumably to influence the rest of Australia. I remind the member for Eltham that the good people of Australia had a choice on this only recently, in the last 23 years. They had a choice to look at our system of government and to make an assessment of the best way to go forward as a nation. They clearly were given the choice of changing to a republic model and doing away with an age-old tradition that has served not only Australia well but many other countries well, and they decided not to take that option. They decided to stick with what they knew and what they knew worked well.

And so it is disappointing to see this government, as it so often does, seek to creep changes in in its own sneaky little way when it thinks people are not looking. This has provided a great opportunity for them to water down the system that has been here and worked very, very well in the grand state of Victoria for a long time. Not only has this building hosted the former monarch, but it has been long on the visiting trail of the monarchy that has been part of our governing system here in Victoria and Australia for our entire existence. And so it seems not only an act of rudeness, really, to sneak this in but unnecessary.

The government, if it wants to move from – as the member for Eltham sort of outlined – all the woes and heartache, in her mind, of being part of a constitutional monarchy, then the government can put that forward to the people of Victoria and say to them, 'Look, it is our belief of our membership that we do not want this system and we want to change it and we are going to rip away the customs and traditions and language and the format of the way our Parliament works, just to prove a point.' But they know of course that that sentiment would not win, and they know of course that Australians by and large, new Australians, old Australians, multigenerational Australians, are all actually very, very happy with the system of government that we have here in Australia. However strong the arguments that members on the other side might feel that they have, however strong they feel those arguments

are, they in fact were given not so long ago to the people of Australia and the people of Victoria, and they decided that that was not the way to go.

**Michaela Settle:** It was 24 years ago.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Well, you know, there is a Labor federal government now, and they are more than welcome to try again, but I suspect that they need to look to the Liberals for how to run a successful referendum, where you actually go out and work with the community and get a successful referendum up. Of course we can quote 1967 and 1977, when in fact constructive, collaborative Liberal governments got together and worked with all the community and got them across. They do not take the point of view of the Australian populace for granted. They do not just assume that their way is the only way. They do not just assume that, you know, whatever is the mindset of a humble caucus is what everybody in the nation wants.

Sadly, we are going to see a great opportunity missed, most likely, this year for greater reconciliation and greater understanding of our First Nations people when this government recklessly drives a good notion and a well-supported notion over the cliff just through avarice, through contempt for negotiation and through contempt for the Australian people. And quite frankly, if you cannot get a progression in our constitution to recognise our First Nations people, then that says a lot about the way this government deals with constitutional change. If the member for Eltham, amongst others, sits there and makes up excuses as to why they have to operate through backdoor mechanisms to try and get their way on constitutional monarchy, then I think that is a sad indictment on the mindset of the government and those that support their approach.

The legislation that we have before us today has a simple role, and it is a role that the average Australian simply understands. We have had the passing of one monarch to another, and as such we have to update certain elements of our legislation and bills and so on. And so that makes sense – that you would, just like so many other jurisdictions around the Commonwealth, simply just replace like for like. It is not a particularly difficult concept for people to understand, but not for this government of course. They have decided to wiggle and wheedle a whole raft of other changes that at the end of the day – the sky is not going to fall in – speak to the intent of this government, to its sneakiness, to its trickery that it so often employs when bringing legislation into this house. I know in my time in this place we have seen time and time again simple, good notions that many of us could support or believe in, but this government tends to put a barb and –

**Roma Britnell:** A twist.

**Richard RIORDAN:** a twist, member for South-West Coast, you are quite right. They put a twist in it that really makes it not workable or not palatable, and they try and patch it up with the trickery of language and the trickery of intent that they have behind it.

So to this legislation that is coming to us today we are proposing as an opposition that there be a simple amendment, and the simple amendment is that this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government has provided clarity on the rationale of the amending provisions, which has been sadly missing as it so often is with this government. Time and time again we have pieces of legislation coming before us completely devoid of regulations and other details that really are vitally important for not only the opposition to decide on the merits of the case but also key stakeholders and others.

In this particular case, while the sky will not fall in, it is about the simple practices and procedures that the police employ. There is a list here in fact of agencies. For the protective services and others that work and protect the Parliament and work and protect the people of Victoria, the way that they operate is fundamentally switched as to the purpose and the way we operate legislatively, as a Parliament and as a governing body. I think that most people – most Australians and most Victorians – fundamentally understand the concept that we need to update on a regular basis, for a variety of reasons, our legislation, our acts of Parliament and our procedures on the change of a monarch. It is something that has gone on now for centuries across Westminster systems across the Commonwealth. It is not difficult

to do. There are clear ways that this can go forward. There are clear procedures in place in other jurisdictions where automatically, at the change of a monarch, things are updated. There is no reason why Victoria cannot similarly follow suit. I find just on principle that this is a difficult bill to support. It is one that speaks more to the intent and the sneakiness of the government than it does to the aspirations and future of Victorians. Therefore I cannot support the bill in its current form. I support our amendment put forward, that we can do this with greater knowledge and understanding of the government. I urge my colleagues not to support this bill.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (18:22): It is a great pleasure to speak on the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023, and what a wideranging debate we have had on this bill. I may try to take the tone down a little bit and direct us back to the bill, as a new member. I will stick clearly to this bill as much as I can. This bill, though, is not groundbreaking, as has been referenced before; it is ensuring that our legislation is accurate. Obviously this bill is going to amend the references in Victorian legislation from ‘Her Majesty’ to ‘His Majesty’ and other similar terms following the death of Queen Elizabeth II and King Charles III assuming the throne. I have spoken a few times in this house and have prepared for a variety of bills, and I have talked about new legislation. I might have to go back over the records, but I do remember nearly every time saying that our legislation needs to be modern and up to date and obviously accurate. Good legislation housekeeping is making sure our bills are accurate and that the accuracy is maintained.

The passing of Queen Elizabeth II, who died on 8 September 2022, will certainly be one of those moments in our lives where we probably all remember where we were when we heard the news. She had 70 years on that throne. It is an incredible reign and I respect that, but I have to admit I do not follow the monarchy that closely. The institution represents obviously our head of state, but I know many Victorians held the Queen with great affection and respected Queen Elizabeth II. My gran certainly did. My gran is from that era of singing *God Save the Queen* and having the Queen’s portrait in the house. I can even remember my gran being excited to become a great-grandmother at the same time that the Queen was becoming great-grandmother again, with my cousin and Kate Middleton having similar due dates. My gran would reference that often. I understand the affection that Victorians had for the Queen.

This bill, as we have seen today, does raise maybe some debate about the ongoing connections to the monarchy and the fact that an Australian is not our head of state, but that is kind of not the direction I want to take. For me traditions are always important. People hold traditions very close to their hearts, but moving forward and going into a modern society we do make changes. We make changes for those right reasons. We make changes for the betterment of our communities. In this Parliament and obviously in the Commonwealth Parliament we pledge our allegiance to the foreign monarch. I certainly remember my pledging of the oath here in this place, a special moment, and I know those traditions are important. Interestingly, I have learned that Victoria is the only state that requires members of both houses to be sworn and to swear allegiance to a new monarch after a death, under section 23 of the constitution, so I am learning a lot from this legislation. Last time this occurred was 14 February 1952 after Queen Elizabeth’s father King George VI had passed, and I know members in this Parliament had to be called back late last year to be sworn in again under His Majesty. But ultimately any of those changes to a republic are questions for the Commonwealth to deal with.

We have lots of things that change over time, and the passing of the Queen has also seen changes needing to be made in a variety of settings. We have had to change the Australian passport. Reference to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is on that first page of your passport, and these words will now be replaced with His Majesty King Charles III in the new passports. Obviously – side note – passports referring to the Queen still remain valid until their expiry date. There are changes to coins, with the royal mint confirming King Charles will appear on the back of Australian coins. An item adorned with the Queen’s cipher will need updating, and that includes on uniforms worn by Australian soldiers. We make changes all the time when these events happen and occur, so making changes in this legislation is just sensible housekeeping that needs to happen.

It is also important here to note that we have made changes at a constitutional level and legal arrangements to recognise here in Victoria before kings and queens there was in this state the oldest continuing culture on earth, a unique and a precious thing. We recognise that. I will just have to reference this to get this right, but section 1A of the Constitution Act 1975 does go to this point. It provides that:

- (1) The Parliament acknowledges that the events described in the preamble to this Act occurred without proper consultation, recognition or involvement of the Aboriginal people of Victoria.
- (2) The Parliament recognises that Victoria's Aboriginal people, as the original custodians of the land on which the Colony of Victoria was established –
  - (a) have a unique status as the descendants of Australia's first people; and
  - (b) have a spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters within Victoria; and
  - (c) have made a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the identity and well-being of Victoria.

Proudly, Victoria has advanced as well to being the first state to pursue that treaty and truth with our First Nations people here in Victoria, something we should all be very proud of. Now we have the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria; this is an independent and democratic elected body representing traditional owners of country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria.

But just back to the bill at hand, I suppose, and the objectives and the necessity of this bill, current legislation obviously references Her Majesty, and since the death of Queen Elizabeth II these references are incorrect. The actual wording in each act is incorrect, and these amendments will make sure that the state's laws remain relevant and accurate. As a new member I do like to do a lot of research when I am talking on a bill and making sure that I am really clear on what I am speaking about and understand that, and legislation is important. As they say, the devil is in the detail, and this is part of the detail that needs to be addressed and detail that needs to happen. That is why it is called, obviously, a statute law bill, which is a type of bill Parliament often considers passing to correct any of those omissions, ambiguities and errors found in statutes. As I have said, it is a good piece of legislative housekeeping.

Contrary to what I have heard from the other side, these bills do not make changes to policies and they do not make substantive changes to laws. They are really just tidying up what needs to be done. So the overarching intent of this bill really is to make these minimum changes to the Victorian statute book to ensure the terms remain legally accurate and the current meanings and legal interpretations are preserved. The bill is not intended to have any retrospective effect either. So I think we just need to simplify this down a little bit. This is a simple bill that is really doing the housekeeping that needs to happen in this place. It will not change policy in Victoria. It will not change how acts are applied. But more importantly, as I have said, it is important that we have accurate, modern and up-to-date legislation, and that is exactly what this bill is trying to achieve.

I am pleased I was able to stand up today and talk to this bill to make sure that we have a wideranging debate and that this bill passes. But it is quite confusing to hear some of the rhetoric we are hearing and the scaremongering from the other side, which I am just a little bit confused about. This bill is not going to change any policies. We are literally updating our legislation, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (18:31): It is disorderly to respond to interjections. I am just on my feet, only 10 seconds into my contribution on the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023, and already the member for Frankston is throwing barbs across the chamber. Let the record reflect that. I will not be, to the member for Frankston's great disappointment, giving a rendition of *God Save the King*, although I know that that is something which perhaps many members of this place could learn from.

I rise to address, hopefully without interjection, the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023, and I do so noting the outstanding contribution of the member for Kew. The

member for Kew is a new member in this place and a new member of the shadow cabinet, and I say to this house: put your money behind the member for Kew. Her contribution, the first time that she has responded to a bill in substance and led a bill on behalf of the opposition through this chamber, should be a textbook example for every other shadow minister in this Parliament –

**Annabelle Cleeland:** And minister.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** And perhaps minister, member for Euroa. As I am on my feet, I note the member for Greenvale has returned to the chamber. I do commend the member for Greenvale for the respectful way in which he addressed the bill before the house. I commend the member for Bellarine for the respectful way in which she addressed the bill before the house. I note the outstanding contributions of the members for Shepparton and Polwarth. But I do take issue with the way in which the member for Greenvale addressed the bill before the house. If I wanted a history lesson –

**Roma Britnell:** Eltham.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** Eltham, sorry. Forgive me. I am hoping Hansard will make me sound better than I am. In regard to the member for Eltham's contribution, if I wanted a history lesson, I would have referred to Geoffrey Blainey's *A Shorter History of Australia*. But, no, we got that from the member for Eltham, and we got from the member for Eltham, I suggest, an insight into the Labor government's intent behind this bill. If they were simply replacing like for like, then the members of the government would take into account and agree to the very, very good and well-drafted amendments proposed by the member for Kew. But, no, I suspect they will not. I suspect they will not do that.

We should at this point actually flag the opposition's intent for the textual amendments drafted and submitted by the member for Kew. We intend for those to be considered in the Legislative Council in substance as well, because we know that this government will not move to consideration in detail on this bill in this place, and that is a great shame for our democracy. I note that the member for Kew in preparing the position of the opposition for this bill has consulted with a number of groups, including the Victorian Bar Council, the Law Institute of Victoria, the Law Council of Australia, the Samuel Griffith Society, the Australian Monarchist League, the Australian Republic Movement and the Police Association Victoria. The member for Kew has done her homework. She has consulted with these groups, some groups that the government did not have a care or concern to consult with in the first place when this legislation was being drafted. If they had the care, the courtesy and the concern to consult with these groups, then they would have known pretty early on in the piece that this bill as drafted does not have the broad support of those particular groups, which is another reason why the member for Kew has proposed the amendments that she has.

This bill should be straightforward. It should be absolutely straightforward. It should be simply replacing like for like, but this bill does not do that. It goes far beyond that. I would even suggest that Labor appear to have seen this bill as an opportunity to, frankly, diminish the role of the monarch and our sovereign. As members on this side have highlighted, in the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General Act 1972 the bill does not replace the formal titles of Her Majesty's Attorney-General and Her Majesty's solicitor-general with His Majesty's Attorney-General and His Majesty's solicitor-general respectively, and I know that the Shadow Attorney-General, the member for Malvern, would be deeply concerned by that omission in this bill. In fact this bill removes the reference to the sovereign altogether so that the roles are simply referred to as the Attorney-General and the solicitor-general. So why, if there was not a deeper intent behind the changes in this bill, would this bill not reflect a simple like-for-like change?

Unlike some of my other colleagues I was not able to attend the bill briefing, and I know that I did speak to the member for Kew on behalf of the opposition before that bill briefing was undertaken by the government. I had a very simple question, and that was: how are the changes that the government is proposing in this bill reflected in other institutions in our state? And I know, because the member



for Kew has told me, that that is a question which she posed to the government and which frankly she never got a response to, and that deeply concerns me also.

If the system of government in this state – if our constitutional monarchy – is to change to a republic, that must be done by an agreement, as the member for Kew pointed out in her contribution, not only by the majority of Australians but by the majority of Australians in each state and the majority of states. Until that time we should have respect and regard for the sovereign, for King Charles III, as not only the King of England but the King of Australia. But many of the amendments contained in this bill appear to remove references to the sovereign for no valid reason. And we know that there is no valid reason to alter or remove references to the sovereign, because Australia remains to this day, the last time I checked, a constitutional monarchy, and any future changes to our system of government are a matter for the Australian people. In fact, I know I am stating the obvious, but perhaps it would assist members on the government side for me to do so: we will remain a constitutional monarchy until the majority of Australians in a majority of states vote to express their will to change our system of government.

The coalition is moving a series of amendments, as I have flagged, to bring this bill back to its original intent and to repair, frankly, the overreach that this government has initiated with the drafting of this legislation. These amendments seek to update the bill to reflect what should have been brought before this Parliament: a simple substitution of terms to reflect the accession of King Charles III in our statute books. With these amendments the bill will be a straightforward matter of legislative housekeeping to ensure all laws in place in Victoria make correct reference to the sovereign following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The relevant acts will be amended only insofar as to switch references from ‘Her Majesty’ to ‘His Majesty’ and ‘Queen’ to ‘King’ – like for like.

If those opposite do not take the opportunity to support these amendments, they need to frankly ask themselves why. Why are they overreaching? Why are they, by stealth, assuming within not only the cabinet but the Labor caucus a presumption of the will of not only the Victorian people but the Australian people? We have seen this before, the way that this government operates, the arrogant way in which this government operates, time and time again assuming the will of the Victorian people and going far beyond their remit and far beyond the will of the Victorian people, and we see that again in this particular circumstance. We do not need to shy away from the fact that Australia is in fact a constitutional monarchy and that we form part of the Commonwealth. Our system of constitutional monarchy has allowed us to maintain remarkably stable government in our country in an increasingly uncertain world, and we should not seek to diminish this in any form, which is why we have proposed the amendments we have proposed, which is why we will propose those amendments in the other place and which is why, when the government’s guillotine drops sharply on the head of this bill and other bills on the government business program, we will be opposing this bill come 5 pm on Thursday.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (18:41): I think the member for Sandringham used his whole repertoire this afternoon. He did very well, although a rendition of *God Save the Queen* would have gone down a treat.

**Brad Rowswell**: King!

**Paul EDBROOKE**: King – my apologies. We will get to that, though. He is right in one thing, though: we will not be supporting the amendments. I have been sitting here listening to the debate on this bill, the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023. I think the book was opened fairly wide from the start and there has been a fair bit of – how would you put this – trivialising of this bill. Some people who have risen in this house would have us believe that this bill is the Victorian government slowly but surely pushing the nation’s constitution away from the monarchy. This bill in no way changes the Constitution Act 1975 or in any way changes what was enacted in 1855. It will not change any policies in Victoria. It will not even change how this bill is applied. It is important that legislation in the statute books is accurate and precise. We all know the reasons for that. Statute law amendment bills like this come into Parliament quite often to make minor changes, and

this is a minor change. It is quite interesting to hear some of those opposite talk about this incremental change that we are making and say that we have decided as a Victorian government, because one person spoke about it, we would like to become republicans. I do not hide my thoughts on this. I read about the monarchy in *New Idea* –

*Members interjecting.*

**Paul EDBROOKE:** when I am waiting to pay for groceries, I should add. I do not think that they have much impact on modern Australia in the way that they did, say, 1000 years ago in feudal Britain. When the kingdoms of England were put together, people were convinced there was a metaphysical kind of connection between them and the king, who was a vision of God on earth and who had all those powers of God as well. Of course there will be some people that disagree with me on that, but I think we have moved on. It is no longer a feudal society in Europe. We are certainly not here. I would even go far as to suggest that, with the link to colonialism that the monarchy has, for some people of a certain background here today to be celebrating the monarchy is fantastic, but other people have had very, very, very different experiences with the monarchy in Australia.

With that I would suggest that changing the language to refer to ‘the King’ or ‘His Majesty’ is not that big a deal. It is just there to make sure our legislation and our statute books are accurate, and that is all. Of course we have to change it from ‘Her Majesty’ to ‘His Majesty’ following the death of Queen Elizabeth II and King Charles III assuming the throne. Even though I am not a monarchist myself, I was really sad to hear of the Queen’s death. As far as people that serve their community go, she is a good example, maybe the last good example of someone who has served their community. Do I think that we need someone in a monarchy as our head of state now? No, I do not, but at the same time I do not believe that anyone seriously can come into this house and read into this bill that it is the Victorian state government’s attempt to undermine the federal constitution and undermine every other state and territory in Australia. It is just ridiculous.

We have heard from the opposition about an amendment to this. I have read the amendment, and it is just a time-wasting exercise. I do not think any of us need to go through that. This bill will raise debate about an ongoing connection with the monarchy for some people, though it is very straightforward and, as I have said, it does not change anything in day-to-day life for Parliament or in any legal sense for anyone in Victoria. In fact it is not like it has not been done before. Western Australia took a different approach, but its Legislation Act 2021 provides editorial powers for Western Australia’s parliamentary counsel to amend laws to update sovereign references consistent with WA’s current drafting practices. We do not have such legislation; that is why we are here today obviously. Conversely, the Parliament of the Canadian territory of Yukon has passed a References to the Sovereign Statute Law Amendment Act 2023 to update legislative references to reflect the change from ‘Queen’ to ‘King’ and to streamline the process for similar updates in the future. This is a similar approach to what is proposed in this bill. The statement published by the government of Yukon explains it very neatly:

In light of the passing of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022, His Majesty King Charles III became Canada’s new Sovereign and Head of State.

As a result of this transition, the Yukon’s legislation must be updated to reflect the identity of the current Sovereign of Canada. This bill will accomplish this while streamlining the process for similar updates in the future.

...

- The proposed amendments are administrative and do not impact policy guiding how government operates.

I wonder if in the jurisdiction of the government of Yukon they had the same kind of opposition where everyone donned their tinfoil hats and it was part of the Yukon’s attempt to undermine the Canadian national government and steer them away from the Commonwealth. I am not quite sure.

One thing I have not heard from those opposite yet is a connection to the Commonwealth Games, and I fully expected to hear that. I am sure we might –

**Jess Wilson:** I did that. You missed it.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** Oh, you have already done that, member for Kew. One thing I will say, though, is I am very glad it was the current member for Kew talking on this bill and not the previous member for Kew. No disrespect to the previous member for Kew, but that would have been an interesting conversation, and I am glad we did not have to hear it.

This bill is also intended to have no retrospective effect. There have been some obvious questions, which deserve answers from the opposition. We have had some people state that they did not go to the bill briefing. Maybe they would have had the advantage of hearing the answers to these questions in the bill briefing, but the obvious question that arises I think with this bill is why we cannot simply use gender-neutral terms such as ‘the Crown’ to avoid having to revise and rewrite statutes in the future. ‘Sovereign’ or a gender-neutral term like ‘the Crown’ has not been used in the Victorian bill, as it would require potentially further and more detailed changes to legislation. While the terms ‘Crown’ or ‘state of Victoria’ can be used interchangeably, noting that under the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 ‘the Crown’ means the Crown in right of Victoria, not all references to Her Majesty are interchangeable with gender-neutral terms. I think that is an obvious answer to a question that has come up quite a few times in this debate.

I guess the only reason I can think of that those opposite might want to move an amendment to this bill is someone has got their nose out of joint because in the Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Superannuation Act 1968 the reference to ‘Her Majesty’s opposition’ is going to be removed and the act will simply say ‘opposition’. I know, as we mentioned before, the former member for Kew would have been up in arms about that, with pitchforks and torches, but I tend to believe in my reading of this bill that it is fairly innocuous. It is just to keep our law and the application of our law accurate. I kind of think maybe there are some people on that side of the house that would always like to be called Her Majesty’s or His Majesty’s opposition instead of just the opposition. That is the only thing I can think of for why you would draw any line in the sand with this bill.

As far as consultation, we have heard a list of people that were or should have been consulted. I am sure most of them turned around and said, ‘Well, this is fairly certainly a straightforward bill that doesn’t affect any of our practice and doesn’t affect the way the law is applied to people.’ Once again, in summing up, I will just say that this bill will not change any policies in Victoria. It does not change how a bill is applied. It is very important that as we change and as our community changes, as monarchs rise and fall, we change the language in our statute books so there are no challenges, there are no issues that come with that – and that is our job in Parliament. Whether it be in regard to a bill that is very contentious or a bill that is very straightforward, as today, that is our job. We have a number of facts which refer to Her Majesty or similar terms. It is, following Queen Elizabeth II’s death, technically correct to change these. That is what we are doing here today, as other jurisdictions, like Western Australia and the territory of Yukon in Canada, have done as well. They have done it. I do not think there were riots in the streets or coups. I think it is very straightforward. I commend the bill to the house.

**Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:51):** I rise today to speak on the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023. I have been waiting all day. After talking about it this morning and seeing that it was coming up, I have just been waiting all day to be able to get up here and talk on this. First off, thank you to the member for Kew for the lead role in this. I do realise that the main purpose of the bill is to amend the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – I have been bursting to get that out – in relation to references to the sovereign and to amend the statute law of Victoria to revise language referring to the Queen and Her Majesty as a consequence of the death of Queen Elizabeth II. I have been over to England and stood at the front of Buckingham Palace. The Queen did not invite

me in, but that does not matter. I am still keen to talk on this. Also, as a young boy growing up we did have a corgi as a dog, so I am well versed to be able to come and talk on this.

Following the death of Queen Elizabeth II and the accession of King Charles III to the head of state, Victoria's statute book required amendment to reference 'His Majesty' or similar terms. While the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 does provide that references in legislation to the sovereign are 'to the sovereign for the time being', the actual wording of each statute on its face is still incorrect. These amendments will ensure that the state's laws remain relevant and accurate. As we can see, I have learned today that even though this is a narrow debate on statute law, it can be wideranging and you can virtually head off and talk about a lot of stuff that does not involve this statute law amendment bill, so it has been great to be able to hear everybody do that.

The bill will update the Victorian laws to replace 'Her Majesty' with 'His Majesty' – pretty simple – and similar terms such as 'her' to 'his' and 'Queen' to 'King', as they are, to become relevant. The bill will update 38 acts, except for a number of provisions in the Constitution Act 1975 due to the need for compliance with important manner and form of passage requirements in the constitution. These include the need for a referendum to amend some provisions and absolute majority and special majority passage requirements to amend other provisions. These provisions are expected to be updated at the next available opportunity when there is a future change to similar provisions in the constitution. It is all stock standard stuff that needs to be done and – I have heard it said a few times before – just the housekeeping of the chamber to make sure that we do get this right.

I see the coalition is moving a series of amendments to this bill – done by the member for Kew – to bring it back to its original intent and repair Labor's legislative overreach. I will just quickly go through a few of the amendments, as I have time. These amendments seek to update the bill to reflect what should have been brought before this Parliament, a simple substitution of terms to reflect the accession of King Charles III in our statute book – basic, nice and easy. But the overreach of the Labor government makes us just a little bit nervous. With these amendments the bill will be straightforward, a matter of legislative housekeeping, as I said before, to ensure all laws in place in Victoria make correct references to the sovereign following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The relevant acts will be amended only insofar as to switch references to 'Her' to 'His' Majesty, 'Queen' to 'King', like for like – so basic, easy stuff to do to get through.

Australia's constitutional monarchy is no less current or valid as a result of the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, which was the trigger event for the introduction of this bill. Back in the day, when the Queen first came to visit Australia, and the member for Shepparton alluded to this before, we were down in the Latrobe Valley. We were lucky enough on 3 March 1954 that the Queen and also the Duke of Edinburgh visited Traralgon and Yallourn, which was fantastic. They arrived in Sale via a plane, so I take it they landed at the RAAF air base down there, and then they travelled from Sale to Traralgon and Yallourn on the royal train, which is pretty apt, because I think the train actually met the KPI back then, unlike today with our V/Line trains – with the Melbourne Big Build sometimes our trains are not running on time. They did not have to revert to going on a V/Line bus. So the royal train travelled from Sale to Traralgon and Yallourn, and they inspected the open cut at Yallourn. Yallourn no longer exists – it actually became part of the open cut – so it was great back in 1954 that the train actually could travel from Sale to Traralgon.

Speaking to my mum and father, they were young back in the day, back in 1954, and aunties and uncles also attended the event. When they arrived in Traralgon there was a magnificent red carpet, which became known as the royal red carpet, which was kept at the Traralgon shire offices back then. In my time as a plumber back working on the old shire buildings I could actually see the red carpet, which was brought out for special occasions like deb balls at schools and other so-called events, but otherwise it just lay idle in a corner of the historical society. If you go into the historical society now, you can actually see a lot of photos and so forth of that particular day back in 1954.

The member for Kew has moved a reasoned amendment:

That all the words after 'that' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government has provided clarity on the ...

impact of the changes. Hopefully the government will take note of that and take that on board. But as I said, I have been looking forward all day to standing in front of you and talking about the Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023. I thank the chamber for listening to me this afternoon.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Albert Park, with about 20 seconds.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (18:59): Thirty seconds? Well, I was just going to say I think the amendments proposed by the opposition, respectfully, reflect more about the not-modern opposition. That is, they are the anathema of modern –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The time for government business has ended.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Adjournment*

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

That the house now adjourns.

### **Panton Hill Primary School**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (19:00): (281) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the minister invest in Panton Hill Primary School to redevelop the outdated, undersized and dangerous asphalt court and replace it with a covered multi-use court. The school has applied for grants under the Minor Capital Works Fund and the Inclusive Schools Fund. This is a big project for the school and one that is so desperately needed for the 145 students there. There are so many benefits. They need an outdoor covered area which is suitable not just for sport and recreation but also for assemblies and concerts. I have been at the school so many times when the kids have had to sit on the asphalt. It is cracked, it is cold and there are tree roots, and so a new softer surface will mean students will have somewhere to play and learn that is protected from the weather, the sunshine and the rain, and a trip or a fall on that surface will do a lot less damage to their little legs.

The kids will have a proper basketball–netball size court that they can play on, and the benefits will actually extend beyond the school into the local community of Panton Hill. It will provide space for the wider community to access this area, including the local junior and senior football clubs, cricket club and netball club, because there is nothing like this that exists within that community. The current asphalt court is very outdated. It is a safety hazard and is in dire need of redevelopment. There is no physical space on the school grounds to build an indoor facility like a hall or a gym or a multipurpose room, so they need to actually go across the road to the Panton Hill hall, and that is pretty unsuitable for whole-school gatherings, and it is inconvenient as well.

The principal Kylie Richards and the committee have been on the front foot here. They have been working extremely hard for a number of years to get this project up and running. They have organised an assessment of the old court and designs for the new court, they have established a landscape design concept for a sensory garden and they have applied for grants previously and have missed out. I think now is the time that they should be commended for their work and have that investment made. It is so needed in a semirural school. It has been in the pipeline for a long time, and we have certainly made it a commitment in the past. The school's students and parents really deserve this upgrade. They have had a condition assessment report done by Sporteng that really outlines all of the shortcomings, and I hope that the minister can see the significance of this matter for that local community in Panton Hill. It really will mean so much. The kids in the country areas, the semirural areas, should not be

disadvantaged. It is a small school in a semirural area, and it would benefit not just the students but their families and friends and that wider community of Panton Hill. I hope that the minister really looks at their application seriously.

### **Kolbe Catholic College**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (19:03): (282) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Veterans, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at Kolbe Catholic College to inform that great school community about the Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize and how it will help young Victorians understand, respect and sustain the legacy of the men and women who have served our nation and the memory of Anzac. I was at this wonderful school just yesterday for the college's feast day in memory of Saint Maximilian Kolbe and the dedication of a beautiful new statue in his likeness, as well as the formal opening of the school's stunning new open space and the interment of a time capsule.

Speaking with principal Nick Scully, who does a magnificent job leading Kolbe and its wonderful culture, I know how interested the school and its students already are in the opportunity provided by the 2023 Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize. This year's prize offers Victorian students in years 9 to 12 the opportunity to participate in a unique educational program that fosters understanding and appreciation of our nation's Anzac spirit and legacy. This year's prize proudly celebrates Türkiye's centenary of independence and the significant ties that endure between Australia and Türkiye. Through this program, 10 students will be chosen to embark on an unforgettable educational journey, learning about the Anzac legend, retracing the experience of Australian men and women on the Gallipoli Peninsula and travelling to battlefields and commemorative sites in Türkiye. It is so important that we continue to support and educate young Victorians on our shared history and the journey of those who sacrificed their lives for our country. I am delighted to support this worthy and important competition in my electorate of Greenvale, and I am really looking forward to joining the minister at Kolbe Catholic College to discuss this wonderful program and how the incredible students of that school can get involved.

### **Murray Plains electorate roads**

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (19:05): (283) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. There is an old saying 'Walk a mile in my shoes', which is about understanding someone's issues better, and I would ask the minister to drive some kilometres on the roads in my electorate so she can see how bad they are. I do not actually know where I should start, but I have some examples of the roads that I would like her to take so she can see how bad they are, because in my electorate we have some major potholes and some major broken sections of road paving that are starting to have birthdays because they have been there so long. The one that featured in the *Herald Sun* story the other day on the Leitchville-Kerang Road that someone wrote some obscenities on was one I visited a few weeks ago. I actually took a birthday cake, stood there and had a photo taken, because it is 12 months since that major defect in the road developed and it is still there.

But the one I really want the minister to go on is the Loddon Valley Highway to particularly look at the section between the Appin South turn-off and the Macorna turn-off. That particular series of potholes, major bumps and broken bitumen is having its fourth birthday. It will be starting school soon, it is that long since that bit of road was damaged. It has had speed restriction signs on it for all that time, back to 40 kilometres. The Loddon Valley Highway is the major through road from Swan Hill to Kerang and through to Bendigo. It has a lot of truck traffic coming through to Melbourne, and that particular section of road is extremely dangerous. As I said, it has had its fourth birthday and will be starting school soon.

Dean Turvey, who is one of the local constituents there, contacted me recently concerned about that bit of road, but he actually thought he had a major breakthrough. VicRoads responded to one of his inquiries saying that they would have a work crew there to fix that section of road next week. Unfortunately, several weeks later, VicRoads have still not shown up to do anything about that particular road. So, as I said, I would like the minister to come to my electorate and drive some

kilometres with me and I will point out the really bad sections of road that desperately need work done on them so they can make them safer, because there is a very good saying that has been around for a long time: 'If you fix country roads, you save country lives.' I want to make sure that happens in my electorate and we do not have fatalities because of the poor condition of the roads.

### **Donnybrook Road**

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (19:07): (284) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for her to direct Major Roads Projects Victoria to provide me with an update on construction of a slip lane to ease traffic congestion on Donnybrook Road. Anybody who uses Donnybrook Road at peak times knows what a difference this project is going to make for the people of Donnybrook and Kalkallo. It is going to make traffic flow more smoothly and help us get where we need to go. I thank the member for Kalkallo for her tireless work on this issue, and I look forward to a briefing on when this project will be delivered. I know the people of Donnybrook would like to know when the first shovel will hit the ground.

### **Bus route 825**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (19:08): (285) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action that I seek is for the minister to initiate an action management plan to address the overcrowding problem on the 825 bus route that operates within the Sandringham electorate. Last Monday I met with a group of bright young students, leaders from Beaumaris Secondary College. They were not just bright, they were the very definition of what we need and we want a student to be – they were just outstanding. They have joined together with students from Mentone Girls' Secondary College and Sandringham Secondary College to advocate for increased bus capacity on the 825 route. This year Beaumaris Secondary College is for the first time a full year 7 to 12 school with approximately 970 students. Combined with other local schools there are now significantly larger numbers of students relying on the 825 bus in the mornings and in the afternoons. As a result of the overcrowding there have been numerous reported negative impacts on the students and other passengers who utilise this particular bus route, including accessibility and safety issues, antisocial behaviour and a decrease in work productivity. Amongst many others, some students have shared with me some of their personal stories.

Emma has said:

I take the 825 after school and it is really crowded, even after the first bus and it is almost impossible to get on.

Harry has said:

I used to take the 825 but don't anymore because it's like a mosh pit ...

Grace has said:

The 825 is way overcrowded and impossible to tap on because it's way too busy!!!

Lucas has said:

... always have to catch the later ones. Having another or a bigger bus will be great.

Amelia struggles to access the bus due to pushing and shoving. She mentioned that walking home is not a viable option for her, especially after knee surgery, which significantly impacts her study time and ability to complete her homework. Another student, Sofia, stated that people are practically lying on each other due to lack of space, creating an unsafe environment and forcing students to walk further to access alternative transportation options. It is evident to me that the capacity and frequency of buses along this route need to be greatly increased to address this overcrowding issue and ensure greater access, safety and wellbeing for students and other public transport users in my local community. I invite the minister to meet with this group of students as well to hear about their personal experiences and to discuss with them a practical solution to manage overcrowding on the route 825 bus.

### Point Cook Coastal Park

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (19:11): (286) The matter that I raise is for the Minister for Environment in the other place, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the works at Point Cook Coastal Park. As everyone in this room should know, Point Cook Coastal Park is a massive community asset for the people of Point Cook and beyond in the south-west and western suburbs of Melbourne. It is situated on Port Phillip Bay, and in fact the second to last time that I was there I enjoyed watching dolphins swimming across the bay as we launched the Coastcare activity that is going on there. The Victorian Labor government has so proudly announced \$10,000 to support that Coastcare organisation in funding 1000 tube stocks. The last time that I was there was on a beautiful winter's day. I did not see the dolphins, but I did see the construction work going on at Point Cook Coastal Park. New play equipment and new toilets are on the way, and I am so excited that this will be so well utilised over the summer. I look forward very much to the minister providing her update soon.

### Ministerial responsibilities

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (19:12): (287) My adjournment tonight is for the Premier as leader of the government, and the action I seek is that he directs his ministers to actually do their job and respond to the contributions raised in this place with factual information, not prewritten press releases. I have not been in this house long, and my community is very much pushing for answers on certain subjects. When I asked a minister about a rail issue in Bunyip – it was to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure and it was about when the line duplication will be done for the line from Bunyip to Longwarry – the response I got talked about rail lines in Bairnsdale and Stratford. Bairnsdale and Stratford are a good 200 kilometres away from Bunyip – they are not even close – and the response was not even relevant.

The reason I am doing this adjournment tonight is because this is becoming a common thread with responses I am getting from ministers. I asked the Minister for Roads and Road Safety about access ramps in Drouin, and I got pretty much another press release talking about regional roads. It was not very relevant and stated that that is in the precinct structure plan. I know it is in the PSP – I live there, I do not need to have that reinforced to me. I have raised issues about water and regional development, and I am getting this common thread of press release responses that are not relevant to the question. Being that the Premier is the boss – he is the number one man – I would like the Premier to talk to his ministers and ask them to respond with factual responses. I have asked about roads and road funding, and I get blanket responses. I ask about many things, and I do not get responses that are relevant to the question. The Premier is the leader of the government. He is responsible for the standard of his ministers, and I ask that he ensures their answers to the questions are factual and relevant to what is asked by members in this place.

### Eltham East Primary School

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (19:15): (288) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to come out and visit Eltham East Primary School and help commemorate the 60th anniversary of this fantastic primary school. Recently I was fortunate enough to be able to join principal Warren Lloyd and the school community for their anniversary assembly, where I learned much more about the history of this fabulous school, which was originally known as the Grove Street primary school and which opened in 1963 with just seven teachers and – wait for it – 217 students and one telephone. I also learned that in 1965 the first library opened at the school and £200 worth of books were purchased, which I understand equals \$41,742 in today's terms. In the 1970s the school saw lots of wildlife, including tiger snakes, and amazingly, we can now celebrate that we have got a confirmed breeding colony of the Eltham copper butterfly in the school's remnant bushland.

Since then a lot has changed. The library and art rooms have been built, school uniforms have been introduced and interschool sports have begun, and more recently there has been the creation of an artificial turf oval and a kitchen garden. In 2023 there are over 60 teachers, more than 650 students



and several hundred iPads, desktops and notebooks. There have been 17 principals since the school was opened, and I thank and congratulate all of these principals, including current principal Warren Lloyd and his teachers and staff, for their valued work. Minister, I ask you to visit this great school and meet with the principal and students to see all that Eltham East have to offer in celebration of their 60th year.

### **Wild dog control**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (19:16): (289) My adjournment is to the Minister for Agriculture in the other place, and the action that I seek is that the minister immediately reinstate proper funding for the control and removal of wild dogs in regional Victoria. For a government that spruiks its environmental credentials and the wellbeing of animals, I cannot believe it is cutting funding to the wild dog management scheme. Wild dogs are a stain on the Victorian landscape. They offer no useful role in the ecology of the environment that we are so proud to protect. Wild dogs hunt and kill sheep and young cattle that are commercially produced to feed our nation, and yet the Victorian government is hell-bent on discontinuing funding that supports the removal and culling of these predators.

My frustration comes to boiling point when I see that this government for Melbourne, who manage the state-controlled land that harbours these wild dogs, are cutting funding that removes these killer dogs. These are not pests, these are not a nuisance; wild dogs are born killers, thrill killers, terrorists of the land. Wild dog trappers should be encouraged, supported and financed, not eradicated. The Minister for Agriculture needs to get out of Collins Street and visit the farming communities that feed this nation, listen to their concerns and then act on those concerns. It is not like it is going to cost a billion dollars. It is small change for the government, who can actually support regional communities and farming families as opposed to turning a blind eye.

When farmers wanted to graze the High Country on state-owned and controlled land, the Victorian government worked with the Greens to close down effective fire management control. But when feral animals seek refuge on government-controlled land and spend their nights hunting and killing on private land, the government and the Greens are nowhere to be seen. Failing to slow this scourge will create a bigger mess to be cleaned up into the future, and I urge the minister to get out of Melbourne and address this problem rather than kicking the can down the road.

### **Harvest Square housing project**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (19:18): (290) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing. The action I seek is that the minister provide the latest update on the Victorian government's Harvest Square Big Housing Build project, which is currently under construction in Brunswick West in my electorate. As I said in my first speech, I am committed to working every day to help make our community a better and fairer place to live, learn, work, raise a family and retire in. However, fundamental in striving towards this socially just vision for my community is to help ensure that people of all ages and backgrounds across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West have access to safe, secure and affordable housing. We know there is no more important issue anywhere in the state right now than housing. Whether they be first home buyers, families, young people, retirees or renters, or whether they be people experiencing housing stress or homelessness, every Victorian deserves a safe place to live, with access to housing being the very foundation for people to lead better lives.

In this respect I am proud to be part of an Andrews Labor government that continues to take real action when it comes to lifting and improving housing supply and standards through a number of initiatives, including: the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build program, which is delivering a pipeline of 12,000 new social and affordable homes, an uplift of at least 10 per cent in new social dwellings and 2400 new affordable homes; and the government's previously introduced rental fairness package, which cracked down on rental bidding, improved property standards, helped tenants stay on longer leases and limited rental increases to once a year to give renters more financial stability.

In my community I am particularly proud of the landmark \$86 million Harvest Square housing project in Brunswick West, which is being constructed as part of Labor's Big Housing Build and which will deliver new homes for those who need them the most. Harvest Square is being delivered in partnership with Homes Victoria, AV Jennings and Women's Housing Limited, and it will create a total number of 198 new, modern, sustainable and high-quality one-, two- and three-bedroom homes in the inner north. The development is to consist of 119 new social and community housing homes, and 111 of these homes will be new social housing apartments that will be Homes Victoria dwellings. Eight of these will be community housing homes that will be dwellings operated by Women's Housing Limited, as well as 79 new market homes, with the provision made for 10 per cent of market homes to be released as first home buyers housing, while 5 per cent of the development will include provision for Disability Discrimination Act 1992 fully accessible homes.

The new Harvest Square is replacing the former Gronn Place, which consisted of 82 no longer fit-for-purpose dwellings, with 119 new world-class social housing homes – a 45 per cent increase in new homes on that site for social homes. Harvest Square will add much-needed new high-quality housing supply in Melbourne's northern suburbs while creating a well-integrated community that is close to public transport, schools, retail precincts and jobs, with Harvest Square to create a new sustainable corridor through Brunswick West that will connect Albion Street through to Dunstan Reserve. The Harvest Square project is supporting a massive 770 jobs, with construction of Harvest Square social housing and the market apartment stage of the project having commenced in early 2022 and with the social housing stage on track to be completed by late 2024. The Brunswick West community would greatly appreciate the minister's latest update so I can share it with my residents.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Before I call the minister, just in regard to the member for Narracan's question, I understood that the question was to the Premier. I understood the action you were asking for. I am going to refer that to the Speaker for some guidance on whether it conforms to the standards of the adjournment debate. No doubt she will look at that in due course. I ask the Minister for Police to refer items to the appropriate ministers, including that question.

### Responses

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:22): In responding to adjournment items from members: the member for Eildon raised a matter for the Minister for Education. The action she sought was that the minister invest in Panton Hill Primary School and the infrastructure items that the member outlined.

The member for Greenvale raised a matter for the Minister for Veterans, and the action he sought was that she join him and the Kolbe school community to advise on the Spirit of Anzac Prize and of course reflect on the legacy of our veterans.

The member – in fact not only a member but the Leader of the Nationals – for Murray Plains raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. He did touch on the fact that we should all 'walk a mile in my shoes' – not that the member for Murray Plains is doing a lot of walking just at the moment. But I do take the time to acknowledge his trekking of Kokoda, which I can also claim to have done. It is a great experience, a great achievement and a great acknowledgement of those who have gone before us in far more difficult circumstances. It is a great chance to reflect on that. He did seek from the minister for roads that she visit the electorate and review the roads and road infrastructure that he outlined in his contribution.

The member for Yan Yean raised a matter for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure to seek action to direct Major Road Projects Victoria to provide an update on the slip lane to ease congestion on Donnybrook Road, a very significant route for locals in her Yan Yean electorate.

The member for Sandringham raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action that he sought was an urgent plan for the 825 bus route, particularly in relation to increasing capacity and

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the work that is happening there near Beaumaris Secondary College, who did provide some great content for his adjournment debate, and their engagement is very much welcomed by the house.

The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the Minister for Environment, and the action that he sought was an update on works at the Point Cook Coastal Park.

The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Premier, and the Deputy Speaker has alluded to the fact that those matters will be passed on for consideration by the Speaker. But in outline, the member for Narracan asked that the Premier request of his colleagues in the cabinet, the ministers, to increase their engagement around adjournment responses to issues raised by members, and that will be passed on to the Premier.

The member for Eltham raised a matter for the Minister for Education regarding visits to Eltham East and the 60th anniversary of the school, and of course the member for Eltham, as she always is at her local schools, was there at the school assembly. The school opened in 1963, an auspicious year for those of us who follow the Geelong Football Club.

The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place and sought the reinstatement of controls in the removal of wild dogs in the community. Of course we all know and understand the heartbreak for farmers in particular who have to deal with the emotional, financial and animal welfare costs of the damage that wild dogs do in regional Victoria – a very serious matter.

The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the Minister for Housing seeking the latest update on the \$86 million Harvest Square development, which he has engaged with with Homes Victoria and Women's Housing Limited, in Brunswick West in his electorate. The member for Pascoe Vale is of course a very strong advocate for housing and the big build – the \$5.3 billion investment of capital infrastructure to provide more homes for Victorians. I was with the member for Pascoe Vale at the ALP state conference where the Prime Minister announced a \$500 million contribution to public housing and social housing infrastructure for our state, and I am sure there will be an element of that heading to the electorate of Pascoe Vale with his advocacy, particularly around the Harvest Square development. I will conclude on that note.

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

**House adjourned 7:26 pm.**