



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 15 October 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keefe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁷	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam ^{5,6}	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ⁸	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁸ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

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

CONTENTS

BILLS	
Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Bill 2024	3747
Introduction and first reading	3747
Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024	3747
Introduction and first reading	3747
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion and orders of the day	3748
COMMITTEES	
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee	3748
Alert Digest No. 13	3748
DOCUMENTS	
Documents	3748
BILLS	
Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023	3750
Council's amendments	3750
Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024	3750
State Civil Liability (Police Informants) Bill 2024	3750
Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024.....	3750
Royal assent	3750
Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024	3750
Appropriation.....	3750
MOTIONS	
Middle East conflict	3750
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Program	3751
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Aitken Hill Primary School	3757
Country Fire Authority Beveridge brigade	3757
Serviceton level crossing upgrade.....	3758
Drought relief.....	3758
West Gate Bridge tragedy commemoration	3758
Planning policy	3758
Sebastopol projects.....	3759
Local government elections.....	3759
Eureka electorate events.....	3759
Mallacoota tourism infrastructure.....	3760
Gippsland East electorate outdoor recreation	3760
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action	3760
Member for Mulgrave.....	3760
Jason Rantall	3761
Brody Masterson	3761
Boronia revitalisation	3761
Housing.....	3761
Welcoming the Babies	3762
Hydrogen Park Murray Valley.....	3762
Frankston Hospital.....	3762
Geelong tourism	3763
Kororoit seniors morning tea.....	3763
Victorian Aboriginal Health Service	3763
Voice to Parliament	3764
JS Grey Kindergarten.....	3764
Sunbury Show.....	3764
Sunbury Heights Primary School	3764
Motor neurone disease	3764
Pakenham electorate community activities.....	3764
Bakhtar Community Organisation.....	3765
BILLS	
Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023	3765
Council's amendments.....	3765
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Short-stay accommodation	3773
Ministers statements: apology to stolen generations.....	3775

CONTENTS

Suburban Rail Loop	3775
Ministers statements: outdoor recreation	3777
Suburban Rail Loop	3778
Ministers statements: housing	3779
Road maintenance	3779
Ministers statements: renewable energy.....	3781
Suburban Rail Loop	3781
Ministers statements: education	3783
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Murray Plains electorate	3783
Kororoit electorate	3783
Eildon electorate	3783
Bellarine electorate.....	3784
South-West Coast electorate.....	3784
Monbulk electorate.....	3784
Brunswick electorate.....	3784
Tarneit electorate	3785
Rowville electorate.....	3785
Wendouree electorate.....	3785
BILLS	
Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023	3786
Council's amendments.....	3786
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024.....	3786
Second reading.....	3786
ADJOURNMENT	
Bulleen Plaza bus shelter	3829
Tarneit Business Association	3829
Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club	3829
Greenvale electorate sporting facilities.....	3830
Portland District Health.....	3830
State Electricity Commission	3831
Albury Wodonga Health.....	3831
Family violence	3832
Fruit fly	3832
Kingswood Primary School	3833
Responses	3833

Tuesday 15 October 2024

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Bill 2024

Introduction and first reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:04): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to provide for the appointment of restrictive practices substitute decision-makers for the purposes of the Aged Care Act 1997 of the Commonwealth and to make related amendments to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (12:05): I ask the minister to give a brief explanation of the bill.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:05): This bill will establish a framework for the appointing of restrictive practices substitute decision-makers under the Commonwealth's Aged Care Act 1997. The bill provides for a substitute decision-maker to be an eligible adult nominated in advance and, if there is no nominee, a person in a close and continuing relationship with the aged care recipient identified from a hierarchy. The bill also provides for the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to oversee the operation of the framework and makes consequential amendments to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024

Introduction and first reading

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (12:06): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 in relation to regulatory and enforcement matters and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:06): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (12:06): The bill will amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to strengthen the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority's regulatory powers and strengthen penalties for running an unregistered school. It will also reduce the administrative burden on school principals in relation to being able to nominate other school employees for work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

*Business of the house***Notices of motion and orders of the day**

The SPEAKER (12:07): General business, notice of motion 25 and order of the day 3, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 13*

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:07): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 13 of 2024, on the following acts, bills and subordinate legislation, together with appendices and an extract from the proceedings:

Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024
 Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024
 Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024
 Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024
 Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2024
 Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024
 Protecting Public Assets and Services Bill 2024
 Roads and Road Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024
 State Civil Liability (Police Informants) Act 2024 – house amendments
 State Civil Liability (Police Informants) Bill 2024
 Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024
 Service Victoria Identity Verification Standards

Ordered to be published.

*Documents***Documents****Incorporated list as follows:**

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Report 2023–24

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978:

Orders under s 17B granting licences over:

Footscray Park

Queen Victoria Gardens and Memorial Statue Reserve

St Kilda Botanical Gardens

Order under s 17D granting a lease over:

O'Donnell Gardens and Shakespeare Grove Reserves

Environment Protection Act 2017 – Sustainability Fund Guidelines 2024

Financial Management Act 1994 – Financial Report for the State of Victoria 2023–24 incorporating Quarterly Financial Report No 4 – released on 4 October 2024

Health Complaints Commissioner – Report 2023–24

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission:

Operation Leo: Special Report – released on 9 October 2024

Operation Turton: Special Report – released on 25 September 2024

Integrity and Oversight Committee – Report on the operation of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, together with transcripts of evidence – released on 23 September 2024

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 45 (Gazette G39, 26 September 2024)

Major Events Act 2009 – Major Sporting Event Order for the 2024 to 2026 Melbourne Marathons

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

Ballarat – C215

Baw Baw – C148

Bayside – C204

Buloke – C46

Cardinia – C279

Glen Eira – C265

Glenside – C114

Kingston – C223

Melbourne – C473

Moyne – C69

Nillumbik – C152

Stonnington – C346

Victoria Planning Provisions – VC270

Wyndham – C274

Professional Standards Act 2003 – Law Society of New South Wales Professional Standards Scheme (Gazette G38 19 September 2024)

Road Safety Camera Commissioner – Report 2023–24

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Building Act 1993 – SR 106

Bus Safety Act 2009 – SR 96

County Court Act 1958 – SR 88

Credit Act 1984 – SR 90

Credit (Administration) Act 1984 – SR 91

Electricity Industry Act 2000 – SR 104

Gas Industry Act 2001 – SR 105

Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 – SR 95

Local Government Act 2020 – SR 92

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – SRs 100, 107

Road Safety Act 1986 Act – SRs 101, 102

Seafood Safety Act 2003 – SR 87

Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 – SR 94

Status of Children Act 1974 – SR 103

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – SR 99

Supreme Court Act 1986 – SR 89

Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 – SR 97

Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2014 – SR 98

Valuation of Land Act 1960 – SR 93

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 104, 105, 107

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Wildlife Act 1975* – Declaration of the dingo to be unprotected wildlife

Victorian Local Government Grants Commission – Allocation Report year ended 31 August 2024

Victorian Multicultural Commission – Report 2023–24

PROCLAMATION – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamation fixing operative date:

Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2023 – Division 1 of Part 2, Division 1 of Part 3, ss 27, 28, 29 and 30 and Division 3 of Part 8 – 1 October 2024 (*Gazette S508, 24 September 2024*).

Bills**Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023***Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (12:10): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024**State Civil Liability (Police Informants) Bill 2024****Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024***Royal assent*

The SPEAKER (12:10): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024, the State Civil Liability (Police Informants) Bill 2024 and the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024.

Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (12:11): I have a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024.

Motions**Middle East conflict**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:11): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Hamas terrorist atrocities of 7 October, which saw 1195 people murdered and 251 taken hostage; grieves for those killed and calls for the immediate release of all 101 hostages; supports Israel's right to self-defence; and stands with Victoria's Jewish community amidst skyrocketing antisemitism.

Leave refused.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (12:11): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that in just the last 24 hours Israel has bombed the al-Aqsa hospital, where displaced Palestinians were sheltering, killing four people and leaving dozens of others with fatal burns, and Israel has killed five children who were playing in the street in Gaza City and over 20 people in Aitou village in northern Lebanon; and
- (2) calls on the Victorian Labor government to stop arming Israel and to end its memorandum of understanding with the Israeli defence ministry.

Leave refused.

*Business of the house***Program**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:12): It has been a very busy September break for many members of this side of the house. Of course we have been out in our communities, working hard to represent the people of Victoria.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the House, you need to move the government business program.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: 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 October 2024:

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

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024

Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024.

I am so excited to get up and talk about the hard work of members on this side of the house over the last few weeks out and about in our communities, representing their needs, listening to the concerns of ordinary Victorians and making sure that we represent those concerns back here in this place. That would be in stark contrast to what a lot of those on the other side have been doing and the way in which they have spent at least the last three or four weeks.

However, I did want to talk in particular about the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. On this side of the house we are very, very proud to take a health-led response, a harm minimisation response, when it comes to addressing the impacts of drug use in our community. I would say this: I doubt that there is a person in this place who does not know someone who has been affected by drugs in their life and the impact that has had on their families, and I am talking about all of the drugs, including the most prevalent: alcohol. We know that drug abuse is real and we know that harm caused by drugs is real, and we need to take a health-led approach to this because these are peoples' lives at stake.

We need to do all we can to support people in addressing the challenges that they may face in relation to the abuse of drugs, and this bill is an important part of our government's commitment to that harm minimisation and health-led approach. It is so important that this pill-testing bill gets through this Parliament this week, because we know that festival season is almost upon us and we want to ensure that we deliver on the commitment that we made to the people of Victoria – a very well-received commitment, I might add – to a drug-checking trial as well as a raft of harm minimisation steps. This includes introducing 24/7 access to naloxone dispensing machines, a crucial aspect of the government's harm reduction strategy when it comes to opioid dependency. Our government has committed to providing naloxone dispensing machines across Victoria. This is a really, really important bill, and it is one that only a Labor government would have the courage to introduce, because we are not afraid to stand up for what is important. We are not afraid to stand up to those that want to put their heads in the sand and pretend that drug harms are not happening in our communities. Everyone on this side is very keen to contribute, because this is life-changing and life-saving.

We will also be debating the Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024. Our government is developing a suite of reforms to Victoria's building system to ensure that Victorians can build, renovate or buy a home with the confidence that they will get what they pay for: an affordable, safe and comfortable home.

A bit of a theme, I must say, in the bills today is that they build towards delivering on the government's *Gas Substitution Roadmap*. The Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024 is part of our government's commitment to continuing on the energy transition pathway. We know, and we have been very clear, despite what those on the other side might say, that gas will play

a part in this, so it is important that in the context of declining gas supply the government provides a legislative framework to allow for offshore storage.

Finally, we very much look forward to the SEC amendments returning from the Council, because it of course was an election commitment that our government made that it would bring back the SEC. I can tell you, we all remember out there in November 2022 how popular this was with the people of Victoria, many of whom remember the SEC of old. They remember the great jobs that it created and the opportunities for so many young Victorians, and of course they also remember the privatisation agenda of the Kennett government. Some people say Jeff Kennett keeps making his presence felt in this state. This is a great government business program, and I commend it to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:18): The coalition will be opposing the government business program. We are deeply concerned. A number of times over this term the coalition has sought to take bills into consideration in detail. We made a request to the government on its pill-testing bill and the government provided 15 minutes when it would take questions on that bill – 15 minutes. Can you believe it? It is little wonder that the coalition sought to take this bill into consideration in detail. What is even more concerning is that not only did we have only 15 minutes to put a raft of questions but the government took those questions on notice, and despite that bill being debated today, in fact shortly, guess what, how many of those questions have been answered? Zero. The government has failed to deliver the promised answers on any of those questions before the bill is debated. Shame on the government. Those are genuine questions from the community, and it is not unreasonable.

In fact it is a longstanding tradition not only of this place but of parliaments that a bill briefing is provided. I raised my concerns with you, Speaker, about the tradition, the strong tradition of this place, that a bill briefing is provided and that post that briefing outstanding questions – genuine questions – that have been put by the community are answered in a timely and reasonable way. Yet this bill is about to be debated and we have seen nothing. That is very, very concerning. I am sure, Speaker, you would share my concerns that that is still left outstanding. And 15 minutes – you can imagine how little opportunity there is to put genuine questions. I mean, the government just got up and spoke about this bill and a health-led response and the fact that they are further legalising drugs effectively, but there are genuine questions that were raised in that process and I know a number of members on our side of the chamber have questions that are still left outstanding.

The coalition will be opposing the government business program, because you cannot run a Parliament this way. It is shameful, just as shameful as it was for the government to deny leave on the anniversary of 7 October. How shameful. Even the federal government managed to provide leave.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the government business program is a narrow debate. I ask that you bring the Manager of Opposition Business back to the government business program.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I will allow in passing other matters that have happened before the government business program, but I do ask you to speak to the government business program.

James NEWBURY: I would have thought that the government business program would afford time to deal with important matters, as did the federal Parliament. That was not provided here. This week I will note for the first time the government business program notification did not include an opportunity for any members to speak on the budget. That was not noted, as has been the case in recent weeks. It should be recorded that the Council has now provided every member an opportunity to speak on the budget. As of this week there are no members in the Council that have not been provided that opportunity. In our place the government business program has not provided an opportunity for roughly a third of this chamber to speak on this budget, and we understand why of course. The fact that a third of the members of this place have not been afforded an opportunity to speak on the budget bills speaks to what the government actually think of their own budget, because the government

members are not being provided an opportunity and the coalition members are not being provided an opportunity, and again I note that Council members have all been provided an opportunity to do so.

The coalition will be opposing the government's business program for their shameful behaviour when it comes to bill briefings, trying to ram through a bill without providing proper detail and scrutiny, and we would call for much better management of the process.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:23): It is always the greatest pleasure to follow the member for Brighton, and I will pick up just where he left off. When we are talking about shameful behaviour I do not know about us on this side of the house, but surely there has been some shameful behaviour by those opposite over the past couple of weeks. I fear I digress, and I will come back to the government business program, but before I do I just want to make a quick, small note, if you will indulge me. I am very pleased to be able to welcome back one of our favourite members, a very, very hardworking member, the member for Mulgrave. It is wonderful to see you here, member for Mulgrave, and we have missed you. It is wonderful to have you sitting here.

It is great to be back here on my feet in Parliament after having that very short break. I know that on this side of the house we have been getting on and doing what we have been voted in time and time again to do, and that is to get on and do the job and deliver for all Victorians. We have been hitting the pavement hard out there, listening to what Victorians have to say, what is important to them and what they want to see us doing more of, and I have to say that the conversations on the streets have translated to the bills that have come before this house today, this week, that form part of the government business program. There is no shame in that, member for Brighton. There is no shame in listening to your community and bringing back their ideas and what they want to see going forward in this state, bringing them to this place and turning them into legislation.

We have got three bills before the house this week which will deliver on commitments that we made to the Victorian community. We have got the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. I do have to say I am someone that strongly, strongly believes that people should not be taking drugs. That is a message that I talk even now to my children about – an 11-year-old and a newly minted 14-year-old as of Sunday.

James Newbury interjected.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Member for Brighton, these are the words that are coming from people –

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Laverton.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Through you, Speaker, these are the words that people are saying on the street. They do not want people to take drugs, but what we do know is that we have young people at festivals that have taken drugs and they have died. The deaths of these young people, every single one of them, were preventable. They made bad decisions during what they thought would be one of the funnest, greatest times in their lives, and I know, as I stand here and I welcome speaking on this bill, that this will save lives. God forbid that one of my children makes that split-second decision to take a pill at a concert like that and they die from it and their death could have been prevented if they had had that pill tested. That gives these kids the option. Do any of us here in this place believe in taking drugs? We do not.

Members interjecting.

Sarah CONNOLLY: I am not speaking for the Greens party, who very rarely spend a waking second here in this chamber. They only work four days a week; you would think that Tuesdays would be one of their days off. But the reality is that parents are worried about their kids, and kids make stupid decisions – dumb decisions, split-second decisions. I am raising an 11-year-old and a 14-year-old. They have very little understanding of the consequences of these things, and the consequences can be absolutely horrific. Any parent that we can prevent losing a child through their making a dumb

decision at a festival or concert – which I know on this side of the house, and I am sure that side of the house, people went to many times as children, many times as young people – this bill is about them.

This is about bringing it forward and having an adult, mature conversation about introducing something that is a trial that could potentially save lives and save lives this coming summer, because what we do know is that with Victoria's fabulous music industry we have many, many festivals coming up and we do not want to see the tragedies that we have seen in the past, including the past summer. People do not need to die at these festivals, and that is what this bill is about. It is a sensible, realistic, mature conversation, and if those opposite would wake up to themselves and think about someone else besides themselves or besides who is going to be sitting in that chair as Leader of the Opposition –

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

The SPEAKER: I ask the member for Laverton to come back to the government business program.

Sarah CONNOLLY: I look forward to speaking on these bills as part of the government business program this week.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (12:28): Obviously we on this side of the house are in full support of the member for Brighton in opposing the government business program this week. There has been much discussion around the pill-testing bill. This is one about which there has been a lot of passion, and there is a lot of thought and evidence being discussed on this side of the house around what it will lead to and harm minimisation. The bill briefing was conducted at 4 pm on Thursday – the earliest time we could possibly get a bill briefing. Many, many questions were asked during that briefing that still have not been answered. Honestly, how are we supposed to have robust debate on a topic that is so important? As the stepmother of two teenagers, and as a festivalgoer myself in my youth, I understand – never having taken drugs, because I was too scared of the implications from my parents and from the police and all those kinds of things.

I understand full well the practical implications on the ground of such things as in those circumstances and how to actually have real effect on harm minimisation in this space, but I was part of a bill briefing at 4 pm on Thursday for a bill to be debated in the house on the next sitting day, with questions outstanding. We also sought to have this bill taken into consideration in detail and were denied that opportunity. However, the WorkSafe bill was allowed to be taken into consideration in detail. So why on earth with a bill such as this, which is essentially life and death at the end of the day, would we not enable consideration in detail in something so important as this? Then, when we oppose the government business program this week, we get moans from the other side of the house like we are being difficult. No, we are actually here to do our job and debate this in detail.

There is the Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024 as well. I was part of that bill briefing, and might I say, while I am going on this one, through the member for Narracan, again, because of his practical knowledge in this space with regard to building, with regard to plumbing and with regard to renovations and the practical implications on the ground, it was uncovered that there could be actually crimes committed should this bill pass. For the most part, while going through this omnibus bill, there are a lot of decent things in there, but in there by stealth is a gas ban which could have owner-builders, owners and the plumbers doing those upgrades committing a crime because of how this legislation is written.

Martin Cameron interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Poor old plumbers. The member for Morwell also understands the practical implications of bills like this and what would happen on the ground if you were going to upgrade a gas pipe from 20 mil to 30 mil should you need it because the gas stove or gas cooktop that you were using is not made anymore. Of course those taking those bill briefings had no idea what the member for Narracan and member for Morwell were talking about, but these are the implications. This is why

taking these bills into consideration in detail is so vitally important, so that we can understand what happens when bills pass through this place and the government forgets all about them and they go on and then all of a sudden we have people unknowingly committing crimes on the ground. It is just ridiculous. So of course we are going to oppose the government business program. The government has left us no choice but to do so. We have to speak up; that is our job.

Of course we have the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. He is not here at the moment, but the member for Gippsland East is very keen to speak about anything regarding offshore petroleum and things like that. Honestly, the pill-testing bill and the Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill are things that we absolutely should be spending time on, and, you know what, if we have to sit here until all hours of the night getting things right, then that is our job, and we owe it to the people of Victoria.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (12:33): It is a pleasure to rise today to support the Allan Labor government's government business program this week. It is great to be back in this place following the September break, and it is even better to be welcoming back the member for Mulgrave. It is so wonderful to see you sitting over there in your seat. Welcome back. It is wonderful to have you.

It has been a very busy break from the house for those of us on this side of the house, as my colleagues have mentioned. I have been speaking with my colleagues and hearing how they have been busy visiting local schools, sporting clubs, community groups and businesses. Like me, they have been using this time in their electorates to advocate and fight for their local communities. This is in stark contrast to those opposite, who have been busy fighting amongst themselves in their party room and advocating for themselves in the courtroom. Today's government business program is another jam-packed program. It is disappointing to see that the opposition is not supporting the government business program. I am impressed, however, that they have come together in unity, completely undivided in opposing the government business program this week.

As the Leader of the House said in her contribution, we are getting on with the legislation that is important to Victorians and delivering on our commitments. This week we are debating the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024, an incredibly important bill. As the Leader of the House said in her contribution, this is all about our government's harm minimisation approach. This important piece of legislation establishes the legal framework for Victoria's trial pill-testing service. Once passed, the bill will give the express legal authority for both mobile and fixed-site services to operate in Victoria and support the government's commitment to introducing secure naloxone vending machines in key areas of need. This is incredibly important legislation as we are heading into the festival season. This bill will save lives, and I am so proud to be a member of a government committed to harm minimisation and saving lives of Victorians.

This week we are also debating the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. This bill makes key amendments to the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010 to clarify that offshore underground gas storage is permitted in Victoria. This means that gas can be stored offshore and then injected into the system during periods of high demand. This is exactly what Victoria has been doing for many years onshore. This bill will establish a consistent regulatory regime to make sure offshore gas storage is done safely and effectively. It is something that is so important as we move, in Victoria, away from our reliance on gas and fossil fuels and towards clean, green renewable energy.

Of course, rounding out the week, we have the Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024. This, importantly, will enable the implementation of key components of the *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, a landmark piece of work in Victoria which maps out how our state will move away from gas and coal-fired fuels, leading us into a future of clean, green renewable energy. It will make important clarifications to the scope of building activities that may be required under a building order and protect consumers by ensuring they do not lose their right to bring legal proceedings in

relation to building or plumbing work due to delays in their matters being transferred from the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to a court.

It is a jam-packed week. These three bills are very diverse. They all have very different impacts on Victorians and very different impacts on our lives in Victoria, but to me what they all speak to is our commitment to building a better, fairer and stronger state in Victoria – a state that supports our future in terms of our transition away from gas and a state that supports reducing harm for our youngest Victorians who are getting out and about and enjoying festivals and makes sure that those Victorians are safe too. I look forward to making a further contribution over the course of the debate this week. I commend the government business program to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:38): I also rise to oppose the government business program this week and support the Manager of Opposition Business and my colleagues in opposing this government business program. I do so because whilst Victoria burns, we have got a government here that has a program that mucks around with a few bits and pieces. We have got people without homes over their heads, we have got children on the streets that are running amok and we have got towns that are being held to ransom by people and the police have not got the rules to be able to assist the community with their own safety. Right out in South-West Coast, where we are normally pretty safe, we have got issues that we have not seen before. Instead of the government actually looking at the issues of crises – like the health system, the education system and the housing crisis that is going on – we have got a government business program that will not even allow the opposition to scrutinise and debate properly.

There are three pieces of legislation that the government has introduced for this week. I will start with the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. Whilst there are elements of concern, clearly, that we want to address around drug and alcohol use in our community, we need to do this with a considered view. We need to do this with consideration of all the risks and the benefits, and the last thing we need is unintended consequences. That is the point of debating in this house and getting legislation right. It is incredibly disappointing that the government have forbidden the opposition the opportunity to actually go into consideration in detail on this bill and, clause by clause, analyse the implications of the bill.

From what I can read in the bill, there are some real gaps around the analysing of the drugs and being able to advise the person who is having the drugs analysed in a way that makes sure they understand the risks. That is actually not going to be able to take place. In the situation where a young person hands over a drug, they will not be told that the testing does not have the right sensitivity needed to be able to give them the safe parameters that they are looking for. In fact it will not be able to test for certain chemicals at all. Nitazenes – the new synthetic opioids – will not be tested for at all. The children who will be advised about these drugs will not even be told that they are waiving their rights for civil and legal liabilities. I am very concerned, as someone who has some knowledge of pharmacology, that these issues are not being discussed here in the Parliament so we can work out why these anomalies have not been addressed in the bill. It is, to me, a very dangerous piece of legislation.

If we were able to analyse it, there would be able to be improvements, and we do know that people want to see improvements in drugs and alcohol progressing in such a way that they do not do the harm that we are seeing throughout our communities, which is certainly leaving towns like Warrnambool and Portland in a real position at the moment with people on the street and people not getting the help they need. But, unfortunately, the government are not getting down to where they really made their promises around addressing the mental health issues in our community and are taking away the ability for the police to help people when they are intoxicated by managing them in the way they had. The move-on laws and the drunk-in-a-public-place laws – all those tools that the police had – have been removed and they cannot do the job they need to do. Instead here we are debating a ‘Let’s do something rather than do nothing’ approach when we need things like drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres funded. Another thing that Warrnambool and South-West Coast need more than ever before

is a drug and alcohol rehabilitation residential centre. It has been called for by the community, and the government are ignoring the pleas of South-West Coast when everybody else has received one.

I have not even started on the two other bills: the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024 and the Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024. Here is an opportunity for the government to make some decent changes to housing. We have got a housing crisis, and there is one role for the planning department, and that is to build houses. Yet what we are seeing is a housing crisis in Victoria and instead of moving some good legislation that the building legislation amendment bill has in it the government have wrapped up gas into this bill, taking away choice for people to be able to use gas to heat their homes. We all know that gas is a sensible transition into renewables, and every expert in the field has advised the government to address it.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (48): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Aitken Hill Primary School

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (12:49): Congratulations to the Aitken Hill Primary School students for their recent efforts in fundraising and staying healthy. The students at Aitken Hill took on the challenge to become heart heroes in the primary school skipping challenge Jump Rope for Heart, supporting the Heart Foundation. It was a huge effort, with the students raising an incredible \$2490 that will go towards vital heart research and education programs. Well done to all involved.

Country Fire Authority Beveridge brigade

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (12:49): On 12 October I was thrilled to join CFA members and officials to congratulate them on the opening of the new Beveridge fire station and the establishment of the new Beveridge fire brigade. The Beveridge fire station was formerly a satellite station of the Kalkallo CFA but became a standalone operational brigade in August. With 26 members, they have responded to 10 primary emergency calls and 30 support calls in the first month of operation and are anticipated to respond to more than 400 emergency calls a year. It was great to walk through the completed new station, having visited earlier this year when it was only a frame and a plan. This station is a great first step in the Beveridge CFA journey, as being in one of the fastest growth areas of the state it will no doubt need to grow as the community does. While the state prepares for the potential of an early fire season, the new Beveridge CFA will provide local residents with better support during emergencies, and I thank captain Jason Smith and all Beveridge CFA members for everything that they do and wish them a safe summer ahead.

Serviceton level crossing upgrade

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (12:50): It is not surprising to hear that the Labor government have overpromised and underdelivered, and that is exactly the case for Serviceton, where the Serviceton North railway crossing upgrade has been delayed – and who knows when it will be delivered. Back in 2019 Labor promised that they would upgrade this level crossing. This is an important crossing because the community is on one side of the railway line and the Western Highway is on the other. The CFA cross this railway line. They need to have it upgraded and made safe. However, back in 2022 the government changed their minds. They said they were progressing the planning and it was going to be delivered in 2023. A year later we still have not heard anything. So rather than just putting out media releases, let us get on with it, Labor. Let us fund this upgrade and fix this crossing, because inevitably someone will die, and that should not be the point where we look at railway crossing upgrades.

Drought relief

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (12:51): There have been terrible seasonal conditions right across the state but particularly in the west of the state. We have low rainfall conditions where we have got not enough surface water flowing in the south. In the middle of the area, around my electorate, we have got no pasture growth or low crop growth. We have now been hit with multiple frosts, and there has been an incredible hit on agricultural production. I urge the government to expand funding for drought support – there are more people applying than there are funds available – and to fund the Simpson pipeline.

West Gate Bridge tragedy commemoration

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (12:52): On 15 October 1970 at 11:50 am Australia's worst ever industrial accident occurred when the under-construction West Gate Bridge collapsed and killed 35 people. The bridge was nearing completion when an 11-centimetre gap was reported. Attempts to address this caused the bridge to buckle. The buckle was to be straightened and the bridge realigned, but ultimately that failed, causing the collapse.

More than half a century on from the disaster, hundreds of thousands of people use the bridge to cross the Yarra every single day, but the scars of that tragic day still linger in the western suburbs. Today six pieces of the bridge are located in the gardens at Monash University to remind students of the tragic consequences that occur when there are errors in engineering. The subsequent royal commission findings led to the strengthening of occupational health and safety laws in Australia, and I am proud to be part of a government that continues to strengthen and protect these laws.

Thirty-five people went to work that day and never returned home, and those that did described it as an absolute nightmare. Today at the West Gate Bridge Memorial Park in Spotswood many in my community will gather to remember and pay tribute to those who never returned home. I stand with my community in commemorating the 54th anniversary of this terrible accident and the West Gate Bridge collapse.

Planning policy

David HODGETT (Croydon) (12:53): The Allan Labor government has quietly approached local councils across 10 activity centre areas with secret plans to scrap existing planning protections and encourage high-rise development. That approach was made in the council caretaker period so the councillors could not oppose the secret plans, which include allowing buildings of 20 storeys or more in the major centres and six storeys in the 800-metre catchment zone outside the central activity centres. These plans will mean that heritage protections will need to be cut up for the government to reach their proposed targets.

Ringwood is set to have between 8200 and 12,200 new homes built, with no consultation with stakeholders and residents. If this happens, will Croydon or Bayswater be next with 20-storey high-rise towers built next to residential homes? These changes are being proposed under the background of taking away third-party rights from the community, which is completely underhand and unacceptable.

The Liberals and Nationals will oppose any attempt to remove third-party rights in the planning process and any attempt by Labor to remove heritage protections. We will also oppose Labor's imposition of major activity centres where they have not had genuine community consultation and involvement. This move is another example of the Labor government removing the rights of Victorians and is completely unacceptable.

Sebastopol projects

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:54): Sebastopol is a proud suburb of Ballarat with a rich history and a strong community. That is why the Allan Labor government is investing to make it an even better place to live. We are delivering a major upgrade to the Marty Busch Reserve, investing \$8.4 million towards new sporting and community facilities, and contributing \$4.5 million to the new Sebastopol community hub. As a part of our Keep Ballarat Moving roads package we have installed new traffic lights at Hertford and Albert streets and at Docwra Street and Midland Highway. We have supported the establishment of the Yiram Burron Early Learning Centre and delivered a significant upgrade to the Sebastopol South Kindergarten.

We are also transforming Sebastopol with our \$5 million Spotlight on Sebastopol program, with 13 local projects thanks to the advocacy of the member for Eureka. Projects include improved access to the Yarrowee Creek, which will allow people to gather and connect, with new pathways, picnic areas and shelters. We have upgraded MR Power park and are growing an urban tree forest after planting more than 1350 trees throughout neighbourhood streets. We have also completed the St Georges lighting upgrades to junior pitches, allowing the junior teams to train at night. Further, works are underway at the Victoria–Albert streets precinct, making it greener, safer and more accessible. The Hertford Street shared path project is progressing too. We have also supported the development of the community garden project, upgraded the Sebastopol RSL hall and enabled the community art project. I am so proud of what we are doing for Sebastopol.

Local government elections

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (12:56): The good people of Polwarth are out and about with local council elections this month, and I very much urge all the local council voters in Surf Coast shire, Colac Otway shire and Corangamite Otway shire to really think about the candidates that they are voting for. The people of Corangamite only have one ward up, but both Colac Otway and Corangamite have Melbourne Cup fields of candidates. I remind constituents that this Labor government has been diabolical at putting costs back onto local councils, and they need to think very carefully about the councillors they vote for. I urge them to put first councillors that are going to prioritise roads, basic services and affordable rates for the people of both the Surf Coast and Colac Otway shires and to really fight back against any candidate prepared to put up with the cost shifting that this Labor government continues to put on local ratepayers, with things such as unfunded kinder promises and unfunded immunisation programs, and of course we all know the crippling lack of funding and support that this government gives to local councils for roads. Roads, roads, roads and basic services are the key issues. To all voters across Colac Otway, Surf Coast and Corangamite, I urge you to talk to the councillors. Find out if the councillor you are voting for is going to put those basic services and cost shifts as key priorities in the way they vote into the future.

Eureka electorate events

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (12:58): I rise to talk about what was an absolutely extraordinary weekend in my electorate. The sun shone on the Australian Open Cup as it visited the Bacchus Marsh

tennis club, the Bacchus Marsh Baptist Church spring fair was full of families enjoying the sunshine and the Bacchus Marsh Little Aths season launch was off to a running start. In the evening I had a wonderful night with the Bacchus Marsh CFA as they recognised with service awards their outstanding volunteers.

I also want to highlight two really important events over the weekend. On Sunday morning I attended the Ballarat Mental Health Collective for a fantastic event around Lake Esmond. This event brought together many organisations and groups who support people and their carers living with mental health issues. As we enter into National Carers Week I think it is really important that we acknowledge all of those people who contribute. A big shout-out to the amazing Rael Cartledge for organising this event. It is now in its second year. On Sunday afternoon I attended a joyous occasion in Bacchus Marsh to celebrate, a little early, Diwali. This colourful and cultural event is also in its second year, and I want to congratulate UNITE Foundation Inc, a wonderful local community group, for putting on such a wonderful event.

Mallacoota tourism infrastructure

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (12:59): Jetties and toilet blocks critical to Mallacoota's tourism remain unrepaired five years after the fires. Locations include South-West Arm, Sandy Point, Kingfish Point Jetty and Goanna Bay. Portaloos were provided as a replacement, but they are now gone. I ask the minister to answer why the rebuilds have taken so long and the portaloos have been removed given that they were being utilised.

Gippsland East electorate outdoor recreation

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (13:00): I read with interest a recent release regarding the opening of 31 kilometres of four-wheel drive tracks and walking tracks in Victoria, but why do so many local tracks and walks remain closed in East Gippsland due to fire and flood damage from years ago? These include Dunes Track, Saros Track, Sledge Track, the Wingun Inlet rapids walk and Betka Track, just to name a few. Minister, when will they be reopened?

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (13:00): I am told that Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action firefighters have been put off commencing employment until 1 December, when every previous year they have commenced work on 1 November. On the eve of a summer forecast to produce more thunderstorms and therefore more lightning and more fire, it does not make sense. Can the minister confirm if this is the case and provide an explanation as to why this decision has been made? The final point is that we recently had DEECA announcing reduced office opening hours. In Bairnsdale they are closed every Friday, which is bad, but a person arrived there on Wednesday, found the office shut and was told to leave. Can the minister please look at this?

Member for Mulgrave

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (13:01): I rise today to update the chamber on my recent health. In early July I was diagnosed with stage 1 lymphoma. Since then I have received expert care from across the Victorian healthcare system. As I am nearing the end of my treatment, which has progressed well, I would like to give a special acknowledgement to the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, where I have received much of my treatment. The staff there have been incredible and always willing to go above and beyond to help not only me but all patients in their care. I am incredibly grateful to live in a state and a time where my diagnosis is not a death sentence. The fact that I had access to the best care and was diagnosed early gave me the best chance possible.

Recently I hosted a fundraiser at Killester College in Springvale alongside many of my parliamentary colleagues, raising \$10,000 for Cancer Council Victoria. I would like to thank everyone who donated and supported me during that fundraiser and throughout the course of my treatment, including my wonderful community of Mulgrave. I would especially like to thank my good friend and colleague the

member for Dandenong, who has supported me immensely during this challenge and has gone as far as shaving her amazing locks today. I could not have asked for a better friend and ally to support me. Combined, we have raised over \$25,000 for Cancer Council Victoria. It is wonderful to be back in the chamber, and I look forward to representing my community of Mulgrave in this place once again.

Jason Rantall

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (13:02): I would like to give a shout-out today to Jason Rantall from Bettermentall in Trafalgar. Jason over the last 100 days has been running 3249 kilometres, which represents the amount of suicides that have been reflected in Victoria. He is a very, very passionate mental health advocate in our region, and often he has to support people who are really, really struggling. He has over the past 100 days been clocking up the k's. The community has got behind him, and one group, Kubale Constructions in Warragul, also got behind him. Tim, the owner of the building company, gave his staff the day off and they all had to run for 4 hours. The community were able to bank up kilometres to help Jason achieve his target, and there were some boys there that it is fair to say were a bit sore a few days later.

Brody Masterson

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (13:03): I would also like to give a shout-out to a young man in my electorate Brody Masterson, who won a state boxing title not long ago. Brody's life journey has been challenging, and he has found boxing to be an outlet for him. Now he is doing very well, to the point that he is going to an interview with the AIS. I think that is a significant turnaround for a young man that has now put his life on track, and I would like to wish Brody all the best in his endeavours.

Boronia revitalisation

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (13:04): Things just keep on getting better in Boronia. The Allan Labor government have delivered over \$5 million worth of projects into Boronia's CBD since 2021, and now there is more being announced, with \$500,000 to help deliver critical projects for Boronia. Knox InfoLink will get a makeover to help them make it easier for people to access their services and food relief when they need it, and they have received funding for another round of their popular breakfast program, one of the best projects to be funded out of the revitalisation program. These are not words from just me but from many people across the department and government and on the ground in my community, so thank you, Knox InfoLink.

We are also partnering with Knox City Council to deliver the green spine from Tormore Reserve to Albert Avenue, which will establish an east-west pedestrian and cycling link and a green spine corridor through the Boronia activity centre.

The Eastern Community Legal Centre will deliver a program that will connect community members through a shared love of food. Participants will share their favourite recipes and stories, culminating in the creation of a community recipe book, *Tastes of Boronia*. Your Library will also produce booklets for Boronia residents detailing local service providers and businesses – good for locals, good for the local economy – and Swinburne University of Technology will deliver a project which aims to develop pathways from non-accredited to accredited training for locals in the Boronia community, targeting employment in the care sector.

It has been an incredible journey delivering the revitalisation in Boronia's CBD. We have seen new lighting, refreshed laneways, new murals, new streetscapes, social programs, community grants, business facades and much more – but wait, we have got lots of exciting news to come about the major upgrade of Boronia station.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (13:05): The sewerage system in Victoria's public housing towers has been scheduled for a long-awaited upgrade. With the pipes corroding, raw sewage has been leaking into dozens of apartments across Victoria and exposing residents to bacteria, viruses and

parasites. But instead of going ahead with the scheduled upgrades, the Victorian Labor government has just cut funding for them. Labor claim to care about the livability of public housing, and they are using it to justify the planned demolition and privatisation of all 44 of our towers – and yet they have ignored problems for decades, and now they are cutting critical maintenance budgets when people are still going to be living in these apartments for decades to come. This is clearly a deliberate act of neglect not just to save money but to make residents so uncomfortable, frustrated and even sick that they desperately want to move out. It is called eviction by neglect, and there is a well-documented history of governments doing this when they want to get rid of public housing. Instead of abandoning public housing residents in the middle of a housing crisis, the government should maintain and upgrade the public housing we have and build more public housing so everyone has a secure and affordable place to call home.

Welcoming the Babies

Katie HALL (Footscray) (13:07): One of the highlights of my year is coming up as we welcome the babies in Melbourne's inner west on Saturday 26 October from 10 am to 2 pm at Tweddle, the original parenting hospital in Footscray. On the day we will have a one-stop shop for new parents and people who are babyproofing their houses for their toddlers, with Tweddle hosting a workshop. Kidsafe will be in the car park doing child seat fittings and checks, and our free kinder will be there talking about the game-changing investment in free kinder – \$2500 per child in savings for free kinder. Of course we just announced a new kinder for North Footscray, opposite Footscray North Primary School, last week. Maribyrnong council will be there, and they will be hosting Rhyme Time. West Footscray Neighbourhood House will be talking about their beautiful toy library. We will have PANDA providing support to people experiencing postnatal anxiety and depression. The Australian Breastfeeding Association volunteers will be holding a workshop on breastfeeding, and Maidstone Kick n Paddle will be talking about kid-safe, child-safe swimming lessons for children. You can book on my website.

Hydrogen Park Murray Valley

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (13:08): Last Friday I had the great pleasure of being at the sod turning of the \$65 million Hydrogen Park Murray Valley. In about a year's time it will be blending hydrogen into gas to supply 40,000 homes and businesses in Albury and Wodonga. It will be the largest hydrogen plant in the nation. It was launched by the federal Assistant Minister for Climate Change and Energy Josh Wilson. The Victorian minister – and it is great to see you here, Minister – was conspicuous by her absence, despite the fact that this Labor government had invested \$12.3 million of taxpayers money into the project. This government's anti-gas ideology is incredibly disappointing.

The process is inspiring. Powered from nearby solar panels, oxygen from the hydrogen process accelerates the aeration of wastewater treatment ponds. Biogas captured in the process powers turbines, whose energy goes back into the hydrogen plant. The resultant heat will burn waste to create a char sought by both industry and agriculture. There were major local employers, including Mars Petcare and Bradken, just to name two, and also interested car manufacturers like Toyota. As the minister's comrade Josh Wilson said, the plant will reduce local emissions from day one. When the day comes I hope the minister has the – *(Time expired)*

Frankston Hospital

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (13:10): I recently had the pleasure of joining the outstanding Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure Delivery at the redevelopment site of Frankston Hospital. I was absolutely shattered that I did not get to ride on the coat-tails of the member for Frankston, who has been a huge, tireless advocate for this redevelopment. This project has significant benefit for the Mordialloc electorate. Anyone that is around the Chelsea–Chelsea Heights–Edithvale area or the southern bits of the City of Kingston – in the electorate of the member for Carrum, the Minister for Planning, who joined us as well and is an outstanding advocate for her community and for health in our area – will know how important this site will be. It is a \$1.1 billion redevelopment across 12 floors,

with a 130-bed capacity. It adds new spaces for mental health, which I am so very passionate about, and oncology services and 12 new operating theatres. We got to see those operating theatres coming together. We know that that will benefit so many more across the south-eastern suburbs and the tens of thousands of nurses that we have added in the decade that we have had the opportunity to serve Victorians. Victorians know, and people in the cities of Kingston and Greater Dandenong know, that Labor governments back our health system and our health workers. We see the investments that have been made and the support that they are providing to the dedicated people who each and every day serve Victorians when they need it most. The Frankston Hospital redevelopment is a great addition to our health system and will be operational by 2026.

Geelong tourism

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (13:11): The Geelong tourism economy is worth many hundreds of millions of dollars to the local economy and is also a significant driver of jobs. Many people visit the broader Geelong region to enjoy their summer holidays and to take advantage of everything that Geelong and the broader region have to offer, whether that be our fabulous beaches, our fantastic national parks or our fantastic wine and food industries. All of these things have had it particularly difficult over the last 12 months with the cost-of-living crisis that our nation has endured. However, I was very, very pleased to see the announcement made by the Allan Labor government just this last weekend of free camping. This will turbocharge the local Geelong tourism economy, providing families across Victoria with the opportunity to camp free, and I have no doubt it will support jobs in our important, growing regions. It is going to be great for jobs, great for families and great for small businesses right across our region. I welcome this initiative, and I hope it helps in turbocharging our local economy.

Kororoit seniors morning tea

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (13:13): Every year throughout the month of October we celebrate the Victorian Seniors Festival. This year it was my pleasure to host the inaugural Kororoit seniors morning tea as part of seniors week. The morning tea was a chance to bring together seniors from across Kororoit and celebrate the invaluable contribution that they have made and continue to make within our community. It was also a great opportunity to celebrate ageing well and put an emphasis on fun and good times with older people. It was a pleasure to have representatives from the Caroline Springs RSL, Comm Unity Plus, Rotary, Lions Club, St George's parish and many of the multicultural seniors across Melbourne's west. I want to thank them for their ongoing and continuing support.

I also want to give huge shout-out to and acknowledge the wonderful efforts of the Victoria University Secondary College student band, who performed at the seniors morning tea. I am so proud to have VU Secondary in Kororoit, and I love watching all that they continue to achieve. I would like to make special mention of the principal Elaine Hazim and of course the music teacher Robert Breen, who is incredibly passionate. The seniors were so impressed with these young people and the talents of these students. It made our morning tea a truly fun and uplifting event.

To the Allied Pinnacle team, another huge thankyou for your generosity in providing scrumptious baked goods for the seniors morning tea. The seniors loved leaving with goodie bags at the conclusion. To Minister Suleyman, who was my special guest of honour: thank you. To all of our seniors in Kororoit and Victoria, happy Seniors Month.

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:14): I had the opportunity yesterday to join the Minister for Children at the Bell Street offices of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service to hear about how their work with family and children's services can inform our broader work in the children's portfolio. There are a lot of great leaders in that organisation, including Aunty Lynette Briggs and Uncle Alan Brown, but I would like to particularly recognise Sue Hedges for her 25 years of service and to thank

Carolyn Dunn, Margie Davidson and Dr Mick Creati for sharing their frontline experiences with us. I would also like to recognise Tanya Saunders for the work she does across our Preston community.

Voice to Parliament

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:15): Yesterday was the anniversary of the defeat of the Voice referendum, and I would like to thank Senator Jana Stewart, Aunty Esme Bamblett and Dr Mandy Nicholson for the event they held to recognise and reflect upon that anniversary and to reflect on the enduring strength of our First Nations community.

JS Grey Kindergarten

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:15): I would like to recognise the team at JS Grey Kindergarten on Gilbert Road: Tennille Khoury, Marisa Puccio, Lisa, Mary, Hayley, Elisabeth, Honielaine and all of the educators there. Marisa is the centre director at JS Grey, and she and her two sons are currently studying, together, an early childhood diploma at Melbourne Polytechnic in Preston. I am not sure how common it is for a parent and their two children to be enrolled in the same class, but I like to think it is a tribute to the quality of the course, supported by our free TAFE initiative, and the commitment of Marisa and her family to the care and education of our preschool children.

Sunbury Show

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (13:16): It is great to be back here. On Saturday it was the 102nd annual Sunbury agricultural show. The sun was shining, and I had the opportunity to chat with many local residents within my community and see many exceptional local competitions and acts, including my very own daughter's dance recital up on stage, which was very, very cute.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Josh BULL: Certainly not, member for Frankston. I did not teach her everything she knows. She has definitely got the moves. I would like to acknowledge the Sunbury show committee, including Kate George, vice-president Stuart MacPherson, Gary Beeton and secretary Narelle Reino for their outstanding contribution in bringing the show together and bringing the community together for what is a wonderful day.

Sunbury Heights Primary School

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (13:16): I also had the opportunity to welcome the Premier and the Minister for Community Sport to the electorate, to my former primary school Sunbury Heights, to catch up with principal Laban Toose and a number of students for our announcement around the Get Active Kids vouchers program, which is making a significant and substantial difference to many families right across our state. We will continue to get on and do the hard work to deliver for local communities right across our terrific state.

Motor neurone disease

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (13:17): Since my last contribution in this place I have found my voice. A quick thankyou to all of you in this chamber who sat in silence with me as I reflected on the many people who have lost their voice from motor neurone disease. It was actually harder than I thought not speaking for 12 hours, but I was pleased that we managed to raise some funds for MND Victoria.

Pakenham electorate community activities

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (13:17): During the Parliament sitting break I had MND Victoria's junior ambassador 10-year-old Finn Cadman come to visit me and discuss ways he can continue to fundraise for MND Victoria. It is something that he has become very passionate about since his grandpa was diagnosed. He also told me how much he loves politics and that one day he wants to be

the prime minister. I reckon that young man might actually get there, because he is determined and hardworking.

Other events and visits included Officer Secondary College's art show. The event and the talent from their students were absolutely incredible. I had a visit to Cardinia Environment Coalition to take our Minister for Environment for a look around and to learn about the very important work that they do for and with our community.

Coming into the warmer months I want to make mention of a wonderful initiative that Dr Harpreet Kandra from the Officer gurdwara has initiated in the community: safely engaging with water. I had the opportunity to attend the launch of this program back in July, and I have now witnessed the first graduation ceremony. Congratulations to all involved. This program is so important to familiarise adults with skills to keep them and their families safe.

Bakhtar Community Organisation

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (13:19): I had the pleasure on Friday night, with Mr Tarlamis in the other place, of attending the Bakhtar Community Organisation.

Bills

Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 4, page 6, line 30, omit "Victoria." and insert "Victoria;"
2. Clause 4, page 6, after line 30 insert –
 - “(f) to develop and invest in strategic renewable energy generation and systems and facilities and strategic renewable energy storage systems and facilities necessary to maintain Victoria's energy system security and reliability in the long term.”
3. Clause 4, page 7, lines 4 to 6, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
 - “(a) if it is a body corporate in which shares have been issued –
 - (i) do anything contrary to section 104(2)(a); or
 - (ii) pay any dividend, or make any other distribution of profits to the shareholders of the SEC or the State; or
 - (b) if it is a body corporate established by or under an Act in which shares have not been issued, pay any dividend, or make any other distribution of profits to the State; or”.
4. Clause 4, page 7, line 7, omit "(b)" and insert "(c)".
5. Clause 4, page 7, line 14, omit "104(2)(a)" and insert "104(2)(a)(i)".
6. Clause 4, page 7, after line 14 insert –
 - “(2) A payment of a dividend or a distribution of profits that contravenes section 106(a)(ii) or (b) is void.”
7. Clause 4, page 7, line 15, omit "(2)" and insert "(3)".
8. Clause 4, page 7, line 17, omit "106(b)" and insert "106(c)".

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (13:19): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

To that effect I would like to say a few words with respect to this bill as proposed to be amended. Victoria's energy systems should never have been sold off in the first place. When those opposite in this chamber sold them off, Victorians paid the price while private companies made the profits off the back of Victoria's assets, workers lost their jobs and skills were lost. It is shameful, and it should never have happened. Today I am very, very proud that this government is able to say that the SEC is back.

Not only is it back but we are making sure that it is here to stay, protecting it from the Liberal Party and the National Party, who themselves have actually said already that they would flog it off again. We know that we cannot rely on them when it comes to public ownership and the public benefits that come from publicly owned assets in energy, because Victorians can be sure of one thing of course: that they will do it again. By safeguarding the SEC in Victoria's constitution we can ensure this important institution can continue to increase its role in powering our state for the good of all Victorians and for good. With this bill the government will hold a controlling interest across its entire portfolio. Renewables – that is, 4.5 gigawatts of new renewables – will replace coal, and new projects will be owned by every Victorian to benefit every Victorian.

There have been a number of amendments agreed to in the Council, which the Assembly is being asked to agree to today. One of them inserts new section 105(f), which expands the objectives of the SEC to include the development of and investment in emerging and less commercial technologies, which are also needed to support Victoria's energy transition and to maintain energy security and reliability in the post-transition period. The SEC has already commenced building its portfolio of renewable assets needed to accelerate Victoria's progress towards its renewable energy target. When you accelerate the work, you bring in more supply, and the cheapest form of new build you can have is renewables. Bringing forward more supply means you put downward pressure on those wholesale prices that affect every Victorian.

The SEC is also ideally placed to play a leading role in investing and developing emerging renewable technologies and in systems and facilities which are not yet demonstrated as commercially viable in the Victorian market but which are critical to an orderly transition and maintaining energy security and reliability. For example, there is a particular need for accelerated development of long-duration energy storage systems such as pumped hydro, flow batteries and mechanical and thermal storage systems. Long-duration storage systems will be critical to supporting energy reliability as Victoria transitions to renewables, but investment cases for these asset classes and technologies can be challenging under existing market conditions. This does not change the government's commitment to the SEC operating under competitive neutrality for commercial activities but simply makes it clear that the SEC can consider these sorts of strategic investments that the market is unable to deliver at a particular point in time.

The Council has also agreed to an amendment from the Greens. Their proposed new clause 4 reinforces the government's existing clear commitment that any and all profits generated by the SEC will remain with the SEC and be used to invest in further renewable energy and storage projects, helping Victorian consumers. This bill also enshrines the objectives of the SEC into the constitution: to support Victoria's transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions; to generate, purchase and sell electricity to Victoria; to own, operate or participate in the operation of renewable energy generation and storage systems and facilities; to develop, support or participate in the development of or invest in renewable energy generation and storage systems and facilities; and to supply energy-related products or services to energy consumers in Victoria.

Importantly, to protect the SEC from the fossil fuel fans opposite, this bill prohibits the SEC from owning, operating or investing in a fossil fuel facility. The SEC will always be 100 per cent renewable. We know that the cheapest form of new energy you can build is renewable, and that is why Victoria has consistently the lowest power prices in the country – because of our record renewable energy investments since we were elected. We know that coal-fired power stations are closing in Victoria and fossil fuels are getting more expensive, so our renewable energy targets have never been more important for climate action, for cheaper power and for grid stability. That is why the objectives in this bill give the SEC an enduring purpose: delivering an affordable, reliable renewable future for Victoria.

The SEC is already delivering a renewable future for our state, with its first project under construction, the Melbourne Renewable Energy Hub in Plumpton. It is big. It is one of the biggest batteries in the world in fact – 1.6 gigawatt hours of energy, enough to power more than 200,000 homes – and it will enable more renewable projects to be connected to the grid. This project would not have happened

today without the SEC; that is a fact. Let us be clear: because of the SEC, this project is happening sooner, is bigger and will enable more renewables to come into the system. The SEC's investment has brought forward delivery of this project and upscaled one of its components from 2 to 4 hours, beyond what the market would have otherwise delivered. The additional firming capacity it gives us in the grid enables up to three times the amount of new renewable energy generation to be connected to the existing grid. It is not just about what it holds in terms of energy but what it enables in new projects getting connected.

We will have more to say very shortly about future projects that the SEC will be delivering, but we need to get as much cheap, reliable renewable energy in the grid as we can to keep the lights on, to keep power bills down and to decarbonise our energy system. While we are committed to delivering this, we cannot say the same for everyone in this chamber. When those opposite last were in government, they had an absolutely anti-renewables policy that effectively banned new wind farms being developed. In fact it was so bad that only one renewable energy project got approved under them in their four years – just one. Projects were abandoned. Many projects closed up shop and left the state. Power prices increased by 34 per cent, because there was no new pipeline of renewable energy projects coming down, and of course jobs were slashed. You would think that a decade later they would be a little bit more cautious about their policy presentations, but no, it is a recycled policy that they came up with last week, and we know what happened the last time that policy was put in place when they were in government. That is a recipe for a lack of reliability of our energy supply. It means that there is going to be a greater reliance on failing coal generators to stay alive and also power prices going through the roof.

This is enshrining the SEC, 100 per cent renewable, in the constitution. We know what can happen and what has happened when our assets get sold off. We do not want to see that ever happening again. The only ones who win are the big corporate players, who take money out of our state and out of the hands of ordinary Victorians. We are about reversing that, putting power back in the hands of Victorians, giving them an energy system that they can rely on, with 59,000 jobs that the SEC will help to accelerate between now and 2035, and ensuring that Victoria keeps being consistently the lowest wholesale electricity market in the country in delivering those cheaper wholesale prices.

This is a really great day. I am absolutely delighted that our government is fulfilling a very important election commitment that was made in 2022. We went to the election on the back of bringing back the SEC, helping to accelerate the transition through the creation of 59,000 jobs by 2035, keeping those power bills down, creating the SEC centre of training excellence – more will be said on that front – and developing consumer-facing solutions for Victorians by helping them with a trusted voice, someone in their corner who is prepared to help them to save on their energy bills by giving them practical advice.

There are a number of pilots that the SEC has already got out there in particular parts of our state – regional and metro Melbourne – which are testing some really terrific ideas that are already starting to prove very, very valuable. We will have more to say on all of that as time allows us into the future. We know privatisation has not worked. Every day we see the legacy of privatisation. With this bill and with all of the investments that we are making to have the SEC doing what it is doing and more, we are returning power to the hands of Victorians, because it is what Victorians deserve. I am absolutely delighted and proud that this bill is coming back to us, hopefully for final approval.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:30): I will start where the minister left off in relation to the amendments to the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023. The minister said a number of times that there would be more to say when it comes to the SEC, and that is the story of the SEC. We saw a press release before the last election – a one-sheet press release, as the former Premier was so accustomed to doing – with no detail, and from that date to now, to today, we have still seen no detail. What this bill does is set up effectively a shell, but it does not deliver what Victorians need, and that is reliable, affordable and secure energy. What we hear from that side of the chamber is ideology, not just in the speech on the amendments today. Follow the minister on Twitter and you can see not just

ideological wars in Victoria but fights with the federal government on energy ideology – fights over ideology with the federal government in relation to energy supply.

What we have seen from the federal government is the federal government calling out that there is a problem with this state providing reliable, affordable and secure energy to Victorians. You would think that this government would put those goals at the heart of what they do – they should be a core function of what they do, ensuring that the community has that – but we know that they do not. We know that in this state, which is so reliant on things like gas – 2 million homes are reliant on gas – we are seeing an ideological ban on gas.

This bill is nothing more than a shell. The minister spoke in her speech about the SEC providing consumer-facing solutions. Do you know what consumer-facing solutions are? Four hundred thousand dollars on promotional junk. That is what the government mean when they talk about consumer-facing solutions. They mean the yo-yos, they mean the coffee mugs and they mean the jelly beans. That is what the SEC has produced thus far – oh, and tote bags; I forgot the tote bags: \$400,000 of junk. That is what this government has done: spent taxpayer money on junk. What they have not done is provide energy solutions to Victorians.

We are two years effectively since the last election – two years – and when it comes to the SEC nothing meaningful has happened. We have seen broken promises and we have seen a waste of money. We have seen this bill sit upstairs for months and months and months and months because the government was not able to convince the crossbench to work it through – more delays, more delays. That speaks to the government, frankly, and their lack of capacity to deal with, in most cases, independent members who lean their way. They could not even convince people who lean their way.

We are dealing with amendments today which the coalition did not support in the upper house, because we know that in the two years after their media release announcement the government has not done anything meaningful – two years, and there has been no outcome. Victorians now know that when it comes to energy, they do not have energy security. They know that energy is not affordable, and they know that there is chaos in the government over which position to take on energy policy, not only in their own team in relation to policy positions but also with the federal government, which has called out the ideological approach of this government, which ended up in a Twitter war from the minister.

I mean, a Twitter war between the minister and the federal minister – it was very, very unedifying to see when it came to that fight over energy security. What I would say about the federal government is they have sided with the need for Victoria to do better when it comes to energy policy. That is what they have said. They have said they want the Victorian government to do better when it comes to energy policy.

This week we are seeing bills move before this house which are entirely contradictory. One says we want to have a structural dealing with supply of gas and the capacity to store gas for times of need, effectively, and at the same time a bill moves forward that bans gas. It bans gas at the same time as the Premier says we are not banning gas. Is there any wonder why Victorians do not understand what the government is doing and have lost trust in what the government is doing?

But this bill is about the SEC. This bill creates a shell that enables the SEC, but what it does not do is provide detail and what it does not do is do meaningful things. What Victorians deserve is reliable, affordable and secure energy. What they do not need is the government wasting money on SEC yo-yos and coffee cups. I do not know what happened to those yo-yos. They perhaps were provided to the members of the caucus. They might have just been provided to members of the caucus for all we know, but what we do know is that \$400,000 was wasted on junk and that did not reduce the bill of a single Victorian when it comes to energy. So the coalition opposed these measures in the upper house, and we will do so shortly.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:37): If ever there was a speech that could attest to the position of the opposition when it comes to the renewable transition in Victoria, that probably was one of them.

They are clearly renewable energy phobic, because you only have to mention the word ‘solar’ and they go off, but not in a good way, because they want to enslave Victoria exclusively to fossil fuels into eternity. We know, when it comes to cutting emissions and when it comes to cutting costs, what Victorians want, because we took this to the election. Nobody was shy about it, nobody slipped it under the cover; we were very, very candid. In fact I remember standing on the roof of the Melbourne Museum when we made this fantastic announcement about bringing back the SEC.

What is so exciting about it? There are so many different aspects, but it is about accelerating the transition to a clean energy future. But I am not surprised that the opposition are not excited about that. They do not care about a clean energy future. It is not a priority for them, clearly, because every time we talk about renewables, they want to do everything but go on a transition for Victoria, which is a darn shame. Having said that, talking about ideology versus action, let us talk about the action that has already occurred in Victoria resulting from or associated with the SEC.

In just the first month alone 3000 households have used the SEC’s electric home planner to get trusted advice on how to slash their energy bills. Oh, that is just ideology! No, that is actually 3000 households that have used the SEC electric home planner, because these are some of the aspects of the SEC. It is about supporting –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: See, they hate renewables. Any time we are doing what we need to do to help Victorians on the path to transition, look how they jack up. They cannot stand it. They love their fossil fuels; they want to be enslaved by them for eternity. That is nice for them, but we are going to look out for our Victorian people and what they want, because clearly they voted for it at the election.

530 Victorians have had jobs created on the construction of the SEC’s first project, one of the biggest batteries in the world. I am really excited about this. I know what it means for our great state, but those opposite could not care less. It does not matter to them because they do not care about the clean energy transition. And we know they have form in this space, because it was quoted a little bit earlier.

In fact way back when, when they were in government in Victoria, their attitude to renewables was so bad, talking about ideology, that only one renewable energy project got approved under them – just one. So if we are talking about inaction, if we are talking about inertia, if we are talking about ideology, then look here: you only have to look across the chamber and there you have it when it comes to the attitude – the very negative attitude – towards renewables.

We know this is the way forward. We have to do it – we have to cut emissions. That is an absolute imperative for the future of young Victorians. Even if they do not care about themselves, they should care about future generations but also about tackling the rising cost of energy. I should say on that that Victoria consistently has the lowest wholesale power prices in the country. That is not ideology; that is the result of consistent legislative reform and action when it comes to tackling the various aspects of the energy sector – namely, the privatisation – which, thanks very much to those opposite, caused an explosion in energy prices. But we are hauling that back because we know that it is in the interests of fellow Victorians to do this. This is absolutely the right thing to do.

Talking about ideology versus action, the SEC is already delivering with its first project under construction, the Melbourne Renewable Energy Hub in Plumpton. That is actually a real thing. It is big, one of the biggest batteries in the world in fact – 1.6 gigawatts of energy, enough to power 200,000 homes. Now, I think that is something to be excited about. But it is not just about excitement, it is actually a pragmatic outcome. It is a benefit to Victorians when we are looking at on the one hand cutting emissions but also appropriate energy storage.

I am sorry those opposite do not value those kinds of projects. I do not see that as ideology, because it is actually a physical thing. A big, big battery is a physical thing. It is not just a thought bubble; it is action, and it actually is generating jobs as well. Are jobs ideological? Well, only if they do not happen.

But we can see already, as I said, 530 jobs having been generated and created on the construction of the SEC's first project – real jobs for real Victorians. It would be really lovely if those opposite would actually get on board and understand the true benefits of renewable energy. It is not about pipedreams, it is actually about finding affordable mechanisms to tackle not only energy costs but also emissions into the future.

I should say the SEC's investment has brought forward delivery of this project and upscaled it – get that, it has brought it forward. This is one of the key elements, and what makes this transition so exciting is that the SEC is actually a mechanism to accelerate the transition, and that is really, really important for our state. The SEC's investment has brought forward delivery of this project and upscaled one of its components from 2 to 4 hours beyond what the market would have otherwise delivered. I am just going to repeat that: beyond what the market would otherwise have delivered. This is a key and integral point as to why we have brought back the SEC, because we know this is a much-needed mechanism that drives the imperative to accelerate the energy transition.

The additional firming capacity it gives us in the grid enables up to three times the amount of new renewable energy generation to come online. When we are looking at that in terms of output, that is a real game changer for Victoria, and of course we will have more to say very shortly about what the next projects are that are coming on board for the SEC.

It is safe to say we need this legislation in place, because we can see by the rhetoric of those opposite that if we do not enshrine the SEC and its place in our state, what would they do if they got in? The first thing they would do is they would rip it up, smash it away and unwind those renewables. They would not get on board with those. Let us just be really frank about that. They have form. We have seen how they behave. I remember way back when, when there was such restriction on the wind industry –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: Well, I tell you what, there are many possibilities. Let me tell you, there are many possibilities. But anyway, I have no objection to this. I welcome wind farms for Albert Park, let me tell you. But anyway –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: We are getting off track.

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: See, they hate renewables. There they go again, classic resistance to a clean energy future. There we have it. Every time we have the opportunity to discuss this in a mature and consistent way, look at the opposition. You only have to mention solar: 'Oh, no, we can't have solar in this state. Heaven forbid we might cut some emissions, we might make a cleaner energy future!'

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: Look, see, they hate it. They hate renewable energy. Whipping them up does not take much. On that note, I commend this bill to the house.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (13:45): The Greens support these amendments, including the constitutional amendment which ensures the SEC's profits are always directed into further investments in renewable energy projects and cannot be taken by the current or a future government in the form of dividends. This was a Greens amendment and was accompanied by an assurance from the government in the third-reading stage of the bill that they would not charge a financial accommodation levy. We know that governments frequently like to pull billions of dollars out of public corporations like the TAC, but for the SEC to fulfil its stated function of consistently accelerating renewable investment it cannot be used as a cash cow whenever a government is strapped for money. Theoretically, and absurdly, a government could even direct any dividends received from the SEC into funding new fossil

fuel projects without this amendment. A key government promise at time of the announcement was that all SEC profits would be invested back into more renewables, but there was nothing in the bill to hold it or future governments to this commitment, and the Greens amendment fixes this oversight.

The SEC has enormous potential to drive the coal-to-renewables transition if it gets the funds necessary for the task. A recent government report quoted a PricewaterhouseCoopers report estimating that that task would cost around \$35 billion. I think that that estimate is a couple of years old, so assuming that is roughly accurate – that we need to spend about \$35 billion to provide the renewable generation and storage necessary to get Victoria off coal – the SEC's \$1 billion means it is less than 3 per cent of the size required. Fortunately there is plenty of private money willing to be spent on this, but there are barriers in the form of planning hold-ups particularly. These urgently need to be addressed, and some of them have been by the government. Nevertheless, we do need to accelerate the transition as quickly as possible, and if the SEC is to do that, it seems to me that it would need considerably more than the \$1 billion it has so far received. I will leave it there.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (13:48): You never quite know if the Greens are going to use their full allotment of time, so I was ready. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to come in here and speak about the SEC. Indeed every time that I and my colleagues can walk into this place and speak about the SEC it is an absolutely fantastic day. It is great to be able to do so once again today after some amendments from the upper house have seen this bill returned to this chamber.

In speaking on this matter this afternoon, and indeed hopefully moving to pass this bill today, the government is fulfilling one of its most important election commitments. The SEC will turbocharge Victoria's transition to a renewable energy future. I have spoken on several occasions in this place about the Allan Labor government's incredibly ambitious renewable energy targets. They are most certainly the most ambitious of any jurisdiction in this country and indeed some of the most ambitious of any jurisdiction anywhere right around the world. The SEC will turbocharge our trajectory to that renewable energy future right here in Victoria. In doing so we will make Victoria one of the most attractive places for business to invest anywhere in the world, whether that be through clean manufacturing or whether that be through significant renewable energy projects to get us to those ambitious targets or whether that be simply by creating a situation and an environment with clean energy and cheap, reliable power. It will just be a cheaper and more profitable place to do business.

But the SEC is not just doing that – that is a significant part of it, but it is not just doing that. In my maiden speech, almost a couple of years ago now, I said that the SEC is all about jobs. It will create 59,000 jobs right here in Victoria, including 6000 jobs, or roles, for apprentices and for trainees. When we made this announcement during the campaign and when I was going and speaking to voters in Hoppers Crossing and in Tarneit, they could remember with fondness their time working as young people in the SEC. During my time as a union official, going through manufacturing facilities and talking to workers, they spoke to me about where they did their apprenticeship, and they did it at the SEC. If those opposite have not quite figured out yet, it was a pretty popular announcement – it most certainly was in my electorate.

It is not enough for us to just bring back the SEC, for all the reasons that I just articulated; we also have to enshrine it in the constitution, which is also fulfilling an election promise that we made. We have to enshrine it in the constitution to protect it from the vandals opposite, because they have already said one of their first points of business if they are elected will be to trash the SEC once again. Now, we know –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: The member for South-West Coast is talking to herself again. We know that in 1994 –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, that was an entirely inappropriate way for the member to speak to a member on any side of the chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order, but the member to continue through the Chair.

Dylan WIGHT: We know that in 1994, under the Liberals, Jeff Kennett – he has had a big weekend – privatised the SEC. We know what the impact of that was: it drove electricity prices up by more than 50 per cent. Eight thousand people lost their jobs. The people that I speak to and that I spoke about in Hoppers Crossing, in the manufacturing facilities across Victoria – they lost their jobs because of Jeff Kennett. The member for Brighton wants to speak about an empty shell. If the member for Brighton wants to see an empty shell, he need look no further than his own party room, because his party room has not had an energy policy –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a debate on a set of amendments. I am not sure what the member is speaking about, but it is not that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member has strayed from the amendments in front of the house, and I ask him to come back.

Dylan WIGHT: As I said, it is a pleasure to be in here this afternoon to speak on the SEC and to fulfil one of the significant commitments that we made during the 2022 election – to not just bring back the SEC and turbocharge our transition to renewable energy but also enshrine it in the constitution. I commend this to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (13:54): I am pleased to rise today in the 6 minutes that are left to talk about bringing back the SEC. Everybody says this policy was what the people of Victoria wanted. Well, I tell you, I can stand here today and say it was so popular in the seat of Morwell, where we have made power for over 100 years and will continue to for the next 100 years in providing energy for Victoria, that they did not even vote a Labor member into Parliament. They voted a National member into Parliament – ‘We’re bringing back the SEC’ – because they could see right through it. That is what they could see through with bringing back the SEC. The people that had been in Loy Yang, had been in Hazelwood and also had been in Yallourn could see straight through the policy. We had ministers standing in the power station saying, ‘This is going to be the most wonderful thing we’ll ever see. It’s going to get our renewables through.’ Well, we have not seen one iota of renewables coming into the Latrobe Valley. Yes, actually, we do have a battery, which lasts for about 1 hour and 12 minutes if it is running at its full capacity, to generate power for the people of Victoria.

We are putting a lot of our energy into batteries, into wind farms and also into solar farms, but what they renege on and do not tell us is the price that it is going to cost to build the transmission lines to carry the power to get it to the power station so that we can have beautiful, clean, green energy here in Melbourne, where we sit. We can rely on our green energy coming from right around regional Victoria, because we do not want to have wind turbines in the inner city of Melbourne that are as tall as the Rialto building: ‘No, we don’t want to look at them, because that’s a little bit of pollution that’s going to be a little bit hard on the eyes, and we can’t palate that. So we’ll throw that out and dump them right around regional Victoria, and then we’ll build all these transmission lines, which are going to rip across beautiful farming land.’ What they also do not take into account is that we have got to feed people in this state. If we are going to stand here and have a renewables policy that is going to destroy our agriculture, our prime agricultural land that we need to feed the state – it beggars belief that we come in with all these policies. Our energy mix is going to be a mix of a lot of stuff; it is not going to be one magic bullet that makes it come through.

But we are talking about bringing back the SEC today. We have an office in Morwell that is going to be the hub for these 59,000 people, we take it – but we have one person that works there only a couple of days a week in a hot desk. It does not make sense. They are falling way behind to bring all this energy transition from these renewables online to secure the energy needs of the Victorian public. We are having more and more people moving into Victoria. Some are leaving because it is easier to be interstate to run your business, but we are getting more and more people here. When we come into the

state and we turn the light switch on in our house, all we want is for that light to come on. People do not care what the energy mix is; as long as it comes on, that is all they care about.

If bringing back the SEC, as I said, was so good and everybody in Victoria was so happy with it, why would they have voted me, a member of the National Party, into the seat of Morwell, where they came with this magnificent project to get their Labor candidate in? Thank goodness they did not succeed, because they are trying to decimate the Latrobe Valley at the moment with all the agendas that they have got. But they have got a roadblock in me. I will stand up here every single day and speak of the virtues of the Latrobe Valley, and I will point out and I will use scientific fact about how the SEC is actually failing the Victorian people and how it is making their energy prices go up. I get my bills, and they are not going down, down, down. Every single person in Victoria knows that our prices are going up, up, up. When will it stop? When will the minister get up and actually deal with the facts for the people of Victoria and give them the real reason for bringing back the SEC, which, as the Manager of Opposition Business said, is just a shell? It is getting to the point where people are starting to turn off because there is no end in sight. There is no way forward; we cannot see it. Our bills continue to come. The SEC is not working to bring our prices down, it is actually putting them up. The time has come where they need to stand up and speak the truth, to be honest with the people of Victoria and to tell them that this is not a policy that is going to bring clean, green energy to anywhere in the state at this stage, because all it is going to do is shut us down, and that is the way we need to –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for question time.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Short-stay accommodation

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. How many houses will Labor’s Airbnb tax shift onto the long-term rental market?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:01): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. It is good of you to squeeze us in between court time – question time, court time. It is good of him to squeeze us in. The Leader of the Opposition has asked a question about how we are working hard at every turn to use every lever available to us to build more homes. I say this to the Leader of the Opposition: what is clear from their announcement today is that Victorians –

James Newbury: On a point of order, on relevance, Speaker, it was a very simple, concise question, and I would ask you to bring the Premier to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been speaking for 20 seconds. I will give the Premier an opportunity to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked about our efforts to build more homes. As Victorians know, because they have seen it played out week after week, you just cannot trust a single thing that the Leader of the Opposition says, and you certainly cannot trust the opposition on the question of housing.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen is warned. Order! The house will come to order. The member for Footscray is warned.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question, and I would ask you to bring her to the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: We are using every lever possible to build more homes for more Victorians, because this is about giving more opportunity, particularly to younger Victorians, to be able to access their own homes. Victorians know well that you cannot trust this critical issue of building more homes to the Leader of the Opposition and the Victorian Liberals. You just cannot trust them.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, you have asked the Premier to come back to the question. Halfway through the response the Premier has not actually dealt with the substance of the question and is making a mockery of the standing orders. I would ask you to bring the Premier to the question.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South-West Coast is warned. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier is being relevant to the question in relation to Airbnbs shifting onto the long-term rental market and housing. She has been relevant so far.

Jacinta ALLAN: As part of that whole-of-government effort to use every lever we have to build more homes – not block more homes, not stop more homes, like the untrustworthy Liberal Party opposite – we are building more homes. As part of those efforts, we have acknowledged that particularly in regional Victoria a number of homes are locked up in Airbnb and in the longer term market. That means they are not available.

Cindy McLeish interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Eildon is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN: They are not available for key workers who work in our country hospitals, who work in our regional tourism industry and who underpin the economy and community of those regional communities. This is part of our overall effort to be able to provide more opportunity. This is what the Leader of the Opposition and his untrustworthy colleagues stand in the way of: giving more opportunity for more Victorians to be able to access a home.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, we asked a very direct question that sought a single response in relation to the number of homes that it will shift. For over 2 minutes now –

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

James Newbury: The Premier is continuing to debate the question and has not yet gone to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has discretion to determine the content of the answer. I ask the Premier to be relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Manager of Opposition Business, who seems to think we go to sleep at night dreaming about him, has raised a question about how many homes this will shift. This is exactly what the policy is designed to achieve: to make more properties available.

John Pesutto interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: Well, how many support you, mate? They definitely were not this supportive of you in court. This is about using every lever we have – not using every lever, like the Liberal or the opposition have said, to stop more homes.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): Labor's 2023 housing statement clearly states that 'local council charges on short-stay accommodation will be removed'. Why hasn't the government abolished the ability of local government to levy these charges?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): This piece of legislation is currently before the Legislative Council. As part of preparing for the bill to be debated by the Parliament there was

extensive consultation that was undertaken, particularly led by the Treasurer, in how we could best apply this policy. This is about looking at how we can make more homes available. Let us remember that there are key workers in regional Victoria –

Brad Rowswell interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Sandringham is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN: who cannot access the home they need near the local hospital or near the local hospitality outlet. It is about supporting those economies and those communities. That is why we are focused on providing more opportunity for more Victorians to be able to access a home close to where they work and support their community.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, the Premier is effectively still answering the first question. I would ask you to draw her back to the supplementary question about why the local government charges are not being abolished.

The SPEAKER: The Premier addressed the question in the start of her answer. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: apology to stolen generations

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): Last Thursday I had an enormous and humbling privilege. On behalf of successive Victorian governments and parliaments I recognised the injustice, acknowledged the enormous pain and finally admitted the truth. The Victorian government formally and privately apologised for the first time to First Nations Victorians who were forcibly removed from their families, communities, cultures and country as part of the stolen generations.

It was because of the laws and policies enacted in this very place that families were broken up, children were torn apart and lives were forever altered. We took children from their country and their culture. We forbade them from speaking their language and practising their traditions. We deprived them of the things that make them human, the things that make all of us whole, and we lied about it too. We falsified records and hid the truth about their beginnings.

Survivors have told me about their deep sense of disconnection, not knowing who they are or where they have come from, and for many the consequences have been lifelong. This apology that I delivered last Thursday has been a very, very long time coming for so many brave survivors. I want to acknowledge everyone who fought over so many decades to get to this point, and we are here and only here because of their fierce determination and the determination of people like Ian Hamm, Auntie Annie Nikkelson, Auntie Sandra Barber and every member of the stolen generations advisory and steering committee.

No amount of reparation can remedy the impacts of being taken from your family, but here in this place I do want to promise every child of a stolen generation that this is just the beginning, not the end. We will continue to listen to you and learn from you. We will ensure that your experience is never forgotten and it can never happen again.

Suburban Rail Loop

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. When sneakily announcing the additional \$837 million blowout on the Metro Tunnel before a three-day weekend, the Minister for Transport Infrastructure said it is ‘costing more to build anything anywhere in the world’. Why doesn’t this cost escalation on major projects apply to the Suburban Rail Loop East?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:12): I am very pleased to answer a question about the delivery of the Metro Tunnel project. Of course if those opposite had not scrapped the Metro Tunnel project, it would be open by now. The Leader of the Opposition has more front than Myer.

‘Sneakily’? This is a man who has been in the witness box for week upon week, where the question of character –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is just demeaning.

The SPEAKER: I ask members to raise their points of order succinctly, without commentary. Premier, I ask you to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The minister is making the details around the additional investment that we are making in the Metro Tunnel, because this is a project that is going to transform the way people move around our city and state.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was actually about cost escalation in relation to the Suburban Rail Loop East.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I remind the Leader of the Opposition that his question referred quite clearly to the Metro Tunnel, and this is a project that will be opened a full year ahead of schedule next year and will transform the way people move around our city and state. That is why we are continuing to work with our construction partners to deliver this vitally important project. It will bring tens of thousands of additional people in and out of the city every single day because they will be able to have more easy access to our train network, and that is exactly what the Suburban Rail Loop is also going to deliver.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question and is not dealing with the substance of the actual question. Her answer is responding generally rather than dealing with the substance of the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has discretion in the content of her answer. She was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition asked me about the Metro Tunnel and the Suburban Rail Loop, and I am delighted to answer about both of those vital projects, remembering that these are projects that are not supported by those opposite. They do not support these projects, the workers who work on them and the Victorians who will benefit from them. That is why, in terms of the delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop, we are focused on –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is a word you find hard to say. This is such an important project, and that is why we were pleased to be at the site in Burwood which will see tunnel-boring machines at work in 2026. We are working hard to deliver this project, as we should, because not only is it going to deliver the vital transport connections our growing city and state need, but around those six Suburban Rail Loop East precincts we will have the opportunity to build 70,000 more homes for more Victorians. This is vital to provide more opportunities –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is now the third answer where the Premier has been evasive and not answered the substance of the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: As we have been announcing contract awards, we have been providing updated information on how this project is progressing, both in its delivery and in the funding for this project. This is such a vital project, and no question from the untrustworthy Leader of the Opposition covers the fact that they are opposed to this project every step of the way.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:16): In September 2022 Infrastructure Australia asked for more information about the Premier’s pet project, the Suburban Rail

Loop. On 19 September 2024 the Minister for Transport Infrastructure said the Victorian government would provide the requested information ‘as soon as practicable’. Has this occurred?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:16): I know the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and the department have been providing a significant amount of information to both Infrastructure Australia and the federal department for this project. The reason why they have been doing that is of course that in the federal Labor government we have a partner in this project, a partner in this project that has provided \$2.2 billion. I was asked earlier about the Metro Tunnel –

Richard Riordan interjected.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: Not one single dollar from the federal Liberal government of the day was provided to this vitally important project. They found plenty of money, that federal Liberal government, for projects in Sydney and for projects in other parts of the country, but not here in Victoria. So, yes, we are working closely with Infrastructure Australia and the federal government on the delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop.

Ministers statements: outdoor recreation

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:17): We know busy families deserve great holidays in our great outdoors, and this summer they can do this for free. The Premier, the Speaker and I spent some time in beautiful Bendigo over the weekend announcing that all campers will have free access to every public campground in the state. This is while those opposite were busy trying to give the member for Hawthorn a permanent holiday. Campers will be able to snap a pic, take a video, who knows –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, it is clear that ministers statements are not opportunities to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come back to his ministers statement.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bulleen can leave the chamber for half an hour. I did warn you earlier.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Campers will be able to snap a pic, take a video and, who knows, even take a voice recording without worrying about a charge hanging over their head.

This builds on our government’s half-price camping commitment back in 2019, saving campers a whopping \$25.7 million. We know this initiative will provide a big boost for regional economies as more campers head out into the country. More than 50 million people already visit our state forests and national parks every year, and they do camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, four-wheel driving and much more. Our government will always make sure Victorians can access and enjoy the beautiful outdoors while protecting what needs to be protected.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland South is warned.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: We are also proud to be making it cheaper and easier for more Victorians to enjoy a day out on the water. We have abolished fees across boat ramps right through Victoria, and it is now free to launch and retrieve a vessel. That is just part of the reason why Victoria is home to fantastic events like the Hooked on Bellarine fishing festival in the member for Bellarine’s electorate, in Port Arlington in fact, last Sunday.

While Sunday marked national Gone Fishing Day, some members opposite have been fishing for their colleagues' votes for a long, long time. We will continue focusing on delivering for Victorians, reducing the cost of living and getting families out in the outdoors. In fact, talking about outdoor recreation, I will leave it to those opposite to decide who in their party room will take a hike in the next few months.

Suburban Rail Loop

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:20): My question is to the Premier. The government needs to acquire at least 314 properties to make way for Suburban Rail Loop East alone. During the middle of a housing crisis, how much is the Allan Labor government paying to acquire and demolish residential homes?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:20): This information around the acquisition of property to deliver Suburban Rail Loop East was disclosed as part of the independent environment effects statement process. That process was concluded in early 2022, and the details were made available publicly following that process, if my memory serves me correctly, from early 2022. So it has been known for some time that there would need to be a small number of acquisitions of property – some residential, some commercial – along the alignment. That is not unusual, and if the Leader of the Opposition had ever delivered a project, he would know that from time to time there is the need to acquire sometimes vacant land, residential land or commercial land to build vitally important projects. We have had to do this from time to time on level crossings, on the Metro Tunnel and on the North East Link project. Particularly in the instance of the Suburban Rail Loop this was disclosed through the environment effects statement process. I acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition has been a bit distracted lately, but this is information that has been publicly available for some time.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the fact of compulsory acquisition has been well known. My question was about the costs of compulsory acquisition.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being directly relevant to the question, which was about the SRL and acquiring homes to build that state-shaping project, and she is being directly relevant. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Also, further to this, since the release of the environment effects statement process in early 2022, as required by the land acquisition act that governs these processes, we have been working on a case-by-case basis with each landowner, and those processes, out of respect for those landowners, are obviously confidential. But the overall cost of the land acquisition, whether it be homes or vacant land or commercial properties, is all factored into the overall budget for the delivery of any given project. In this instance, it is factored into the budget for the delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop project.

Further to that, of course the delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop project gives us the opportunity to build 70,000 more homes in and around each of the six Suburban Rail Loop East train stations. And that is all about the work we are doing to give more opportunities to more Victorians to be able to access a home close to where they want to live, close to family – exactly in those locations, like in the middle of Camberwell, where you are close to a train station, to schools, to local shops and to other connections. That is what the Suburban Rail Loop East's six train stations will provide: the opportunity to put more homes around those train stations, which is exactly where Victorians have told us we should be building more homes, because it also gives more opportunities to more Victorians, particularly young Victorians, to be able to access a home where they want to live.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:24): Has the Premier had a discussion with the member for Box Hill about the 108 homes being demolished in his electorate?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:24): Yes, and I did so when I was the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. I know the Leader of the Opposition does not talk much to his colleagues – I know they do not get along – but of course I have spoken to the member for Box Hill.

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

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will repeat for the Manager of Opposition Business, who spends more time dreaming than listening: the answer is yes, of course I have spoken to the member for Box Hill. He is an outstanding member for Box Hill who works incredibly hard. I was delighted to join the member for Box Hill just last week with members of the Whitehorse Asian business association, and guess what we spoke about: the Suburban Rail Loop and the opportunities that are going to come to the Box Hill community in terms of retail opportunities, commercial opportunities and the opportunity to build more homes close to a train station. I know it is a foreign concept to talk to your colleagues. I do it all the time; maybe the Leader of the Opposition should take that approach as well.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:26): I am absolutely delighted to be able to update the house on how Victoria is leading the nation when it comes to building more homes. ABS data published last week confirms Victoria is building thousands more homes than any other state. In the last 12 months Victoria has built more than 60,000 homes, which is nearly 15,000 more than New South Wales and 27,000 more than Queensland, and when it comes to home approvals Victoria continues to set the national benchmark, approving 10,000 more homes than New South Wales and 18,000 more homes than Queensland.

We have not got here by accident. We know that, when you build more homes, housing becomes more affordable, and right now Melbourne is one of the most affordable capital cities for homebuyers. But simply doing better than other states is not enough. We want more homes for young Victorians and more homes for families, and where those homes go matters. That is why we are planning for more homes in activity centres – 60,000 more homes in these great locations with good transport connections, close to services and jobs and close to family and friends. We want Victorians to have opportunity and choice about where they live. It is the right thing to do; it is the fair thing to do.

Just ask Cameron from Camberwell. Cameron, who works in hospitality, wrote to me recently, and he wrote, ‘Please let my voice be as loud as the NIMBYs. This housing needs to be built.’ I hear you, Cameron. The Allan Labor government hears you, and we are going to do even more to build more homes for young Victorians just like Cameron. Contrast this with others, people who say they support more homes but who, when the shovels are about to hit the ground, get on the utes and block more housing in their own backyards.

Road maintenance

Danny O’BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:28): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. In 2019 a government media release announced ‘Massive maintenance blitz for Victorian roads’. In 2020 it was mission accomplished with ‘Massive road maintenance blitz complete’. In 2021 it was mission accomplished again: ‘Major road maintenance blitz wraps up’. In 2022 the announcement became ‘Road maintenance blitz rolls out across regional Victoria’; in 2023 ‘Road maintenance blitz kicks off across regional Victoria’; and in 2024, finally, yesterday, ‘Road maintenance blitz revs up across regional Victoria’. When will the Labor government stop the spin blitz and actually fix our roads?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for South-West Coast! I will call the minister when the house comes to order. That was a very long preamble, member for Gippsland South.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Polwarth withdrew from chamber.

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:30): I really thank the member for highlighting our sustained and continued investment in road maintenance. It gave me enormous pleasure that yesterday we announced \$964 million to go out there and fix our roads.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Berwick is warned.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Melissa HORNE: There are roads that are going to be repaired in your electorate –

The SPEAKER: Order! I would like to hear the minister's answer, member for Gippsland South.

Melissa HORNE: and in fact there have been works going on on highways in your electorate, fixing – sorry, in yours too, Speaker. There will not be a single part of this state that does not benefit from works continuing across nearly 400 kilometres in regional Victoria. It is a massive boost. This is the most massive boost that we have ever had to fixing roads. This is rebuilding, it is repairing and it is rehabilitating roads right across the state.

Members interjecting.

Melissa HORNE: Do not worry, member for South-West Coast, there are some works happening on the Princes Highway too in between Portland and Warrnambool.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for South-West Coast, this is your third warning.

Melissa HORNE: There are works happening across the state, and it is terrific that we have been able to fire the starting pistol on getting this work done, because, as the member has pointed out, it is an annual program. Last year it was \$770 million, the year before it was more than that –

Members interjecting.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was specifically about when the roads will be fixed, not how much work we will keep doing on them for years and years.

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

Melissa HORNE: There are crews out there now. There are actually crews out there now. This work was announced in the budget. As I said, we have fired the starting pistol on getting more crews out there to rehabilitate, resurface and repair roads.

Danny O'Brien (Gippsland South) (14:32): Labor's own survey last year showed that 91 per cent of Victorian roads were in poor or very poor condition. What is the current figure?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:33): Again I thank the member for his question. He is being a little shifty, frankly, with the data that he is quoting, because the data that he is quoting is actually around the surveys that we did for roads that were affected by floods, and guess what it showed: 91 per cent of the roads that were actually affected

by floods were damaged. They are the roads that we are prioritising, that we are getting out there and fixing, and that will happen across the state. You know what, when those floods in October 2022 occurred, of the 79 local council areas, 63 of them were under water – 63 of them were flood affected.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, apart from the fact the minister refuses to release that survey, so we have to take it on her word, the question was about what the current figure is.

The SPEAKER: Order! Be succinct with your point of order. I cannot tell the minister how to answer the question. She is being relevant.

Melissa HORNE: Back to the question: a significant amount of our roads – in fact, 91 per cent of our roads – that were underwater were affected by floods.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mildura is warned. Order! The member for Croydon is warned.

Ministers statements: renewable energy

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:34): I am absolutely delighted to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is delivering cheap renewable energy for Victorians. Last Friday I had the absolute pleasure of standing with farmer Kevin Blake as we switched on the Golden Plains wind farm – 1.3 gigawatts of capacity, soon to be the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. It will generate enough electricity to power 760,000 homes. That is equal to every home right across regional Victoria, 9 per cent of Victoria's energy needs. With a \$4 billion investment and 700 jobs, on an annual basis \$215,000 is going to go into a community benefits fund. It will droughtproof the farms of 37 host landholders. Our renewable energy target is 95 per cent by 2035, and may I say the fast-track approvals for critical renewable projects, thanks to our terrific planning minister, will make sure that we create an environment that attracts investment into this state, creating those jobs and keeping the lights on as our ageing coal-fired generators reach their end of life. It is all part of a plan to keep the lights on, lower our energy bills, create 59,000 jobs and reduce emissions.

There are alternatives of course to this. Last week the opposition slipped through their recycled anti-renewables policy, which will take us back to the dark ages when no wind farms were actually able to get off the ground in this state. Fourteen wind farm projects were abandoned in Victoria between 2010 and 2014. Within a year of the announcement of that recycled policy, 14 wind farms went out the door. *(Time expired)*

Suburban Rail Loop

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:36): My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier rule out implementing any value capture tax prior to Suburban Rail Loop East being operational?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:37): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question and the opportunity to go back and remind the Leader of the Opposition about information that is already on the public record when it comes to delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop, a vitally important project that we simply cannot afford not to build. Whether you want to see the construction of more homes, whether you want to see the construction of more train services, whether you want to see the opportunity for people to live close to those train connections, this is what the Suburban Rail Loop project will deliver. When we released the business and investment case in August 2021 – actually, no, I go back to a further point in time. When we announced this project in August 2018, and of course since then Victorians have had the opportunity to twice endorse the delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop as a project that they want to see the government get on and deliver, particularly those communities –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I did allow the Premier some time before rising to make this point of order, but the question was very specific to whether the Premier can rule out a value capture tax.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I am delighted to go back to talking about the delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop, because when we first announced this project we did say – we were very clear about this – that because of the significant benefits that will come from the delivery of this project, it would be funded from a third federal, a third state and a third non-government sources. We said this. This is consistent –

John Pesutto: Who are they?

Jacinta ALLAN: I refer the Leader of the Opposition back to the August 2021 business case. I know the Leader of the Opposition has been a little distracted. He has been reading court papers, not business cases. I know it has been a bit busy for the Leader of the Opposition these last few weeks. We have been really clear that this is a project of national significance. It is going to deliver significant, enormous benefits, productivity uplift and job uplift. That is why we are seeking support from the federal government, and we are so pleased to have a partner in the Albanese Labor government in this project. In addition, this is consistent with what we have seen around the removal of our level crossings, where there has been a value uplift realised for some private landowners around those sites. We have been clear about this.

And, you know what, this is not a foreign concept. This is a concept that was advocated by people like Malcolm Turnbull when he was Prime Minister for projects like the Sydney Metro, which was delivered in part by the Liberal government of the day in New South Wales. It is how parts of the city loop have been delivered. This approach of having non-government revenue from those who will see a value uplift in the project is common practice, and we have already indicated that that is something that we will be pursuing as part of the delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:40): Will the Premier rule out a land tax surcharge to pay for the Suburban Rail Loop?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:40): Indeed I am happy to come back and correct the date if my memory has served me incorrectly, but when we released the business and investment case in August 2021 we did say at that point in time that we would not be looking at residential properties. But we did say that there was an opportunity for some who would see some value uplift to look at value capture partnerships from those projects. This is consistent with what we have seen with the Sydney Metro and with the city loop in the past. This is completely consistent with that we have seen in the past.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, Frankie Carroll in his evidence to PAEC in May of this year said that a land tax surcharge had been submitted to government as an option.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. On relevance, the Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: There are lots of options over there at the moment – lots of people considering their options over there. This is all about the Leader of the Opposition demonstrating that he cannot be trusted with vitally important projects. Opposing the Suburban Rail Loop, opposing the Metro Tunnel, opposing the North East Link and opposing level crossings is entirely consistent with the record of the Leader of the Opposition.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Malvern is warned again.

Ministers statements: education

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:42): Students, teachers and families are all back for term 4, and so is the Leader of the Opposition. While those opposite have been focused on themselves, we have been focused on families and talking to families. While they are dreaming of revolutions, we are dreaming of how to make our state fairer and more prosperous for every student. That is why during the school holiday period we were talking to all our peak bodies, from Parents Victoria to the Victorian Council of Social Service, about the school saving bonus, and they made it very clear that they want cost-of-living support. They made it very clear that they want to make sure they get support for textbooks and for camps and do everything they can. That is why the Allan Labor government is working very hard to make sure that business managers and parents have the most seamless process for applying for the school saving bonus.

But it does not stop there. We know how hard it is to concentrate. Whether you are in the classroom or even if you are in the courtroom, you need to have a full stomach. That is why we are rolling out the breakfast program to every one of our 82 specialist schools. Under the Allan Labor government we are upgrading every single specialist school in this state. When you talk about fairness it does not get more important than upgrading and supporting our specialist schools. They will benefit from the school saving bonus as well as the free breakfast program. We also know, given the importance of concentrating if you have got vision impairment, there is the Glasses for Kids program. That is why we have tripled funding under the Allan Labor government for the Glasses for Kids program.

We are getting on and supporting every student right across our state. We are not talking about HECS for high schools. We are talking about school saving bonuses. We are talking about cost-of-living support, the free breakfast program, the free glasses program and Respectful Relationships. More recently, the Premier has been leading on Safe Socials to make sure social media is discussed in the family home as well as at school. We will continue to build the Education State under Premier Allan.

Constituency questions

Murray Plains electorate

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:45): (830) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Lake Lyndger borders a game hunting reserve in my electorate. Parks Victoria have installed a gate on the access track at the south-east corner of Lake Lyndger. Hunters are concerned that Parks Vic will lock this gate in future, excluding them from vehicle access to this part of Lake Lyndger. I ask the minister to provide information as to whether the gate that Parks Vic have installed on the south-east access to Lake Lyndger will be locked in the future.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:45): (831) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Can the minister please outline what benefits my community of Kororoit will see in the recently announced road maintenance blitz? As the minister knows, I am quite passionate about the roads in and around my patch of Kororoit, and I was extremely excited about the announcement of the largest single-year investment in road maintenance in the state's history. My electorate is quite large in size compared to my other metro colleagues, with a large mix of both expanding residential and industrial areas, and roads within my electorate are in dire need of upgrades. My constituents and I will eagerly await the minister's response.

Eildon electorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:46): (832) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. The Labor government have axed funding for the Queensland fruit fly coordinators across the state because they cannot manage money. These vital roles provide a mechanism for government to work with and educate communities to help stop the spread of the fruit fly. What now is the minister's plan to work with and educate communities to prevent widescale spreading of this destructive horticultural pest?

The coordinators are proactive. They remind both commercial and backyard growers when it is essential to bait weekly, to trap and to actively treat and deal with waste fruit to prevent the pest from establishing in their region. They offer seminars, community information sessions, attend events and field days and have newspaper articles. Prevention needs to be part of the equation. It is too late to contact Agriculture Victoria once the fruit fly has established. Coordinators should be part of the shared and collaborative approach.

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:47): (833) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Yesterday the major road maintenance blitz was announced, with \$964 million going to rebuild, repair and resurface roads across the state in the next nine months. Minister, how will this funding benefit my electorate of the Bellarine? Not only do local residents rely on our highways and residential roads every day, but we also have heightened traffic every year over the summer period, when tourists flock to the Bellarine for our incredible beaches, wineries and townships. I look forward to hearing how this announcement will benefit my electorate.

South-West Coast electorate

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:48): (834) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. When was it first identified that the train platforms on the Warrnambool line are too short to accommodate a six-carriage VLocity train, which is the same capacity as our existing N-class train service? The government's upgrade is a downgrade, as they plan to run three-carriage VLocity trains at half the seating capacity with no buffet car. For long trips this is inadequate, particularly for people with special dietary needs, like diabetics. Disability groups are concerned about the safety of disabled people standing for 3-plus hours. After waiting for more than seven years the community are extremely disappointed to realise they have been duped. This is due to the government's lack of planning for increased demand, capacity, safety and amenity. The VLocity trains should at least match the amenity and capacity of the current service.

Monbulk electorate

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:49): (835) My constituency question is for the Minister for Small Business. What supports are available for small business owners if their landlord and/or real estate agent are failing to meet their obligations? A local business owner recently contacted me explaining that he was told by his agent that he had to personally cover the cost of repairs of faulty air conditioning and sewerage at the premises he leases, despite the Retail Leases Act 2003 stating that the commercial tenant is not liable for these repairs. When landlords and agents do not meet their obligations and do the right thing, it can put people's small businesses at risk. I know our government recognises the rights of residential renters, and we are taking action to improve the rental market, whether it is through our taskforce cracking down on dodgy rental leases or increasing minimum standards in homes, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Brunswick electorate

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:49): (836) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Two weeks ago a Brunswick constituent contacted me after a motorcycle accident on Lygon Street, Brunswick. His bike hit a patch of Lygon Street where the bitumen has sunk well below the tramlines, which now sit above the road, creating a serious hazard for anyone on two wheels. He was sent over the handlebars and injured. Victorian road crash data recorded eight motorcycle injuries on this part of Lygon Street in 2023, two requiring hospitalisation. None of these accidents involved another vehicle – they were all due to loss of control. I understand that deliberation about who is responsible for this sunken bitumen is delaying repairs but that the responsibility ultimately lies with Yarra Trams. When will this dangerous patch of road be fixed?

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:50): (837) My question is to the Minister for Education. How is the Allan Labor government's safer faith-based schools grants program making communities of faith safer in Tarneit? I am proud that the Islamic College of Melbourne has received a share of the \$2 million investment designed to keep our faith-based schools safe. The Islamic College of Melbourne is an outstanding school in Tarneit, which is home to a strong and vibrant Muslim community. Ensuring the safety and security of this community is vital, especially in times of division. We know so many families are affected by and worried about their loved ones in the Middle East, testing social cohesion. We also know that families and school communities just want the best education for their children, without needing to worry about their safety. This government is committed to ensuring all students can learn in a safe and secure environment. That is why we are investing in the safety of our students and faith-based communities.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:51): (838) My question is to the Minister for Carers and Volunteers. Can the minister please inform Feed One Feed All, from my electorate in Rowville, what the government is doing to support volunteer organisations like Feed One Feed All, which aim to feed people who are living below the poverty line. Feed One Feed All is an organisation based in Scoresby that aims to address the very serious issue of lack of food and malnutrition in Melbourne's outer east. Feed One Feed All is doing a fantastic job trying to fix this issue, already on track to provide over 40,000 meals this year alone. However, Lillie and her team cannot do it alone. The state government needs to be supporting fantastic volunteers such as this organisation. I look forward to hearing what the government is planning to do to support the volunteer team at Feed One Feed All.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:52): (839) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health, and the question I ask is: how will women living in the electorate of Wendouree benefit from the Allan Labor government's investment in women's health clinics? I am passionate about the provision of health care for women in my community, and I am particularly interested to learn more about the provision of gynaecological services as well as treatment for pelvic pain conditions and menopause. I am proud to be a part of a government that has made women's health and wellbeing its priority. Our health matters, and we need to be heard and believed and have our medical needs taken seriously and addressed effectively. I look forward to the minister's response.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I still have a number of questions that are unanswered by ministers and overdue now. To the Minister for Jobs and Industry, there is adjournment matter 833 and questions on notice 1621, 1622 and 1623. There are a number with the Minister for Skills and TAFE – questions 1141, 1357 and 1358. To the Minister for Economic Growth, the questions overdue are questions 1589, 1591, 1592, 1599, 1629 and 1630 – still defying the orders of the house.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no commentary associated with a point of order. I would like to remind members that the procedure office is currently updating the database as we speak in relation to questions that have not been responded to, so I encourage members to check later today and, if it is still an issue, to raise points of order tomorrow.

Sam Groth: Thank you, Speaker. I will take up your note there, but I also raise a point of order in relation to question 835 to the Minister for Emergency Services and constituency question 784 to the Minister for Children.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, it is disappointing, given that your directive before the break was to –

The SPEAKER: Order! What is your point of order, member for South-West Coast? I ask you to state your point of order succinctly.

Roma Britnell: Like the previous point of order, the Minister for Children in the other place has 24 outstanding questions on child protection. Those are numbers 1686, 1685, 1684, 1406, 1405, 1404, 1403, 1402, 1401, 1400, 1399, 1398, 1397, 1396, 1395, 1394, 1393, 1392, 1391, 1390, 1686, 1685, 1684 and 1395, which was due in August, a long time ago.

The SPEAKER: I refer the member to my previous comments about the procedure office currently updating the database.

Bills

Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023

Council's amendments

Debate resumed.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Sam Hibbins, 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, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, 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, Nicole Werner

Motion agreed to.

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

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

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (15:03): I rise today to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. At the outset I think it is important for the chamber to pause and reflect upon those young people who have lost their lives at music festivals – people who had gone out to have the time of their lives, who had probably been planning it for a very, very long period of time, but who sadly did not make it home to their loved ones. It is a situation that no friend wants to witness – nobody wants to be hospitalised and feel that that could have happened to them. And it is certainly not a situation that any family member – any parent, any sibling – or any friend would ever want to hear had happened.

That is the biggest challenge when it comes to dealing with issues and the impact of drugs and alcohol in our communities: they do take lives. In the last 10 years we have lost over 5000 Victorians to drug

overdose. This is not just about illicit drugs, it is also about over-the-counter drugs and harms and overdoses due to alcohol. It is something that as a community we accept and often turn a blind eye to when in fact the harms of alcohol are very deep in our communities. They are drivers of violence, including family violence, but too often alcohol and other drugs (AOD) are overlooked in terms of their impacts on our community.

There are many different views about different policy ideas within the drug framework. I have been the Shadow Minister for Mental Health for a long time now – I think about seven or eight years – and over that time there have been many differing positions about different ideas that were put forward to the Victorian people for consideration. I have certainly taken my time to listen to the harm reduction sector, to talk about what we like and what we agree with and to talk about what we do not necessarily agree with. It has always been a respectful conversation. I deeply respect the work of the alcohol and other drug sector and particularly respect their tenacity in wanting to see change, in wanting to see more support for the alcohol and other drug sector, but most importantly in making sure that we have more supports available to Victorians who are going through the challenges of using alcohol or other drugs, often to deal with past traumas in their lives when they cannot access other mental health supports, and for those who have no other alternatives. They do not know how else to deal with the traumas that are impacting their every day, with their mental health concerns or with other contributing factors to the reasons why people use and misuse drugs and alcohol.

We have had a briefing on this bill. However, a number of questions that the Liberals and the Nationals asked remain unanswered. It is very concerning to me that a policy that has promised so much, particularly to parents of Victorian young people who are heading to music festivals, has been so grossly under-researched and underdeveloped in terms of the ability of the government to share that information not just to the Liberals and Nationals in this chamber or the other chamber but also the Victorian community. We have a responsibility on this side of the chamber. It is not just the Liberals and Nationals; it is the Greens in this chamber as well and the crossbenchers in the upper house. We have an obligation to scrutinise legislation. We can best do that by having a full understanding of what model the government is proposing and having an open discussion around that.

I am very fearful that the government's lack of ability to answer the questions that have been put to them in a timely manner or with any detail at all actually indicates that there is no detail around how pill testing will operate in Victoria in the upcoming summer. This is how soon we are talking about this being rolled out. We are talking about legislation that will come into place. Then we have got –

Juliana Addison interjected.

Emma KEALY: I pick up the interjection from the member for Wendouree – I realise it is not parliamentary to do so – of what harm would be done. I was raised by amazing parents, and they always embedded in my way of thinking that you do it once and you do it right. Member for Wendouree, my concern is that the government is not doing this right. This is policy on the run when basic questions cannot be answered about how this legislation will operate in practice. We have a number of questions which remain outstanding and cannot be answered. If the member for Wendouree says, 'That's not right,' it is – that is actually correct. We put a number of questions to the government. In fact today my contribution will go for more time than the amount of time we were given to ask questions. I will note that the questions that were taken on notice during our bill briefing, including questions from the sectors that we work with in our community and the AOD sector in particular, were unable to be answered. If there are promises of what this will deliver, that is fine, but you need to have substance behind it; otherwise it is nothing more than mere words.

I have key concerns around the construct of the legislation. I think there are some issues with how this bill has been drafted which will restrict essential information from being passed on to clients who share their drugs for testing within that environment. From my experience as a laboratory scientist, as a lab manager and a regional lab manager for the state of Victoria – for all labs in Victoria and Tassie – someone responsible for drug testing, who has undertaken drug testing before, who understands what

it means to set up a laboratory for testing, I am able to share my firsthand experience, because I have had a job in the real world. I have not just come through political offices to get my job. I am able to apply that and use that knowledge and experience, including that of the people that I engage with and speak to. I have key concerns around how this legislation has been put together, and I would urge all members of this chamber to review this legislation, because it has to be right. There is no doubt this legislation will get through both chambers of Victoria's Parliament. We know that the support is there, and therefore there is an obligation upon the government to ensure that whatever legislation is in place will meet the needs and what is being promised in the media releases.

I would like to outline today a variety of different issues that I have around the legislation and the limitations that the legislation puts in place that restrict the opportunity to access information, which I think is critical to young people making decisions around how to interpret the test results that will be provided to them. I also have other concerns around how this model will operate in terms of information which is not being provided publicly, whether it is around the staff and their training and qualifications or whether it is around how we link into an emergency drug reporting or alert system or when we look at other challenges that we have seen in jurisdictions in Australia in regard to access to insurance cover, which can pull apart the opportunity to run and operate pill testing very quickly. I have other concerns around the planning permits not required for the fixed testing site. There are issues around fit and proper person tests.

These are basic things that we see in other pieces of legislation which have not been applied fully in this legislation. We have not got details around key elements of how the sites will operate, particularly the mobile sites, knowing that we are restricted in the type of analyser that can be utilised in a mobile site. There are questions from the AOD sector, the alcohol and other drugs sector, as to what the limitations are of that testing and whether it will in fact be sensitive or specific enough to be able to identify some of the up-and-coming dangerous drugs that we are concerned might become present in the community of Victoria. We also have concerns around other aspects, including how we can do better to look at some of those other risks that are inherent for summer music festivals. I will share my experiences of music festivals in my own electorate – the Pitch festival, for example, earlier this year – and reflect upon Hardmission. It is a story that was shared many, many times through the media earlier this year and was the trigger for the government to put this policy in place.

Of course I would also like to touch on naloxone. There are two provisions or two main focuses of this legislation. One part is establishing a pill-testing service in the state of Victoria. The other is around naloxone, expanding availability of naloxone and of course making naloxone available through vending machines at 20 sites, apparently, across Victoria. I will start off on naloxone, because I think that that is a story which really starts off in Victoria with the former Minister for Mental Health, Mary Wooldridge, who was in the Liberal-Nationals government. Mary really led the way when it came to looking at ways we can implement harm reduction strategies by looking at opportunities to access drugs that can reverse the impact of opioids or to expand treatment and rehabilitation options.

Mary really only got some of the way through the reforms that she was establishing. The recommissioning was dismantled by Labor when they came into government, but it was certainly – and this is what I hear from the AOD sector – making great strides towards a mental health system in particular but also an AOD support system that was more responsive to the needs of Victorians in the place that they needed it and when they needed it. That is so essential when it comes to AOD treatment and support and also mental health support.

Mary did an incredible job in that she actually launched the first availability of Narcan, which is a brand name, or naloxone to be made available to drug addicts and their families and carers by prescription. This was a huge step forward at the time in that naloxone, which reverses the impact of heroin, was something that would be made more widely available not just to medical professionals but also through prescription so you could have something handy on your person at home or wherever those drugs were being utilised so that if somebody did accidentally overdose, somebody near to them would be able to administer Narcan, which is naloxone, to reverse the effect of heroin and other

synthetic opioids such as codeine, methadone, morphine and fentanyl. It is used by paramedics now and it was then, but this is something that would take it out of that medical setting. That was back in 2013.

In 2014, a year later, there was a commitment by Victorian mental health minister Mary Wooldridge, a Liberal Party member, that there would be a trial of syringe vending machines of naloxone. That was in 2014, and yet here we are 10 years later – many overdoses later, many fatal overdoses later, after many lives lost to heroin and other opioid overdoses – rolling out the legislation today. It is of course positive that 10 years on from that commitment by the Liberal–Nationals we are seeing the rollout of naloxone in vending machines. It is something that is well overdue, but we do need to make sure that it is done in a way that can deliver support to most Victorians.

We asked during the bill briefing where the 20 units would be located, and unfortunately we were not able to learn that information. One of the concerns of the AOD sector and also of my colleagues – particularly my Nationals colleagues in regional Victoria and the Liberal member for South-West Coast, my neighbour to the south, as she is – is that there are not going to be any vending machines available within hundreds of kilometres of our people. To say that there are not heroin issues or opioid-related issues in our community is both naive and wrong. It is incorrect. I do encourage the government to ensure that rural and regional Victoria does not miss out when it comes to access to drug and alcohol support, because, sadly, time and time again we do see our regions miss out. We see our regions miss out when it comes to residential rehabilitation. The member for South-West Coast and I have been working for a very long time to secure funding. For seven years we have been fighting for funding for the Lookout. There are no public drug and alcohol rehab beds available in the south-west of Victoria. The Lookout is a fabulous model. It incorporates a focus on the Indigenous community. Everything the community have done and the Lookout committee have done to establish this model is excellent. It deserves funding. The people of south-west Victoria deserve access to local support.

I also mention the member for Mildura, who is seated behind me. She has been a fierce advocate, as was her predecessor Peter Crisp, the former member for Mildura. Both of them tirelessly worked to try and establish a residential rehabilitation service for the Mildura community. In the north-west of the state there is no access to public residential rehab beds. This is a disgrace. We need to make sure that all Victorians can access residential rehab. If they want treatment, they should be able to access it. At the moment the waitlist for residential rehab is just growing in Victoria; in fact it has doubled over the past three years. There are 5000 Victorians on the waitlist for residential rehab, and yet we do not see any investment in those services. This must change to save Victorian lives.

In regard to my concerns with the legislation specifically, new section 20AA(5)(b) states that general drug-checking workers are not authorised:

to provide a drug-checking service other than the service of providing harm reduction information.

In the legislation we actually see a definition of ‘harm reduction information’. This is very positively affirmed on the substance that has been detected within the pills or the drugs that have been provided for testing. I note it is not just pills, it is also other substances. It can be in other forms. And I note that it is (a) information about the composition of a substance, including information about the presence of poisons, controlled substances and other drugs of dependence in it or (b) information about the use of that substance, considering its composition. And then thirdly, it is around information and advice about access to health services, welfare services and similar assistance.

I am deeply concerned that when you look at the parts of that legislation, in that a general drug-checking worker cannot speak – there is a legislated ban on speaking about anything aside from that – it means that automatically you cannot talk about what is not within those drugs that have been provided for testing. It means that by law the general drug-checking worker cannot share limitations about the testing. As I said, the government could not share with us the analysers that will be put in place. They could not share the sensitivity or the specificity of the testing. They could not share whether it will be National Association of Testing Authorities accredited or not, whether it would be

a known category S lab – a specialised lab – in accordance with the national pathology standards. That information is not available. We also therefore have a limitation that general drug-checking workers cannot share key information that is in this legislation which is that civil legal liabilities have been waived. If someone makes a mistake and gives somebody the wrong results, which can happen, there is actually no civil action that that person can take if there is an overdose, if there is a wrong result or if there is a fatality. It is something that I believe needs to be changed in legislation to include discussion around what the limitations are of testing but also around legal liabilities being waived. I think that that is essential in terms of informed decision-making and, particularly around harm reduction, in informing people what is in a substance but most importantly what is not detected because your analyser is not sensitive enough to pick up that drug.

I pick up on that because it is an area of concern that the alcohol and other drug sector has in particular that the quality of analyser that is being put in place in the mobile sites is not sensitive enough to pick up some of the highly potent new drugs that are entering into the Victorian drug system. The one that is most topical is around nitazenes. Nitazenes are a hundred times more potent than heroin, and so it is a very, very, very tiny amount that needs to be present in a drug in order to perhaps be at a potency and at a strength which is fatal to some Victorians. This promise and this commitment that we are testing drugs to pick up dangerous drugs is one thing, but if you are putting in place analysers that do not have the sensitivity to pick up those highly potent drugs at tiny, tiny levels of detection, that is a big problem, particularly when you couple it to the issue that I raised before – that the general drug-checking workers cannot share that information about what is not detected in the drugs that that have been submitted for testing. It is something that must be addressed.

We know that this is an issue in Victoria. Recently, in June, we saw the horrible fatalities of four Victorians in Broadmeadows – a 17-year-old and three adults. They thought that they were using cocaine is what is understood. It had nitazenes in it, and nitazenes are so, so potent. It is likely these people died within between 30 seconds and 2 minutes of taking the drug. There is no time to call an ambulance. There is no time to do anything. It is horrific. If we are looking at what the Premier has said and the minister has said in their public media statements about reducing the harms of some of these newer drugs, then we need to make sure we have got a testing protocol but also analysers in place that can actually do what you are promising to deliver.

There are other concerns I have around linkages within the legislation to mandatory obligations for an early drug warning system. Again, this is an issue that has been raised over and over by the alcohol and other drugs sector – that it is taking too long to notify the Victorian community when tainted drugs or dangerous drugs are identified. There are two examples of that. One is the example I have just mentioned, the Broadmeadows nitazene-tainted cocaine that resulted in four horrific fatalities of Victorians. We look at the time frames around that. These four people, their bodies were discovered on Tuesday 25 June. It was not until Monday 1 July that Victorians were issued with a drug alert. That is six days of an extraordinarily dangerous substance being in the Victorian population when Victorians were not given any information even though the government had that information. That must be put in place.

If we are serious about harm reduction and informing the community and saving Victorian lives, which is the constant line that is rolled out, then surely an early warning system should be mandated through legislation when you have got a drug-testing service. It is a minimum obligation of the government when they are funding a drug-checking service to say, ‘We are also going to share these results with the community in a very short time frame’ rather than sitting on the results for a week. It is not unusual to see – I am not picking one out of the sky that had a very long turnaround time on results. If we look back at the Hardmission Festival, there were obviously a number of overdoses to arise out of that – a mass overdose event. But that was on Saturday 6 January. It was not until Friday 12 January that a drug alert was issued. It is too long. That should be mandated in the legislation. We need to make sure that any tainted drugs are widely broadcast to the community, particularly when the government are responsible for testing of that.

There is another aspect around these events that I have just referred to, particularly when you look at music festivals, and it is the inextricable link between music festivals and heat and humidity and overexertion – those physiological injuries which are leading to people being hospitalised and unfortunately to fatalities. In studies that arise out of festivals where they have had pill testing we will always see the number of drugs that were tested, the number of drugs that were not what people expected, the number of people who discarded drugs. That is fine, but let us look at the outcomes as well. Are we seeing the same level of overdose at those festivals before and after? They are mixed results. I think we see sometimes some picking and choosing of which data we look at, but there are certainly some festivals where there has not been any decline at all in overdose or hospitalisation following an event versus sometimes there is fewer. Sometimes there is more. It is not consistent. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and I think it is very dangerous for anybody. I have heard this, and I hope I do not hear it during today's today debate. Pill testing may inform people about the choices they make about taking drugs, but it will not stop drug overdoses. It will not stop people dying from fatal overdoses either. I wish it were the case – all of us wish that that was the case – but we cannot overpromise and underdeliver when it comes to drug use in Victoria.

As I have stated, I am very concerned about the limitations that the government have put in place around dealing with particularly the pathology testing side. When you are issuing a government-issued test result in a laboratory, we need to make sure that that laboratory is appropriately accredited, that it has got a licence that puts obligations upon how testing protocols are developed, that ensures quality assurance and a quality control system. That is something that is standard practice for every other laboratory that is open in Victoria and Australia. It provides consistency. It is something that the National Pathology Accreditation Advisory Council has mandated to support state governments and federal governments to ensure we have a level of testing where we can rely on the results. That should be a minimum requirement as part of this legislation.

We also note that there is no fit and proper person test for special drug-checking workers, even though they are going to be handling the drugs for testing. There is no fit and proper person test for general drug-checking workers, and this is noting that some will be employees and some will be volunteers. We need to make sure that particularly people who are handling the drugs can pass the fit and proper person test. That is something that is not unusual in other pieces of legislation.

We note that no planning permit is required to develop a premises as a fixed drug-checking service. Again, we do not see any consultation with the local community, and we have seen what has happened with that with the proposed second injecting room in the former Yooralla building on the corner of Flinders Street and Degraes Street. We look at what has happened with the medically supervised injecting room in the middle of one of the highest density public housing areas in the state of Victoria, where there has been –

Michaela Settle interjected.

Emma KEALY: The modelling indicates there may have been some change. However, the outcome has not been in place; in fact it has never been evaluated. Is it appropriate to have an injecting room next door to a primary school? Is the location right? That is something that everybody would like evaluated, because maybe moving it would be a good outcome and actually provide a pathway of opportunity to stop these stories that come out time and time again of dead bodies next to a primary school. That is not an appropriate way to treat children. There is no evaluation about the site. I am happy –

Members interjecting.

Emma KEALY: That is simply modelling. The death rate has gone up, sadly, I would like to say. When there are dead bodies outside primary schools and you are having schools shut down because there are dead bodies that primary school aged children are walking past, that is inappropriate. I cannot support that as the mother of a four-year-old and an 11-year-old. I would never support that for my

child, or any Victorian's child, particularly those people who have no choice about where they send their children to school. If they live in those public housing towers, they have to send their child to the nearest public school. They do not have a choice about sending their children somewhere else. You should listen to those people you purport to represent.

There are issues around so many aspects of how Labor deal with drugs and alcohol in this state. SafeScript is nothing more than a software-flagging system. There has been no additional access to alternative pain management support. It just has not provided any support, and of course people cannot access treatment. We are still seeing horrible overdoses from people who are addicted to prescribed pain medication. The government have cut funding just this year to Reconnexion, the only benzodiazepine-specific counselling service in the state. We have persistent issues around access to forensic alcohol and other drug treatment in Frankston. The waitlist is on hold time and time again – it has been the case for years. In Frankston we have seen this transition to opioid replacement therapy from a doctor who was treating many patients and prescribing methadone and other opioid replacement treatments. There are people in that area who have not got anyone. They are wanting to seek treatment and help. Their doctor has now retired. There is not capacity in the public system to provide that support. The residential rehab waitlist continues to grow, and over the weekend we heard that the Labor government have now scrapped their intent to implement all of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommendations. We want to see the government get on with a hydromorphone program. We want an expansion of residential rehab. We want to see naloxone availability in rural and regional Victoria. We want to commit to the mental health royal commission recommendations.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:33): It is great to rise on what is really important legislation for Victoria: the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. It is important for a number of reasons. It shows the values of this government and the work that we have done to bring this policy to bear and to bring this forward for consideration and the leadership of our Premier Jacinta Allan, who spoke passionately about why this is so important for families and as a parent thinking of the future of her children. Indeed when we think of our kids when they go out, we hope for the best, but we cannot control all elements that will confront them in life, including the impact of recreational drugs or illicit drugs. This policy that has been delivered to this Parliament builds on the work that we are doing as part of the state action plan – the \$95 million that is being invested, which I will come to very soon.

I sat here for 30 minutes listening to the shadow minister, the member for Lowan, and I was waiting and waiting to see if the member for Lowan would address the comments of the Leader of the Opposition in June of this year when he said that this would green-light drug use in our state. That was some of the more inflammatory language around this policy, which is in operation in the ACT and Queensland, and said it would give a green light to the illicit drug trade in our state. I was waiting for 30 minutes to see if there was a correction of opposition policy. You see, the shadow minister did every bit of work to try to tear down a piece of legislation on this important topic of saving lives in Victoria and dressed it up as attacking the substance of the bill, when the Leader of the Opposition is vehemently imposed and does not listen to any evidence in this space. The member for Lowan talked about listening to the experts and supporting families. Well, Professor Jennifer Schumann said recently in coverage in the *Age* that there is 'no evidence from anywhere around the world, from 30 years of drug-checking services' that pill testing gives a false sense of security. We have got a situation here where, at the bookends of the shadow minister's speech, there were the comments about the safe injecting room, in the absence of evidence, all the way through to saying we need to rely on the evidence and support those families, but she did not address some of the damaging comments and sensationalism that the Leader of the Opposition put forward in his comments in June. It just goes to show that you cannot trust the opposition in any part of their shadow policy.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I ask you to draw the member back to debating the bill that is before the house and not using this time to attack the opposition.

Tim RICHARDSON: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a point of debate. I know it is really awkward that the shadow cabinet has no idea of how they present on this bill, and that comment has not been judged.

A member interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: It is not ridiculous at all.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): I will make a ruling. There is no point of order.

Tim RICHARDSON: That is exactly right. I know it is awkward, from the comments of the Leader of the Opposition in the absence of any evidence on this topic. We did not hear any contribution or anything addressed. I know that is really sensitive, because being at opposite ends, I can only imagine what the shadow cabinet would have been like, and the member for Lowan has put her views forward in the absence of any evidence from the Leader of the Opposition in presenting on this bill. We have had the courage, in the face of such horrific sensationalism, in the face of more than 547 lives lost to overdose in Victoria in 2023, to come forward and say, 'We need to find a different way. We need to listen to the experts, and we need to support people who might make one choice that can destroy their lives and have an intergenerational ripple impact on their loved ones in the future with an overdose that sees a loss of life.' The member for South-West Coast might run a little bit of commentary on that. Hopefully she will stand up and address whether she stands by the Leader of the Opposition's point that this is a green light to the illicit drug trade. Is that the position that the shadow cabinet has in this space – dressing up their position on the bill or attacking the bill and all of its elements, when this is a trial and being run out in its –

James Newbury interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: At least the member for Brighton unlocks that, which is at direct odds with the member for Lowan. The Manager of Opposition Business just said, while sitting in his place, that this is a green light to the illicit drug trade. When we listened to the member for Lowan, she demanded an evidence-based approach. I am seeing just in this spectrum on the bill the absolute chaos that forms shadow cabinet policy. That is why we in the Allan Labor government listen to the experts. We have gone and consulted and engaged with the community to make sure that we save lives. It is not about posturing on politics to see what angle would best be suited; it is about supporting –

James Newbury interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Brighton says it is about principle. If only principles saved people who have overdoses when they take illicit drugs. If only the member for Brighton and his principles were standing at the festivals saving people at those times. This is the absolute straw person antics of those opposite. It is all about a quick grab and not about the policy. Thank goodness we have a minister like Minister Stitt in the other place.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Lowan can detract from the member for Brighton's comments and scream and yell at me about this. We gave the member for Lowan the courtesy in her contribution making some points around an evidence-based approach and engagement. The member for Lowan has had the opportunity. I know it hurts that there is such division and impact here.

This is why Victorians do not trust the opposition on this and why they back the Premier and the Minister for Mental Health in rolling out this really important reform, because this summer cannot wait. Once again when we front up to music festivals in six to seven weeks time waiting for a few questions about how the trial runs out, we cannot wait for more people to lose their lives and we cannot wait for more posturing on politics, for an absolute symptom of a solution based on the member for Brighton's principles on any given day. I mean, I tell you, he is a nightmare to some people. This would be a nightmare in policy. This would be an absolute nightmare in policy if it were implemented.

No, we listen to the experts, and we have got a yardstick for how this works in ACT, in Queensland and in international references. Thankfully the Premier and the Minister for Mental Health had the courage and the guts to come forward and make sure this was the decision.

When you listen to the family members who have been impacted – those with lived and living experience of the loss and trauma of losing someone to overdose – if only there had been that drug information, if only there had been that support, if only people had been empowered with the knowledge of what they were confronting, then that might have diverted them away. Every bit of evidence shows that. Most people are then informed, and they might not go on to take the substances. I go back to Professor Schumann's point that absolutely destroys the member for Brighton's contention: not across the world in 30 years of empirical evidence is there any sense of encouraging drug use in the evidence. But that does not matter to those opposite.

Beyond that very important point, you are saving and supporting fellow Victorians who might take a substance just at the youngest age of being able to legally attend festivals and then end up overdosing and ending their life. What are we talking about here? We are talking about positive policies, and we go across then to others that have shared their experiences. Those opposite are not fronting up to overdoses like our dedicated paramedics, who have told us time and time again, 'Don't sit on your hands, legislators, do something. We front up each and every day and have to bring people back. We have seen the benefits of safe injecting rooms. We see the tragedy. We see the trauma.' Then VicPol has to front up to someone's house and say, 'You've lost a loved one.' They were only thinking that they were going to a music festival to have fun. They have taken something and they have lost their life. If we can do anything to lower that risk and lower that harm, I go back to the fundamental point from the Premier sitting at the table and then talking about what she would think about for her children.

We hope that children and our kids in the future will not use illicit drugs, but just in last 12 months 1 million people have taken cocaine. That is the reality that we are confronting, and one in six Australians has taken illicit drugs. The member for Brighton and others would go, 'Let's just wait for a utopia,' or do we have a health-led response that acknowledges the difficulties in this circumstance and provides the health offering, like we will see with the state action plan, the most ambitious investment in alcohol and other drug reforms – \$95 million invested by this government – that will save lives. Thankfully, Victorians who know their kids are going to music festivals this summer know that their kids, if they take illicit drugs, will be safer with the option of pill testing. That is what the evidence shows, and that is what Victorians expect – leadership in this space.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:43): I rise to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. This is a very important bill because there is a big change taking place in Victoria. The thing is, when you want to do something, you should always do it well, and when it involves pharmacology, you should do it absolutely to the letter. You cannot afford to make a mistake when it comes to drug administration.

We know there are children and young adults going to festivals, we know they are taking drugs and we know that families and parents are very, very concerned, and rightfully so. As a mother of 21- to 30-something-year-olds, I absolutely understand the environment that they are talking about, and I know that is what the children are doing. So you would be Blind Freddy if you did not understand that was happening; however, our job here as legislators is to make sure we do things right. We had the bill briefing just last Thursday at 4 o'clock. Now it is Tuesday at 4 o'clock almost, and we were not given the amount of information that I think I needed to be able to understand what we are actually implementing here through this bill and through this legislation.

In fact during the bill briefing, which was restricted to a half-hour, only 15 minutes was given to answering questions. The first 15 minutes was given to government spin, just repeating what was in the documents that we had available to us to read ourselves, so it was a complete waste of time. I ask: why was the government frightened of actually giving us information? What is there to hide? Surely, particularly for this, where you want to make sure you are getting it right, everything needs to be on

the table so we can understand it. I could not get information on how the process will look and who will be getting – not who will be getting contracts; I understand commercial-in-confidence information – more availability of resources as technology changes so we can be confident that the analysing machines will be able to detect the new substances as they are developed. In fact quite a lot of information was not able to be got. We submitted a raft of questions, and I can go through some of those questions. But they promised those questions would be answered before we were speaking on the bill, and to this minute I have not received the answers. I was at a family funeral gathering, and I stepped out for the bill briefing and came back in. I was talking to an intensivist – someone who works in accident and emergency – about the importance of getting this right, and to a question she asked me I said, ‘We actually asked that question, but the government couldn’t give us the answer.’ It is just really concerning.

We have got drugs that are coming in like nitazenes. New drugs are being developed – synthetic opioids – that are causing absolute grief. It appears these will not be able to be identified in the analysis that is done on these drugs, so when you go to the pill-testing authorities at a festival they will not be able to test for a raft of things that you need to know about. What a false sense of security that would give a young person who knows nothing about drug taking when they hand over their drug and they are told it has got certain things in it. But they cannot tell them what it has not got in it, so the testing advice will leave the person who is trying to feel confident by doing the right thing, they are thinking, by getting it tested without all the information that they need. Firstly, under the legislation the testers and the workers will not be able to speak about anything aside from what is in the legislation, so they cannot share the limitations of the testing. They cannot tell the person, ‘The testing’s actually limited, so don’t be that confident in what we’re telling you.’ The legislation prevents the workers from even saying, ‘We won’t be able to guarantee that if something happens you can legally or civilly do anything about it. We’ve taken away your rights to be able to do anything.’ What is the reason for that? Are the government not confident in the program themselves so they are frightened about that?

It is a most concerning piece of legislation. It is not good to just do something. It has got to be something that is going to be effective, and I cannot see how this is going to be effective; in fact I think it could be more dangerous. There was no understanding of how you could identify the client. If you gave someone some pill-testing advice and there was a readout of the chemicals that they thought were in them and then that person goes off and sells those drugs with that chemical analysis and someone dies, what are the legalities around that? What happens to someone who uses this as a dealer? I am pretty sure they are not honest people, and this might be an opportunity for them to peddle something that is very dangerous if they swap in what they actually want to sell and use the information that is given through the chemical analysis readout. This is a very, very concerning piece of legislation, and it is identified to me as concerning because the information has been so difficult to obtain. In fact we have not even got it.

The other part of this bill is the rollout of naloxone in vending machines. This was an idea that was 10 years ago put forward by Mary Wooldridge, the Minister for Mental Health in the 2010 to 2014 period of the Napthine–Baillieu governments. Ten years on, if this was a government that was serious about change, we would see these out in the community already, so only seeing 20 of them for the whole state makes me wonder how many will be available in South-West Coast. Narcan is a trade name; naloxone is the generic name. It is a significantly effective drug when it comes to reversing heroin overdoses, for example. So having it available is not a problem, but why 10 years? I mean, that does not tell me this is a government that is really serious about putting a dent in the problems we have with alcohol and drugs and problems we have with substance abuse. In fact if this government were serious, we would not be seeing 5000 people sitting on a residential rehab waiting list. We would see a government that was getting on with building, for example, a residential rehab facility in South-West Coast. An extraordinary need exists in South-West Coast, which was identified seven years ago. In fact it is longer – it was nearly nine years ago, actually. It was in 2015 that that was discussed, when I was first elected to this Parliament.

The community have worked to jump through every single hoop that the government could possibly think of to put in front of them to make sure that this facility was meeting every requirement. They have done that. They have had committees that have been down to make representations to the Department of Health and ticked every single box there could possibly be to be ticked, and yet the government continues to make excuses as to why it cannot be delivered. There is nothing wrong with building that residential rehab right now. The only thing getting in the way is the government. The money is needed immediately to do that. It is a \$40 million build. Considering the waste of this Labor government on project after project, this is a significant amount of money that is important for us in South-West Coast but a very small amount in view of the \$40 billion collective waste that this government is responsible for. That puts in perspective to me that the government does not really care.

This bill is a look-good, feel-good one, but there is no substance to it. So it is worrying me as a parent and as a nurse. I begged and begged for places for individuals who I had been nursing and case managing who needed rehabilitation beds to get back their lives from substance abuse. I have actually been in the position of begging, and I have had mums and families beg me to help them get support for their families. When you have actually worked in that environment and become close with a family and wanted to help them get through their journey and you have not been able to get any support because there just is not a bed available, you really do know just how important it is. When you see a budget which was \$36 million – I have upped it to \$40 million because we all know that building costs have gone up – you see a government that really is callous and does not care, because we should have had that rehabilitation centre in South-West Coast so families could rehabilitate at home. We should have had that years ago, and we should not keep getting told as a community that the government has found another hoop we have got to jump through, getting the community's hopes up that, once they have ticked that, at the next budget that is going to be announced. Yet here we are, the only community in the whole of the state of Victoria that is still awaiting an announcement. Get on with it, government. The money needs to be delivered. The beds are desperately needed. Having 5000 on a waiting list of people needing support for drug and alcohol rehabilitation is absolutely out of control. The government has a huge responsibility to deal with that.

I have major concerns with this bill. I do not believe the government care like they purport to do, because if they did, we would see the drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre delivered already in South-West Coast.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:53): I am really pleased to be able to have the opportunity to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. I say so because rarely a day passes by in my role when I am not asked to step into someone else's shoes and when we do not find ourselves sitting down and hearing someone's story, being asked to share their perspective on the world and sometimes briefly to shoulder their burden. We are also asked in these roles almost constantly to empathise with experiences that we do not sometimes fully understand – to comprehend circumstances that often look or sound nothing like our own. Indeed, Acting Speaker, I would put it to you that that is the privilege of the job that we do every single day – these glimmers of life that make us better, more understanding leaders of our community, interactions that round us into more caring and compassionate people. They also remind us of why we are here in the first place. We are here to understand, to empathise and ultimately to act.

But occasionally you have an interaction, one of those interactions that you just cannot shake. Sometimes you walk into a room and without warning a new perspective is thrust upon you. You sometimes hear a story that is so powerful and sometimes so painful that it does sit you back in your seat and you share a moment so private and privileged that it lingers with you for days and weeks. Sometimes you step into shoes so heavy they weigh down on your own convictions and they have the power to rewrite your perspective. This is where I want to be up-front in my contribution to the debate in the house this afternoon on this bill: my views on this issue have changed over a period of time. If you had asked me quite a few years ago, I would have told you that I was not convinced about pill testing. But when I became a parent and as my kids became a little bit older my perspective shifted.

What really convinced me was meeting Victorian parents of children who have been deeply and personally impacted by this issue – regular, loving, caring everyday parents who have come in and sat with me and told me about the realities of what their kids are up against and that we know many Victorian young people are also up against. They also told me honestly about the worry they feel every time their son or daughter heads off to a festival or when they leave the house on a Saturday night for a party or to go to a club. They also shared some really deeply personal and confronting stories of kids who took risks, who overdosed, who ended up in hospital or worse.

One of these mums told me something so simple and so obvious that I could not forget her words. She said young people are smart; they just want information. If they are handed a pill at a music festival, they want a professional there who can tell them exactly what it is and exactly what it does, without shame or stigma. And if young people are reaching out and asking for information about their health and safety, she said to me, and we have the power to give it to them, then why on earth wouldn't we? Drug use is complex but pill testing is not. I know that this is a debate that can at times be clouded by controversy and stigma, but this bill that we are debating here in the house this afternoon should not be controversial at all. Parents just want their young people to be safe; so do I. As a mum my one and only responsibility is to protect my kids. But as Premier of this state it is my job to keep every Victorian child safe.

Every parent wants to believe that their child is the exception, that they would never put themselves at risk, that they would never make a silly or a regretful decision and that when it comes to something like drugs they will always make the right choices. Ask any parent and they will tell you exactly the same thing: we all want to believe that the worst would never happen to our child. While we so badly want that to be true, we know it is not, and there are some families in our community today who are living every family's worst nightmare. Many of us in this house are parents, and while we would rather not imagine it, it is likely that some of our children, maybe many of our children, will at some point in their lives face that choice. It is likely that as parents what we can say to our kids will only carry so much weight. We will not be there standing over their shoulders. We will not be there to step them through the risks and the dangers, and we will not ever get to make that choice for them. It is why as a parent I want to know that when our kids – everyone's kids – are put in that situation, they will have all the tools and information that they need to keep them safe.

I challenge any member of this house to sit with parents like I have or to listen to Victorians who have lost a child to an overdose. I ask you to share and consider and shoulder their burden, to hear their worries and just try for a moment to stand in their shoes. I ask every member here today to confront their own preconceptions and to listen to those families and what they are telling us. Young people are smart and they want information; remember that. If a tool is there to keep them healthy, to keep them safe and keep them alive, then who are we to stand in the way of it? My preconceptions have been confronted and challenged, and that is why I am supporting the bill before the house today.

If I can share one final heartbreaking statistic, in the first three months of this year paramedics responded to more overdoses at festivals than for the entirety of 2023, more in just the first three months of this year than for the entire 12 months of 2023. As you can imagine, this was a statistic that was accompanied by a lot of headlines and even more outrage, because we know fear makes news, but it does not solve those real problems that we are up against. But there is a quiet majority of sensible, compassionate parents out there who are not interested in fear. They want leaders to get their heads out of the sand and do the right thing, and that is certainly what parents have said to me. That is why this bill, which supports pill testing, is about saving lives. It is about keeping kids safe. But also, importantly, it is about having honest, open and health-focused conversations, and it is based on evidence that exists already around the world, evidence that tells us and guides us around what works.

I want to be clear in supporting this bill today and supporting the great work of the Minister for Mental Health, who has brought this bill to the Parliament today: pill testing most certainly does not make pills legal. What this bill is focused on is keeping our kids safe, nothing more, nothing less; not making pills legal but keeping our kids safe is what this bill is focused on. I feel very strongly that this is

something that no member in this place should feel the need to stand in the way of. It is not making pills legal; it is about keeping our kids safe and arming them with that honest, open health-focused information. Again, the evidence internationally can guide us on this matter. Evidence absolutely can guide us on this matter, but so too can the powerful voices of those parents and families who have had their own lived experience and who have had some incredibly tragic circumstances around their own lived experience and are imploring us to act. That is why this bill is before the Parliament this afternoon, and I hope that it can receive the support of this house and the Parliament as a whole as we continue to work incredibly hard to keep young people safe, to provide them with health-focused information and to support them every day. I commend the bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:02): I rise to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. I am glad to follow the Premier and her contribution and do intend to make a few brief comments. The Premier is not known to stand for many things, but one thing this Premier will be known for is giving a green light to illicit drugs. That is what this Premier will be known for. This Parliament is a make-up of community leaders, and our role is to set standards, rules and laws for the community. The Premier just spoke about this bill because, in her words, she is seeking to make people safe. This bill allows any person of any age – a child – access to a government service that green-lights their drug use. That is what this bill does. This bill allows a child to walk into a government facility – there is no age limit on this service – and have their drug green-lit. Shame on the government. This bill is about a breach in a basic fundamental principle, and this Parliament and we in this place should say no to illicit drugs. This Premier, who is known for little, is saying yes to illicit drugs.

Victorians can see it. They absolutely can see it. There is a reason why there has been a total collapse in the support of the current Labor government; there is a reason. It has not just happened by chance. A third of the government's vote has collapsed, a third of the government's vote, and that is because this government does not stand for principle. Shame on this government for allowing a bill into this place that allows children access to government services that green-light drug use. That is what this bill does. There are absolutely no age limits on use of these government services. Let me tell you, the coalition put a raft of questions to the government, serious important questions like, for example, details around what drugs can be measured. That is not an unreasonable question. What sensitivity will there be in the testing? The government was not able to answer it. Not only did they not answer it but they have not been able to answer it. Not a single speaker in this chamber on the government's side has stood up and provided detail around those issues, not a single speaker, and there will not be. There will not be a speaker who stands up and says, 'What can be tested? How sensitive is the testing?' because the government do not know, and they refuse to answer.

The Premier spoke about keeping the community safe. The government will not provide any estimate of the impact of this policy, but common sense would tell you this will not even touch the surface in terms of drug use; this will not touch the surface. Not only is the policy wrong but it is poorly implemented – only Labor could do that. It should be noted that we know that soon after the Premier took the role – following the former Premier, who stood strongly against pill testing – we saw multiple briefings where the new Premier was anonymously quoted as supporting pill testing and, by the way, open to cannabis reform – same briefings. Premier Allan is open to pill testing and open to cannabis reform, so what is next? What is next? This bill is shameful, and what it is is craven populism. That is what this bill is about. The Premier who stands for nothing has picked to stand for something because she thinks it wins her a vote. That is what this bill is about.

The basic questions around the operation of this program cannot and will not be answered by any speaker from the government side in this place: the sensitivity of the testing, the types of drugs, any age limit access to these facilities. Can a 12-year-old walk in and have access to it? Can a 13-year-old? No government member will stand up and say, because the bill allows for it. The bill allows children access to these government services. And then when you use this service, you waive your civil rights. Government members have not spoken about that one either. You immediately waive your civil rights.

You waive your legal rights. Why? Because we know that testing will not properly and carefully assess for every dangerous substance, so it will not keep people safe. We know it will not keep people safe.

We also know that workers who work in this program cannot talk about limitations of the testing. It is specifically ruled out of the bill. The workers who provide these services have been given specific, set guidance on what they can talk about, but limitations are not one of them, so you cannot say to someone, 'We can't test for everything, but we are going to take away your civil rights'. This is the detail of the bill.

This bill on principle is wrong. It is wrong. It is a green light to illicit drugs. We know that the Premier is open to cannabis reform. That will be the next one. When the Premier chose to stand for this issue – the Premier who does not stand for things – the Premier made the wrong choice. As a community leader she made a wrong choice in saying, 'I approve as Premier children having access to drugs.' We must always in this place stand up for what is right, and saying to children, 'Use drugs when we test them' is wrong. It is absolutely wrong. It is wrong in principle. Victorians will see and have seen through this Premier. They know and are seeing through this Premier, which is why there has been a wholesale collapse in support for the Premier – a wholesale collapse. There is no question about that. The 49th Premier is the Premier who has chosen to say, 'I choose as Premier to green-light illicit drugs.' Now it is through pill testing, but we know what is next, because the Premier ensured that it was reported. Pill testing first, cannabis reform next. It is shameful, and Labor should stand condemned for this outrageous bill being put to the Parliament.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (16:12): That is the most gutless response to this policy and this legislation that we have seen in a very long time. Victorians take drugs. That is an undeniable reality, and we cannot just police it away. Every day, every night in every single suburb Victorians are taking illicit drugs and they are rolling the dice on substances that they do not and cannot truly trust. They are taking that deathly risk, and they will continue to take that deathly risk. That is the reality. No amount of moralising to young people or heavy-handed policing is going to change that reality. What we can do is work to mitigate the risk that illicit drugs pose to people's lives, and we can do that by prioritising the health and safety of Victorians. We can and should rightly prioritise the health and safety of Victorians over any other metric, because frankly lives should be the most important metric of all. Everyone in this chamber will either be or know someone who has taken illicit drugs. They will either be or know someone who has had a concerning or unexpected reaction to those drugs. If they are lucky, they will not be or know someone who has had a serious or life-threatening reaction to those drugs, but that is only if they are lucky.

This bill, the Victorian government's Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024, represents a progressive step forward in our evidence-based approach to drug harm minimisation. It is not about legalising illicit pills and substances. That is the warped narrative of those opposite. Pill testing is a health-led response. It is a prevention response to a real-life health risk. It is an approach that seeks to reduce the negative consequences of drug use – drug use which, like it or not, has caused far too many overdoses and far too many deaths. Every single one of those deaths was preventable – preventable by not taking those drugs in the first place. In that critical moment of decision, that life-or-death moment, that contemplation and that weighing up of risk which people go through when they think about taking a pill – in that moment when they have the pill in their hand, when they are thinking, 'Should I or shouldn't I' or 'I may as well' – how could we not want Victorians and especially young Victorians to have every bit of information at their disposal to potentially prevent them from taking that pill?

This bill will go to the heart of the issue, supporting the establishment of mobile and fixed-site drug-checking services in Victoria, including at music festivals. It will also progress the government's commitment to introduce secure naloxone vending machines in areas of need, a life-saving treatment to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. This bill gives people the opportunity to have substances tested for dangerous additives, high doses or unexpected compounds and, importantly, to receive crucial education from trained peer workers and technical experts about the risks involved.

This vital conversation could be the first time a person speaks with a health worker about using drugs. It could be the first time they truly get an understanding of the risks. These are life-changing conversations, life-saving conversations. The information could be about the effects of different dosages, how substances interact with each other, the importance of sleep and hydration and the impact of hot weather, all of which can vary significantly, particularly at music festivals. This is about harm minimisation; it is not about harm elimination, because we are not so naive as to think that we can convince every Victorian never to experiment with illicit drugs. But it is about establishing an additional safety mechanism to prevent drug harms in the community. In so many aspects of our lives there are elements of risk. To reduce these risks we implement legislation that increases safety. This is no different. This is a practical response to the undeniable reality that Victorians use drugs. It does not make it completely safe, but it empowers people with information and resources they need to make safer and more informed choices.

Earlier this year nine people were hospitalised after taking drugs at a music festival, and Victorian paramedics responded to more drug overdoses at festivals in the first three months of 2024 than during all of 2023. The criminalisation and messaging of ‘Just don’t take drugs’ is not working; it is not enough. Alarming, the drugs are more potent and more complex than ever before. In the past 10 years over 1100 new drugs have been identified, and we are witnessing the potency of synthetics increasing dramatically. In Victoria in 2023, 547 people tragically lost their lives to overdose, and 42 of those deaths involved new psychoactive substances.

Recently I joined the parliamentary friends of harm minimisation at an information session in Parliament on the synthetic opioid crisis. It was frightening to see the trends occurring overseas and how they are showing up here in Australia, where drugs are contaminated with traces of fentanyl or the newcomer, nitazenes. Nitazenes were developed by researchers around 60 years ago as an alternative to morphine but because of their high potential for overdose were never released. However, over recent years they have shown up in the illicit drug market. They have been found in tablets which were meant to be oxycodone, in heroin, ketamine and cocaine. This drug, which is showing up in Australia, is stronger than fentanyl and hundreds of times more potent than heroin. These drugs do not come with labels. They do not come with warnings. There are no ingredients lists. The potential for these substances to be deadly is extremely high, with as little as 2 milligrams enough to cause death. The message from researchers and advocates is that we cannot sit on our hands. We must be ready for new and more complex drugs entering the illicit market, and we must be agile enough to respond.

Pill testing can help detect new potential substances and provide timely, valid data about illicit drug markets. This is particularly useful for emergency services and can be used to provide early warning systems, helping protect the whole community and strengthening Victoria’s drug surveillance efforts. It should be organised crime that pays the price for circulating these substances, not the people who are using drugs, and drug-checking services can help us achieve this.

This bill can and will save lives. It is backed by experts locally and abroad. Since 2021 four Victorian coroners have recommended the government implement a drug-checking service for illicit drugs. Drug checking is overwhelmingly supported by the health sector, including the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Public Health Association of Australia, the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association and the Penington Institute. In the words of Dr Anita Muñoz, chair of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners of Victoria:

This is a victory for common sense and sound policy over tired rhetoric and a ‘war-on-drugs’ mentality that gets us nowhere.

...

The Government has not only listened to the College, and a host of other groups, but acted decisively to introduce mobile and fixed sites. It’s such a fantastic outcome. Drug testing is not about condoning illicit drug use, rather it’s a sensible harm reduction measure.

Thank you, Dr Muñoz. I completely agree. The Allan Labor government is listening to the evidence. We are listening to the experts and we are acting because there is no time to wait. Those opposite are arguing that pill testing gives the false impression that it is safe to use drugs, but the evidence shows us a different story. Local and international experiences show that drug checking is an effective intervention that does not increase or encourage illicit drug use. It has proven its efficacy over many years around the world, with 31 programs operating globally, including in the United Kingdom, North America and New Zealand. Closer to home there are pill-testing services in the ACT and Queensland, and the outcomes in the ACT give us a good indication of what might happen here in Victoria. The ACT data shows that over two-thirds of people visiting the fixed site reported never previously accessing a healthcare worker for information or advice on drug use before, half the drugs were found to contain substances not expected by the person and 39 per cent of the services were used by young adults aged 24 and under. Approximately one in 10 samples tested resulted in that drug being discarded at the service. These are powerful outcomes.

I mentioned it briefly earlier, but I want to come back to naloxone in the short time that I have left, because we are enabling the supply of naloxone through secure automated vending machines. Naloxone is a completely safe, life-saving opioid-reversal medication, and we are committed to getting it to the people who need it. That is why we will establish 20 secure naloxone vending machines in the areas of greatest need, and we are making amendments through this bill to enable that to happen.

The evidence is there. The need is urgent, and the consequences of inaction are far too grave to ignore. As policymakers we have the responsibility to act on this and act on this now, and for that reason I commend the bill to the house and I commend everyone who has been involved in putting this bill forward.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (16:22): Today I rise to make a contribution on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. We do know that there is a significant issue with drug substance abuse and also the criminal activity of drug crime. Music festivals are a place where young people are out to have a good time and we know that they are also an environment where the opportunity to be exposed to drugs is increased, but we know that this issue goes much more broadly. Labor had a firm stance against pill testing, and as recently as February 2023 the government said that they would not be introducing a pill-testing trial and that pill testing can give people a sense that it is safe to take drugs. Yet here they are now with a completely different position with this bill before the house.

Police Association Victoria Secretary Wayne Gatt said pill testing would fly in the face of long-accepted policing principles, personal responsibility and the law. 'Our view remains that pill testing is not the panacea to the issue,' Mr Gatt said in a statement. The state's powerful police union has also criticised the move and said the government needs to clearly outline how it expects police to respond to drug taking at music festivals. Police also have unanswered questions. The government has not provided sufficient information with this bill, and there are significant areas of concern and critical flaws in the drafting of this legislation.

The government has not provided significant information through the bill briefing and to the public to fully understand and evaluate the drug-checking service model. We had many questions on this side of the house at the bill briefing, and we have not received those answers. How are we expected to support a bill without the information that we require? There is no mandatory obligation to enact an early drug warning system if a tainted or dangerous drug is detected by the drug-checking service, thereby withholding health information from the community. This is contradictory to the Minister for Health's second-reading speech, which states the drug-checking trial will provide Victorians from all parts of the community with the health information they need to reduce drug harms and save lives. The government were unable to provide details around what analysis would be used at mobile sites, the limitations of testing, test sensitivity and specifically the testing protocols, turnaround times for testing, whether mobile or fixed testing sites would be NATA accredited, or details surrounding the cost of testing or the number of tests to be completed each day.

There is concern that the analysis intended to be used for mobile testing will not be able to detect nitazenes, the emerging class of drugs of most concern to the alcohol and other drugs sector. Despite messaging around pill testing, mobile analysis will not be able to test the potency of a drug, so the result cannot be used to dose-test substances. The legislation does not mandate referral of novel, impure or other dangerous drugs to the centralised drug-testing service for confirmation or further initiate an alert when extremely dangerous drugs are detected. There is no fit and proper test for special drug-checking workers, even though they will be handling drugs for testing. New section 20AA(5) states that general drug-checking workers are not authorised to provide a drug-checking service other than the service of providing harm reduction information. The definition of 'harm reduction information' is extremely limited to information about drugs detected in the sample, information regarding possible consequences of using the substance, and information and advice about access to health services, welfare services and similar assistance. The legislation therefore does not allow for the general drug-checking worker to discuss the limitations of testing – for example, that a drug could be in the drug sample but below detectable limits – or allow for disclosure of vital information around the waiving of civil liabilities, as outlined in the legislation. This is a highly concerning drafting error which could impact on the ability of drug-testing clients to receive information that would affect their ability to make an informed decision around consumption of the tested substance.

A Melbourne mother whose son survived a drug overdose at the Hardmission Festival this year said she had mixed feelings about the pill-testing trial. She said her son was hospitalised and placed into an induced coma and intensive care for two days. She said no-one can determine how each individual will respond to taking drugs and if it is safe to do so. There are also additional risks when alcohol is mixed into the equation, as we know. In January two women were hospitalised after suspected drug use at the Juicy festival, where heat was found to have also played a role in the impact. Not everyone is affected in the same way. What if there are other medications being taken? What measures are in place? There are many unanswered questions and alarming flaws in this bill. This will now be the sixth proposal for pill testing to be introduced to the Victorian Parliament since 2016, and they still do not have it right. New section 22CD, which provides exemptions for clients from supply and possession offences, does not limit police officers' authority to exercise discretion in not charging a person in the vicinity of a drug-checking place in order to use the service.

There is no such thing as safe drug use and pill testing, and this bill fails to address the real dangers of relying on pill testing when tackling drug consumption. This is because onsite testing has significant limitations. It cannot measure drug potency, predict individual reactions or account for dangerous interactions with alcohol and other substances. Education does remain paramount in addressing drug-related harm, with the biggest risks being overdosing and mixing drugs and alcohol, as well as overheating. The government should be focusing on evidence-based strategies to reduce drug-related harm by investing more funding and support in drug addiction and drug and alcohol rehabilitation, in education for reducing drug harm and in mental health support. The Allan Labor government has failed to implement other effective harm reduction strategies. There is currently no drug early warning system available. Opioid replacement programs have been wound back as the government has failed to recruit doctors to prescribe the methadone opioid replacement therapy.

The form of pill testing that the Allan Labor government is proposing and seeking to legalise is not a safe or reliable way to manage drug taking. It is a trial that fails to address the real dangers of drug consumption. You only have to look at this government's failed handling of its self-injecting clinic in North Richmond, right next door to a primary school. It has constantly been plagued with issues. But it is the most vulnerable regional Victorians in need of drug and alcohol rehabilitation who continue to be snubbed by the Allan Labor government. In the minister's overview of the bill he says that it is the government's aim to improve public health outcomes in Victoria related to harm caused by illicit substance use, yet the government could not answer basic questions that remain outstanding. Communities are calling out for support and for drug rehabilitation facilities, and we know the need for these types of facilities will continue to grow. Drug and alcohol addiction is devastating the lives of people, and the Allan Labor government is failing to deliver enough support, despite Labor's mental

health tax raising \$1 billion annually. A recent survey undertaken by the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association revealed a staggering 93 per cent surge in the number of Victorians waiting for treatment since September 2020. Alarming, more than 4600 people were waiting for treatment on any given day between June and July this year.

It is appalling that my community, like many other regional communities, does not have adequate drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities. The government is ignoring our calls for support. People in the community who are ready to seek treatment for drug and alcohol addiction are told that there are lengthy waiting periods and they will also have to go elsewhere to seek treatment, isolating them from their loved ones and support. Victoria's most vulnerable residents are being left behind. Communities are feeling the impact of drug and alcohol addiction and mental health issues. Ask families who are living every single day with a family member with addiction and who are not getting the support that they desperately need. When addiction takes hold it can ruin lives, and there is not enough support to treat addiction.

I wish to also raise a community organisation called The Cottage in my community, which offers a secure residential program for men and women. It is a not-for-profit organisation. The community has funded and come together to support this centre. But, as we know, there are so many more people that need help, and this facility is only a drop in the ocean for my community. But I praise their efforts, and I praise the contribution they make. I also spoke recently to some of the participants, some of the people at The Cottage, who are suffering drug addiction, and it is interesting when they talk about the social interactions and the opportunities that they had to come into contact with drugs.

I do feel we do need to do so much more. It is irresponsible of the government to present this bill in the current form, which clearly has many issues, and for the government to not answer critical questions of concern. It should be no surprise that we oppose this bill.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:31): It is a pleasure to get up and rise on this bill today. Can I begin by acknowledging the minister, the unions that have supported this move, the department, experts and colleagues. I am the co-chair of the friends of harm reduction for Parliament, so thank you to that group. I have got to say it makes me really angry to sit here and hear such absolute tripe and rubbish coming from that side –

Kim O'Keeffe interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: I will answer your questions, member for Shepparton. You said there was no monitoring. Yes, there is, and I will get to that in a second. You said that there was no early warning system. Pill testing is the early warning system, and I will explain why in a second. You also missed a great chance to talk to three professors at a Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association event that was held in the last parliamentary sitting week, and I note that there were no Liberals or Nationals at that event talking to those professors. I will speak a little bit about what they said because it is clear that pill testing saves lives. I found it really interesting that the member for Shepparton quoted VAADA, because it is VAADA that say that pill testing is what saves lives, and they support it – VAADA, who you quoted just then.

Since 2021 four Victorian coroners have investigated the deaths of 10 Victorians following exposures to adulterated or high-dose drug products. They have recommended again and again that governments implement a drug-checking service for illicit drugs, including recently in March 2024. Various organisations have publicly supported drug checking for several years, including the AMA, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Public Health Association of Australia, VAADA and the Penington Institute. So you have got to ask yourself, on a subject like this: why are we listening to these absolute academic nobodies across the line talking about dealers using pill testing to check their product? You have totally missed the point.

If you had gone to the Parliamentary Friends of Harm Reduction event where these three professors from VAADA actually spoke, you would have learned that there is a massive issue globally. While

you see this as just pill testing, there is a whole other story to this, and there is a wave of misery coming. They have seen it in the States, they have seen it in Europe, and it will come here. It is already coming here. We saw it in Broadmeadows only months ago when four people died. Do you know why those people died? Do you know? Because our experts are suggesting to us – there is no conclusive evidence yet – that those four people ingested cocaine and that that cocaine was cross-contaminated with something called a nitazene, and that nitazene was cross-contaminating whatever drug lab there was. Nitazenes are the new fentanyl. Australia has had a relatively small – in comparison to Europe and America – fentanyl crisis. In America fentanyl is absolutely destroying communities. The US Drug Enforcement Administration reported nearly 80,000 deaths from fentanyl in 2022, making up roughly 70 per cent of the 110,000 fatal overdoses in that year.

The focus on fentanyl in Australia is that we might have got away with not having to deal with as much of that trauma and crisis as other states and nations, but now we are looking at something called nitazenes. The member for Northcote spoke about nitazenes, so I will not talk about them, but we are at risk of an outbreak of these highly potent drugs. As the member for Northcote said, they were developed in the 1970s. They are far stronger than heroin or fentanyl. If heroin has a strength of one, to give people some context, fentanyl is at 50 – 50 times stronger than heroin – and these nitazenes can be 500 times stronger. The issue that first responders have and that friends and family have is that, while fentanyl and heroin will give you usually a 25-minute window in an OD to give Narcan, or naloxone as it is also known, with nitazenes people can be dead in 2 minutes.

It is a real issue. Why is it an issue for us? Because roughly 1 million Australians have used cocaine in the past year – that is almost 5 per cent of the population; 2 per cent, or 400,000 Australians, have used MDMA in the past year – that is 3 million or so reporting a lifetime use; and 1 million, or 5.3 per cent of Australians, report recent non-medical pharmaceutical drug use. As things like nitazenes come onto the market they are very hard to detect. We are hearing that is not like finding a pallet of cocaine somewhere, like on *Border Security*; this is coming through in envelopes the size of stamps. This stuff is so strong that the cross-contamination will easily kill so many people in our community, so it is about being prepared for that.

I talked about early warning drug signals and also getting the message out to the community. For the knowledge of the member for Shepparton and other people across the aisle, there are drug signals that are developed in Victoria. The old premise goes that if we cannot monitor, we cannot manage a problem. So we have residue analysis of used syringes, which is about 160 samples a week; we have the Emerging Drugs Network of Australia – Victoria, which is overdose blood toxicology through hospitals; we have the coronial findings, which is overdose blood toxicology; and we have voluntary drug samples with drug checking. In a lot of ways pill testing actually supplements that; it gives us some more information about new drugs on the market, and we are seeing a ton of new drugs coming onto the market now. But we are not saying to people, ‘Take the drug.’ We are educating them on that and we are getting data so we do not have what happened in Dublin.

There was an emergency response in Dublin quite recently – there was a nitazene overdose. On 9 November 2023 the health executive in Ireland was notified of an unusually high pattern of opioid overdoses occurring in the Dublin CBD among people attending homelessness services. These reflected early signs of drug market changes and the emergence of nitazenes. There were 40 overdoses in 36 hours among people who used heroin in the Dublin CBD, so the suggestion there is that the heroin was cross-contaminated with nitazenes. Rapid responses helped to protect a lot of people, but the takeaway in Dublin was that these substances can emerge without warning and that outbreaks require urgent responses and preparedness. In Dublin they got to the point where they were putting large LED signs up saying ‘Extreme overdose warning’. We certainly do not want to get to that stage, but we know that we need to prepare and that this could happen in Australia.

We actually do have drug alerts currently. The department will issue drug alerts and they will get them out to different health providers, but I can see that not everyone can see the risks. I do not think it is about being narcissists or being idiots; I think it is about a lack of education about what is happening

overseas. We heard someone before talking about naloxone and how they had failed to introduce a program like this in 2010. Well, maybe you should have introduced this program in 2010 and we would not be here now. I cannot wait for the day when people – families, friends, people who are using drugs – have naloxone in their bag or their pocket, because it is such an easy solution to save someone's life.

I will end my contribution to this debate by saying something really simple, and that is that there is nothing – and I am sure the member for Melton will agree with me – that will stir your insides like resuscitating or ventilating a young kid who has OD'd on heroin or pills. And at the time you do not know. You might be asking family and friends, and they do not want to tell; they do not want to be part of it. But there is nothing like feeling that kid's life ebb away as you are on a bag valve mask filling their lungs with oxygen and seeing that they are still not breathing, filling their lungs with oxygen and seeing that they are not breathing, and filling their lungs with oxygen again and seeing they are not breathing.

You know that if that person, these days, could have tested their pill or had naloxone, they would not have been in that position. You can shake your head over there, but the nonsense that I have heard from those across the aisle just speaks volumes to the fact that they still think that drugs are something on the outer edge. Drug taking is something that is mainstream. Saying no, like Ronald Reagan advised – say no to drugs – and having a war on drugs is akin to telling people our age that we should not drink. It just does not work. It is stupid. A health response is what we need, and a health response is what has been put forward by professionals, by professors, who even told us in the last parliamentary sitting week, 'This is what we need, and this is what we want,' to help people now but to be prepared for what might happen in the future. I commend this bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (16:41): I am pleased to rise today to contribute to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. I will take on board the comments of the member for Frankston, but let us start off – and I am probably a little bit more pragmatic about these issues – by saying that drugs are a problem in our society; there is no doubt about it. Drugs have been at festivals since Woodstock back in the 1960s, and they will probably continue to be at festivals when my kids are my age. I do not encourage anybody to put something in their mouth when they do not know what it is. That is pretty sound advice.

But the reason we are opposing this bill – and I listened very carefully to the member for Frankston's contribution – is that we had more questions to ask. When the government is putting through a bill like this, we are talking about people's lives; it is a very, very important bill. This side of the house had a lot of questions to ask. We had a bill briefing at 4 o'clock last Thursday. We did not get a lot of answers to the questions that we had. It was put forward that we have consideration in detail, which I thought was a great idea for this particular bill because, as the member for Frankston just explained – and quite passionately – there are answers to the questions. The member for Frankston articulated it very well, so why couldn't the minister come in and give us the consideration in detail so we could fully understand the bill? I do not think that is too much to ask. We had consideration in detail for the WorkCover bill. Minister Pearson sat in that chair. He sat there for I think it was about an hour and a half, and we got to ask him questions. It was important legislation for the government. It was very important. Minister Pearson knew it was important. He knew if he did not get these reforms through, WorkCover was in a lot of trouble. So he had consideration for the opposition to enable us to ask the questions.

When the government are trying to get a bill through that they are obviously passionate about – they obviously want to save lives; I do not think any government produces a bill not to save lives or not to do the right thing – why not give us the consideration to let us ask the questions that have not been answered. I do not think any reasonable person would say that that is not a fair thing to do. I cannot understand the minister's reluctance to enable consideration in detail to answer the questions that we want to ask. We are talking about a piece of legislation that is going to enable testing of pills, and it is going to give –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): There is quite a lot of audible chatter in the house. Can we have some respect for the member for Narracan.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thank you, Acting Speaker, I appreciate that. This is important legislation. This is legislation where we do not want young people to think it is a free-for-all to take pills. We want this legislation to be an education tool, to say, 'This is in this pill, don't take it. Your side effect will be A, B, C or D.' This is legislation where we have to be very, very careful, and this side of the house has to be convinced that the government has it 100 per cent right. It is okay for the member for Frankston to stand up there and talk about it – he has got a medical background, so does the member for Melton. They probably understand the consequences of these drugs better than I do, and I respect them for what they did in their previous professions because they would have seen horrific things. I stand to be corrected, was it 547 people that died?

Paul Edbrooke: Something like that, yes.

Wayne FARNHAM: I do not want to see 547 people die from overdoses, but I need to understand the bill. I need to understand from my point of view just how pill testing physically works. Does it test the pill? Does it tell you what is in it? Does a big red alarm go off and say, 'Don't take this, it will paralyse you'? I do not know how it works, and that is why the consideration-in-detail stage, I believe, is a very important aspect of this.

I am really disappointed with the minister. If this bill is so important – it is important; I am not downgrading the importance of the bill – why did we get a bill briefing at 4 o'clock on a Thursday for half an hour when there were a lot of questions to be answered? We were trying to get a bill briefing earlier in the week. I do not think it is too much to ask that this side of the house has all of the information and gets all of the questions we need answered, and that is where consideration in detail would have come in. We should have consideration in detail on this bill for a good 90 minutes, not 15 minutes for asking questions. Fifteen minutes was not long enough to get the questions answered that we wanted. If the minister had enough respect for us on this side of the chamber to do consideration in detail, there may not be an opposed position to this bill.

Our shadow minister has concerns about the bill, and it is her job to look at the bill and go through those concerns. There are some concerns. For example, there is no mandatory obligation to enact an early drug warning system. This comes back to the four young adults that overdosed not that long ago at another music festival – the member for Frankston touched on that as well – and the alert did not come out for six days. I would assume if the authorities knew what was in the drug or what caused those deaths, that those alerts would come out a lot sooner, so we do not put more lives at risk. It is something I think we need to work on with the government.

Education is a big part in teaching young adults about the side effects of drugs. The member for Frankston was talking about nitazenes. I have not heard of this, but 500 times stronger than heroin is frightening. I have not heard of it as a 50-something-year-old, so how many young people have not heard of it? Why don't we get the education process going? We have ads for skin cancer. We had ads as kids – Slip, Slop, Slap! I do not doubt the potency of this drug – that is not what I am saying – but if this drug is as dangerous as it is proposed to be, why aren't we educating people on it? Why don't we have a television or social media presence on this? Why don't we warn them of the dangers of it? Why don't we warn them with education on drugs?

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: I am listening to the hecklers over there, but I will tell you what: I grew up with a sister who was addicted to drugs. I am sure if she had had an education, she probably would not have gone down the track she went, plus then it became generational. What I am saying is from experience: educate people. It is not a debate across the chamber, it is a fact. If this drug testing does work and if this drug testing does educate people on the dangers, great. If it saves lives, great. But give the opposition the opportunity to ask the questions so we can be clear in our heads that your legislation

is 100 per cent foolproof. That is what we want. We are not asking for much. We are asking for clarity. We are asking to be educated by way of consideration in detail. I do not think that is too much to ask, and that is why we are opposing this bill today.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (16:51): I am pleased to rise to speak in favour of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. I think those on the other side seem to have missed a very basic point about this debate. This debate is about saving lives. It is not about the opposition. I have heard endless contributions from the other side about the questions they raised and the things they want to do. This bill is about saving lives.

I was listening to the member for Narracan talk about the need for education, and one of the things that comes out of this pill-testing model is indeed that very thing. In the ACT 70 per cent of people who use pill-testing services have never previously discussed their drug use with a professional. So the drug testing and pill testing at festivals and in Melbourne will be a very real and probably for many a first-time opportunity to talk to somebody about their drug use.

We have time; we could, if we were the other side of the house, procrastinate endlessly. But I ask: how many lives will be lost in that time? We now lose more young people to drug overdose than we do to car accidents. Whilst those on the other side would like to prevaricate, I want to see action. I have got a 21-year-old son and a 23-year-old son. I know the circles they move in and I know the parties they go to, and I want to make sure that we as a government are supporting and protecting young people as much as we absolutely can.

The member for Narracan suggested that perhaps if we had given the opposition more information, they may have supported the bill. I think it really just goes to show what disarray the opposition is in. I had the misfortune of having to listen to the member for Brighton's contribution, which seemed to take us back to the war on drugs. I think my good friend and colleague Mr Edbrooke was suggesting we had Ronald Reagan in the house and we should just say no. We have come a long way from that time, and we understand that drugs are now a prevalent thing in our community. The member for Brighton suggested that pill testing in some way would condone drugs. We do not condone drug use, but I certainly will not condemn a child to death because you want to prevaricate and posture for your base on the other side. This is an incredibly important step that we are taking in protecting young people.

Delightfully, my electorate is home to some really famous and fantastic music festivals. I love going to Golden Plains and I love going to the Meredith Music Festival, and we now have Beyond the Valley, which I believe is the largest music festival in Australia. When I see those kids going to those festivals, I want them to have the opportunity to speak to someone, to have that contact. I cannot remember which of the tawdry contributions it was from the other side, but someone was talking about the fact that there are all of these other factors, and indeed there are – heat and lack of water. They all contribute to those overdoses. But it is just such a strange mentality to say, 'Therefore we should take away all supports for them.'

What I would say is that once we have pill testing at those festivals, there will be an opportunity to talk to those kids face to face – talk to them about making sure they consume enough water, talk to them about keeping out of the heat. I must say I really do raise my hat to the Meredith Music Festival. I went a couple of years ago, and it was incredibly hot. They made a really strong effort to talk to people in the audience: 'No judgement. Just make sure you're keeping your water up, keeping your liquids up.' So something like pill testing at festivals is quite literally a lifesaver, and I cannot believe the prevarication from the other side and the horror that we might lose lives.

I listened to the member for Lowan. She was screaming across the desk about dead bodies and how children in Richmond have to see dead bodies on the street. What I would say to her is that that dead body is someone's child. They need to remember that. These people are using drugs for many reasons: for some it is recreational, and for some it is because they are from very difficult circumstances. Each

of them is someone's child, and their lives are just as important as those of all of the children in our community.

I grew up in Castlemaine in the 1970s. There was very strong drug use. I lived through the 1980s heroin crisis, and I have seen that drug use. I have seen it with kids: someone turns up and offers you something and, with peer group pressure, off you go and do it. Some suggest that we can just turn a blind eye and stick our heads in the sand. The member for Brighton would have us wage a war on drugs, and we would achieve very, very little.

I also want to flag something that I think is incredibly important in this program, which is the naloxone vending machines. I had the honour of working at Ballarat Community Health and working with the pharmacotherapy people there at one point. They were giving naloxone out in the regions at that point. It is an extraordinary lifesaver. It cannot be used for any nefarious purposes; it saves lives. I did hear the member for South-West Coast complain that none of these services were available in the region. I would just like to bring to her attention that the federally funded naloxone-in-the-home program has been going for quite some time and that indeed those services are available in the regions. As I said, Ballarat Community Health do an extraordinary job in outreach work – much more broadly than Ballarat – and making sure that people have access to naloxone. On the thought that there will be vending machines across the state, I can absolutely guarantee the member for South-West Coast that I will be making sure that regional and rural Victoria also have access to those services. It is something that I think our regional MPs are pretty fierce about, and I am certain that we will ensure that those services are available across the state.

As I said, it is so important that kids can have access and someone to talk to. This is not about condoning drugs. No-one is going to say, 'Good to go. Have another pinger.' The services are about talking to kids about the chemical analysis of what is in a drug and what they might face but also offering that real wraparound support. For those on the other side to want to deny and delay is just extraordinary. How many more lives of young people do we have to lose before those on the other side can move away from some sort of ideological, Reaganesque war that we are never going to win.

I would like to point out that this legislation has enormous support locally and globally. We have worked with many organisations – over 77 organisations – including the AMA, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Public Health Association of Australia. I am delighted to understand that Youth Affairs Council Victoria are also very supportive of protecting our kids in rural areas through pill testing.

For those on the other side to suggest that there has not been enough discussion – that we are making some sort of woke, unilateral piece of legislation – is just extraordinary. This legislation is about protecting young people. It is about accepting that there is an issue in the community. It is about accepting that young people are experimenting with drugs but making sure that we are there wrapping our arms around them in any way we can.

This government has done some extraordinary work in this space, and I certainly commend this government for the safe injecting room. We believe in health-informed harm reduction. There is no point in being Reaganesque with your head in the sand. It is about harm minimisation, and this legislation will go a long way to supporting young people in that moment. Someone said, 'I would rather the last person my child talks to be someone who can give them a bit of health support and advice than a paramedic that's taking them away from an overdose.' I commend this bill to the house.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (17:01): I will say a few words on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. I was catching a tram home from the Midsumma carnival a couple of years ago and I had forgotten I was wearing a T-shirt calling for pill testing, so I was a bit startled when an older passenger pointed at me and announced, 'Now that's something I do support,' and the tone he used suggested that he would not support a lot of Greens policies. As an advocate for pill testing, something I have learned over the years is that so many older Victorians do

support it. Parents of young adults, for example, say that it is a no-brainer. That is because whatever their attitude is to party drugs, what every parent of a teenager wants to hear is the reassuring sound of the door closing quietly in the middle of the night when the teenager comes home after a late night out.

When the Greens introduced a private members bill very similar to this one five years ago, then Premier Andrews indicated that Labor would not be supporting it because he did not want to send a green light to people using drugs. He, and the police he regularly quoted, were very concerned about sending the wrong message. What is the right message? Is it a message that 'Drugs are bad' and 'You get what's coming to you – don't touch it, because it might kill you, and we won't want to do anything to reduce that risk' – or is it a message of care and concern which says, 'Let's test that drug for contaminants and just make sure that it's what you think it is. We want to make sure that we reduce any harm that you might suffer if you are going to use these drugs.' At long last this bill sends a message of concern and care.

The story of this bill is, in part at least, a story of a shift in official attitudes towards currently illegal drugs. It might be an achingly slow shift, but it is an important shift. So I want to acknowledge at least a decade's work by groups and individuals who have called for pill testing in Victoria despite repeated rebuffs from the major parties. I am thinking of parents like Adriana Bucciante, whose son Daniel died after taking an untested pill in 2012. I am thinking of groups like Harm Reduction Victoria, Harm Reduction Australia, Pill Testing Australia, the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association and Students for Sensible Drug Policy who were so helpful when we brought a bill in five years ago, and so many dozens of healthcare organisations.

The first co-sponsored bill in the Legislative Council, the first bill to ever be sponsored by more than one party – in this case it was Reason and the Greens – was a bill calling for pill testing five years ago. Then this year there was a three-party-sponsored bill calling for pill testing. There have been at least four coronial reports in recent years calling for pill testing. This bill shows that if enough people call for change, it will eventually come.

The bill provides legal protection to allow an 18-month trial of pill testing, also known as drug checking, to be provided at music festivals and next year at a fixed site. Clients of the service will be given harm reduction advice, which we know from trials in Canberra is as important as or more important than the drug-testing process itself. After appropriate counselling clients often discard their drugs. The drug-testing results will inform surveillance of the illegal drug market and enable public alerts to be issued. The bill also introduces vending machines for naloxone, which, as we have heard, reverses opioid overdose if it is given quickly enough, and that is a useful addition to the current supply through pharmacies.

The circumstances which bring us this bill should also be considered. This policy was announced at the same time the government announced that Melbourne's CBD would not be getting a medically supervised injecting room, so it seemed like something of a consolation prize. Experts working to reduce the harm from drugs in Victoria have been wanting a supervised injecting room in the CBD for some time. A much-anticipated report by former police commissioner Glare called for this, because with one to two deaths per month from opioid overdose in the CBD, here is a chance to save some lives. People die because the opioid, usually heroin, stops their breathing and because they are not resuscitated in time. Making naloxone more widely available, as this bill does, is a good idea. It might help if enough people have it on hand when someone overdoses and they are confident to give it quickly enough. Other recently announced initiatives, including more resources for pharmacotherapy and a small trial in a couple of years of hydromorphone, might conceivably also help reduce this death rate. But one factor will make a huge difference, and that is out of our hands, and that is whether or not potent synthetic opioids like fentanyl or nitazenes become common in our illicit drug market. They have been popping up here and there, and there was the well-publicised case of four people who died in a house in Broadmeadows a few months ago. But if they become common, there will be a significant increase in overdose deaths, and when that happens, the government will be obliged to set up more

supervised injecting rooms, where people will not have to wait for an ambulance before resuscitation begins. Injecting a potent synthetic opioid in the presence of someone who is trained in resuscitation who can respond immediately is much safer than doing it with someone who might be carrying naloxone and might be able to use it.

What has this got to do with drug testing? Drug testing might not normally be expected to save many lives. Sometimes we go for a couple of years without a death in a nightclub or a music festival attributed to taking an untested pill. But an increase in more potent opioids, like the nitazene which killed four people in Broadmeadows, will make drug testing more important. Nitazenes have been turning up now in drugs sold as cocaine and MDMA as well as heroin, and it may also become necessary for heroin users to get their drugs tested to ensure that they do not overdose. This was not something we contemplated when we introduced a bill like this five years ago – nitazenes were not even discussed – but it raises an important question: will the spectrometers used by the pill-testing trial be sufficiently sensitive to detect nitazenes in very low concentrations, where they can still be harmful? I urge the government to listen to advice on this and ensure that Melbourne has the right equipment to respond to the likely emergence of potent synthetic opioids.

We still have a long way to go in reducing drug harms in Victoria, but this bill is a clear step forward, and I congratulate all who have worked for a decade or more to get us to this point. The Greens will support this bill.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarnait) (17:09): It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to contribute on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. It probably comes as no surprise that I strongly support the legislation. In saying that, I want to begin by saying that I respect the position taken by some who are opposed to this measure in the community – not the member for Brighton, having had to sit through that ghastly performance. I am sure he is deluded enough to think that that was some sort of audition for him, but it was ghastly all the same. Others have come to this matter with goodwill and honourable intent, but in the end we are going to disagree on the best way forward.

For my part, I am going to rely on one very telling and one entirely irrefutable fact. This debate has been going on in this Parliament for at least two decades. Over that time some of the language has changed and some of the science has improved, but the basics of the issue remain the same. The irrefutable fact is that 20 years have passed and we are back here where we started. What that demonstrates to me is that the goodwill that leads people to oppose pill testing – that honourable intent that leads people to support the status quo – leaves us with an approach that simply does not work.

The drugs are still available. People are still taking the pills. People are still taking the risk. Twenty years ago the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee released its report into amphetamines and party drug use. Carolyn Hirsch, who was a fine member of Parliament and a great local representative, addressed the Council on why the committee had recommended against the introduction of pill-testing kits. She said:

There is quite a divided opinion in the literature about these kits. The committee on balance has recommended ... that pill testing kits should not be made available to the public ...

The lengthy report of the committee looked closely at supply and demand reduction. However, it is the section on harm minimisation on which I will focus today.

The committee noted, for example, the submission of the YWCA calling for the availability of drug-testing kits or facilities for people to test the purity and relative safety of the drugs they have purchased. The report describes how in 2001 the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee of the 54th Parliament visited the Vienna Social Projects Association. There they observed an innovative project called Check it!, which involved testing drug substances in an onsite laboratory during raves. The Youth Support and Advocacy Service submitted that, consistent with a harm minimisation approach, users in Victoria

should be able to quickly test and verify any substances being sold as MDMA or ecstasy in order to reduce the risks associated with party drug use. They said:

One of the hazards associated with MDMA/ecstasy use is the unknown content of the pills.

So as a Parliament the position we were in then was in many respects the exact same position that we are in now. As I said in the beginning, I fully respect the position that was taken in 2004, as I respect those who remain opposed to pill testing in 2024. But I am forced to ask: is 20 years not enough to show that the current approach is simply not working? In April of 2021 then Coroner Spanos had this to say:

... as long as illicit drug use exists in the community, Victorians will continue to be exposed to the risks of unregulated drug markets. Furthermore, the successful operation of drug early warning systems internationally, coupled with submissions from those working in harm minimisation, demonstrated that these evidence-based interventions could save lives.

Coroner Spanos recommended that the Victorian Department of Health urgently implement a drug-checking service and a drug early warning network. Coroner Spanos's conclusion was in response to the investigation into the deaths of five men. The men, aged 17 to 32, died in five separate incidents between July 2016 and January 2018 after ingesting what they believed to be MDMA and/or magic mushrooms. The circumstances as released by the coroner were:

Each of the men exhibited erratic and distressed behaviour after taking the substance, including headbutting walls and furniture, hallucinating and paranoia.

In four cases the men died of mixed drug toxicity following seizures and respiratory distress. In the fifth case, the deceased leapt from a 10th floor balcony and died from his injuries combined with mixed drug toxicity.

In April 2022 Coroner Gebert echoed the call for a drug-tracking service and observed that:

People have always faced the risk that drugs obtained from unregulated markets are not what they expected: more potent, or adulterated, or even completely different to what was represented by the supplier. Where this occurs, the potential for harm including overdose and death is increased. The appearance of NPS –

new psychoactive substances –

in unregulated markets has substantially increased this risk, because NPS are often substituted for other drugs and represented as being other drugs. The rapid evolution of NPS means that suppliers may not even know what they are offering in the market; and the highly variable effects between NPS with respect to onset of action, potency, interactions with other drugs, and so on, mean that developing informed safe use practices is extremely difficult.

I want to talk briefly about the testing regime in the ACT. Obviously there are other examples around the world to also consider, but I will confine my comments to Canberra. In 2023 Australia's first government-sanctioned drug-testing service, CanTEST, issued its first red alert, which is the highest level of warning, following the detection of metonitazene in a yellow pill masquerading as the pharmaceutical drug oxycodone. At the time, CanTEST made this telling statement:

Unlike many of the other detections reported in Australia, the recent detection of metonitazene in Canberra was not predicated upon the overdose of a young consumer. The whole point of drug-checking or 'pill testing' is to *prevent* such tragedies and provide an evidence-based alternative to the potential consumer, as happened here.

The *CanTEST Health and Drug Checking Service Program Evaluation: Final Report* from April 2023 shows just why regulated pill testing is so important. Firstly, a third of trial users had done some pill testing in the past, predominantly colorimetric reagent tests with limitations around accuracy and the type of information yielded. Eighty-four per cent of trial users had taken drugs before, so, far from encouraging people to take drugs or creating new drug users, the ACT service ensured that people were able to access accurate information. The report includes interviews of service users, which I think are useful to hear. A female aged 20 said:

... I was going off to a four day festival over here and I had bought some for myself and my friends ... because I didn't want to provide stuff to my friends that was potentially dangerous or anything like that.

A female aged 33 said that when getting drugs, you never really know what you are getting, where you are getting them from and, especially for things like powders and pills, what they have been cut up with. I think that shows just how important it is to provide people with accurate information. One other impact of the testing was that some people decided to use less of the drug than they originally intended, and virtually everyone who used the service told someone else about the results, so there is somewhat of a multiplying effect.

We have heard several contributions here today, but I thought it was incredibly important to get some context of what has occurred in this place over the past 20 years. In 2004 there was an inquiry into this very issue, and there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that pill testing should have been a part of what we have done in this state for some time. We have found ourselves in the exact same place now. This is incredibly important legislation, and I commend it to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:19): I am more than happy to rise to give a practical, pragmatic, real-world point of view on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024 – the pill-testing bill. You will know by now, Acting Speaker Mercurio, as anyone who knows me does, that I am a very practical and pragmatic person, which is probably why I am a National. We have had many, many questions around this bill and its implications, and as the member for Narracan pointed out several times during his contribution, there is simply not enough information and evidence to support this. There is just not.

The member for Lowan, who had a career before politics in health care and in science, is someone that I am going to take a lot of direction from. The member for South-West Coast, again, has worked in health care. I have never worked in health care, so of course you look to your mentors, like the member for Lowan, for those sorts of opinions. I will get to those a little bit later on, but as far as I am concerned, as a mother and a stepmother, there is simply not enough information in this bill for me to be comfortable with it. However, it has allowed for some conversations that may have otherwise been very, very difficult or perhaps not have ever happened at all, so for that I am grateful. However, there is the how, the where and the what. What exactly is being tested? If it is not picking up nitazenes, what is it testing for? How reliable is it? How is the information shared? Is it going to be shared? As far as the legislation goes now, no, it is not. What is in the pill that you are testing? That information of what it is composed of does not have to be shared, so then what is the point? Where will it be available?

We are all for harm reduction of course regarding drugs and alcohol in particular, and obviously we are all about practical ways to go about harm reduction. There is the residential rehab facility that the member for Lowan referenced during her contribution obviously, and the 5000 people that are on the waiting list for residential rehab in Victoria for alcohol and other drugs is alarming. We are still waiting, after my predecessor Peter Crisp and the member for Lowan worked tirelessly on a policy in 2018 and obviously previous to that in 2014 as well – for years and years – to help facilitate that. There are no residential beds in my part of the world, yet when you have a look at the statistics they are alarming. This affects so many families.

Yes, we are on the way. There are steps in the right direction. Recently we had the location announced for our alcohol and other drugs residential rehab facility. But in the true style of the government there was very little, if any, consultation with the surrounding community, the neighbours. When the announcement was made via a press release and printed by the local press, the community was befuddled as to exactly what the facility did, how it looked and what solutions were going to be around the infrastructure, the transport infrastructure in particular, given the site that has been chosen. The former Minister for Mental Health was very, very helpful in helping me get some local elders on that location selection committee. She was very, very helpful, the member for Dandenong, in getting local elders on that selection committee, because there was a great amount of alarm when things were starting to move forward and there were no local elders. The Aboriginal community in the north-west of this state, the largest in this state, obviously need to be consulted. These are the people that we are desperate to provide these facilities for, because if they have to leave country, they are not going to get treatment. They are just not. The location was vitally important, so I do thank the former Minister for

Mental Health for her assistance in that. The location has been announced, but still there are 5000 people on the waiting list. That is not harm reduction.

But I did say earlier that I was going to give a pragmatic real-world account of this pill-testing bill. I am still a festivalhead. Good Things Festival is coming up even in my mid-40s. I know that is kind of pathetic, but whatever; it is our thing. The ones in the middle of the bush – the bush doofs, as they are affectionately known – were never my scene, but when I was a young person we had Big Day Out, we had Groovin the Moo in the regions, which was amazing, we had Triple J's One Night Stand and we had great rock festivals. In my day – and I may have been very, very naive – I was so scared because of my parents, in particular my Italian father, that if I was to touch anything illicit and anything happened to me I would not be standing here today. I was so scared of him, and my mother was probably worse, to be honest. But in my day I was not aware. Like I said, I could have been naive, but I was not aware of any sort of chemical or synthetic drugs going around in the 1990s. We knew that people would go there and we could smell things being smoked or whatever, but synthetic drugs were just not even on my and my friends' radars until Splendour in the Grass and a little bit later on when there were sniffer dogs at the gates of these festivals.

However, I also mentioned earlier that this bill has led to some conversations with my teenagers, in particular my 17-year-old stepson, who has the most magnificent mane of long curly hair and looks like he could be a rock star. But it did allow for some conversations that otherwise we might not have had. I asked him about this pill-testing bill, and he is very, very smart – in fact sometimes smart to a fault where his common sense maybe lacks a little – but he is also very, very sensible. He is a type 1 diabetic and his health is at the forefront of his mind all the time. When I asked him how he felt about going to festivals in the coming years and about pill testing – I did say, 'This is obviously completely hypothetical because you would never do anything like this, would you, darling?' – the response I got was concerning. He is obviously very well versed in this and it is something that he and his friends have spoken about. He did say that he has seen so much about fentanyl that it scares the pants off him and that he has no interest in going anywhere near that. He is not a festivalhead, let me say that; he does not go to concerts. His 15-year-old sister loves a Taylor Swift concert and she has just been to see Olivia Rodrigo, but that is a whole other kettle of fish. He is not. But he did say he does not want to experience anything close to that. However, he said if he knew where the pills or the drugs were coming from, he probably would not get them tested. That to me is really alarming. You might know where you have got them from, whether it is from a friend or whatever, but there is a whole chain of events that takes place before then. He did say that if he did not know where they came from, he probably would, and he would take whatever the test said as the truth.

The member for Lowan and lots of members in this place on this side of the house have pointed out the lack of information contained in this bill on the how and the what, and we know that nitazenes are not being tested for. It is really concerning from a mum and stepmother's point of view, particularly of young people, with festival season coming up that they will rely on and put their faith in the fact that they could have a pill tested and what comes back, even though we know the person testing that pill cannot share the information gathered. They do not have to share what is in it, if they can even tell, because we know nitazenes are not being tested for. The limitations around this testing just create so many areas of concern, not just for me but obviously for other members on this side of the house and other parents. How can it not? Like I said, when I was going to festivals in my 20s and early 30s I was just too scared – I am still scared of my parents, let us be honest – to do anything. And now, with all of these synthetics and the things we see in the news, we should be scared, and we should not be relying on an unreliable piece of legislation – *(Time expired)*

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:29): I too rise to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. I have given quite a bit of thought to this bill and what my position is – party position and position in government but also my personal position – because I certainly do not condone or believe people should be taking drugs. I know there have been a lot of conversations around people's positions and their history growing up and drugs, drug use and

drug taking, and certainly drugs have been a very sad part of the lives of members of my family. So when I reflect on this bill, I too have come to a conclusion, particularly after watching a very special video that the Premier put out, talking to parents – talking to mums like me – about the importance of trying to keep our kids safe.

It has been really good to hear the contributions here in this house, even from those opposite who are speaking against this bill. At the end of the day, this is a bill that is about a trial, and it is about trying to save some kids' lives. We may not be able to save them all, because if you are going to take a pill at a music festival, for instance, it is voluntary to go and have it tested. I really hope that those in the upcoming season of music festivals that want to take a pill – whether they are a kid, a young person or an adult – get it tested if the option is there, because it could save their life. We know it does save lives. We do trust in the research that we have undertaken and received from overseas. We know testing saves lives. No-one deserves to lose their life because of a drug overdose, whether it is at a music festival or on the streets of Richmond.

Appallingly, the member for Brighton talked about the Premier not standing for anything, which was absolutely ridiculous. I feel that the Premier in this instance is standing up for the kids – standing up for young people who take a silly risk and make what I think is an absolutely stupid decision at a music festival – because drugs do ruin lives. They do not just ruin the person's life who takes them, they ruin the family that are then left with the aftermath of permanent damage, if not death, of that person in some instances. The Premier is standing up for young people, and she is standing up for families that have tragically lost their loved ones to drug taking and drug overdose and drug effects. Also, she is standing up and trying to prevent it from happening again. Indeed when this bill passes this place, lives will be saved. Never forget that – lives will be saved. We just will not hear about it, right, but they will be saved, no doubt, this upcoming festival season.

As a parent, I love to say that my darling, newly minted 14-year-old Emily and Leo, at age 11, will never take drugs. I would like to think they will not even drink alcohol. I freak out thinking of them driving a car. But I am not as much of an idiot to not think that the time will come when they will do some of this stuff.

The member for Narracan talked about the importance of education. Education is so important, and that is why we have had a real focus on making sure kids at school, as part of the curriculum, get the right education about drug taking, about sex and even about things like vaping and the effects that they can have on you and the consequences on your life. I hope to God that my kids are listening to that advice. I hope they listen to their mother and they listen to their father. What frightens me most is if they are out and they listen to their friends and they make a split-second decision, a decision that could change their life.

I know this has been talked about previously and the number of people that died unnecessarily from taking drugs at music festivals last season was listed. We know by following New South Wales what is happening there. We do not want to see a repeat of that. I do not want my kids to be a statistic. They might not ever take drugs, and I would certainly not be encouraging them to do so. But this bill that we are talking about here today – I hope that it does pass this place and that those in the Legislative Council go ahead and pass it in their place – is about saving the lives of people that make that split-second decision. Maybe they have thought about it in the days before. Maybe they have done it before. We know that just because you have taken drugs before does not mean that from the pill in your pocket you are going to come out okay.

Some people are okay to take that kind of risk, and some people are not. We have heard, here in this place, us as adults reflecting on whether we were that kind of risk-taker. I was never that kind of risk-taker. I still do not think I am today; it is just not in me. That was not because of my parents, who said, 'Yes, drugs are bad. Don't take them,' it was purely because in my family my mother's adopted brother has been a terrible heroin addict who has spent his life in and out of jail – overdoses, the whole thing. This man has a terrible life. The drugs have ruined his life. He is now I think in his 70s, completely

estranged from his family, dirt broke, and, do you know what, he still takes drugs. It amazes my family that he has survived to be in his 70s, and if it was not for charities and it was not for religious services that are happy to be non-judgemental and look after people coming in and out of prison, he would be on the streets. Indeed many times in his life he has lived on the streets, much to the horror of his mother, my mother and her siblings. But that is what scared me off drugs. I also did not like losing my mind. I like having my mind; I like knowing what I am doing.

So I was never one to take those risks, but I watched all of those people around me, and there were many growing up in the surfing town that I grew up in – everyone was taking drugs. They never thought twice about what was in them, just like we know that hundreds of thousands if not millions of people across the world are addicted to vaping or are starting vaping or are occasional vapers. It is an illegal substance. You do not know what is in that either, and that is certainly not tested, and it is usually chopped up and cut on the same floors where heroin and other horrible, horrible drugs are being imported into this country. That is not tested either. We know that people do take risks, and sometimes they do not see them as risks. They just do not think twice about it. They like it and they have fun doing it, or it is what their friends do. But this bill and this debate here today is not about us legalising drugs or encouraging people to take drugs; it is about saving the lives of people who are otherwise going to take a drug at a music festival, and we want to find out this year at these music festivals how many people are happy to have their pill tested and how many people are worried about what they put in their mouth when they swallow and, in the hours to come, what will happen to them.

We have heard great contributions here in this place, and I will not go through them again, about the terrible, terrible things and extremities that are in these drugs and making them more potent than heroin. As I said before, I saw what happened to an adopted uncle who has been a heroin user his whole life and how terribly addictive that was and how many times when I was at my nan's place he was completely off his face. I remember that as a child quite clearly. Again, he has never been able to beat that addiction. Drugs, in my mind, ruin lives, and the people that are taking them at music festivals are not bad people. They are there to have fun, and they think the drug will enhance that fun. The last thing we want to have happen to those people, particularly our young people, and the last thing I ever want to see happen to my children is for them to make that decision and not come home at the end of the night, when, had they had an option, which they may or may not have taken, to have that pill tested, that service was available to them there and then.

I also want to put on record that it is really disgusting hearing the member for Brighton try and highlight, exacerbate and be hysterical about the amount of consultation or lack of consultation that he and his party have had. It is my understanding that the member for Brighton and the member for Lowan were some of the very few members that turned up to a briefing on Thursday that lasted for 32 minutes, I think, not to be too exact. They asked 17 questions, and all 17 questions have been answered. So for the member for Brighton and the member for Mildura to sit there and pretend otherwise gives a sense of really how seriously they take this debate.

Because this debate is so important, here in this place I do want to reiterate that I wholeheartedly support the bill. As someone that does not believe in taking drugs, I do want to see this option available as a trial at the upcoming music festival. I would encourage people that attend that music festival: if you are intending to take a drug, think twice, but also go and have that pill tested, because you never know – it could save your life and save a whole lot of heartache with you not being around at the end of that day. I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (17:39): I was one of those people that was in the forum to listen to the briefing on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. Yes, there were not a lot of us in there, but my goodness, did I have more questions once that had finished that I needed answered for me to be able to stand here and deliver to my community on what this bill is about. Question after question was asked, and they were not Dorothy Dixers or questions that were meant to try and trip up the people in the meeting with us – 'We'll take that on notice.' The next question – 'We'll take that on notice also.' The next question – 'Oh, we don't know. We'll take

that on notice.’ These are sensible questions at the start of a, hopefully, sensible bill that will protect our children that want to go to a music festival – or it does not matter where they go to – and give them some confidence, if that is the road they want to go down, that we are going to have a service there that is going to work. Well, I am unsure it will, with the answers that we got.

As the member for Mildura said before, I think it was 4 minutes past 4 today that we got answers to the questions that were asked in that briefing. As far as I am concerned, it makes me ask why this is being rushed through. Surely we can have the questions that we have. And they are not just questions from outside of Parliament. I am sure they are questions for those on the other side sitting over there that members in their communities would have. These questions need to be answered. What are they testing for? Where does the information go once they find out what is in the pills that they are testing at these events? Is it only the one pill that is getting tested? What about the rest that they have got with them?

In my former life as a plumber we used to work in some pretty terrible places, where we walked into where they were actually making these drugs. I am tipping that one pill that you have is not exactly the same as the second one or the third one, with the way they mix and create these pills, which they want to sell to our children. Sometimes it is not our children, sometimes it is adults that have been doing party drugs – and let us call them party drugs as we move forward here. We do not know what is in them.

How does it all work? We are going to have mobile units that are travelling around. Are they going to be as well prepared with the equipment that is needed as a permanent facility? The equipment that is in these mobile units that are actually going to be at these events – what tests will they go through? That was one of the questions that I think we had: what regime do they go through so that they are working – that they are picking up whatever it is they are looking for? We do not know what they are looking for in these drugs. Some of the ingredients that go into them they are not testing for. Why not? Why is it so hard? Why can’t they pick up exactly what the components are that are in these pills that people are there selling to our kids?

I think every member that stands on their feet today will be talking about the impact and the trust that they have in their children that go to these events – it does not matter where they are, whether they are in inner-city Melbourne or whether they are out in regional Victoria – and what the effects are going to be. For argument’s sake – I do not take pills, but I will use myself as an example – is a pill that I take going to affect my mate if he has one as well? I can have a nut and my mate can have a nut and he can go into anaphylactic shock. What are the changes, and what are the differences going to be?

As I said, when we sat down in the briefing and the government side went through what was happening – that was fine – we only had 15 minutes to ask questions. If they had answered questions, we may have been able to ask only three or four questions. But the answers were, ‘We will take it under advisement.’ These were the people that were sitting down, engaging with the community – well that is how I feel as a local member – and are talking to doctors, talking to community members and talking to physicians and chemists about how this is all going to work. They did not have the answers for us.

To walk in today and still not have any answers up until just a little bit after 4 pm, when they came through, makes me a little bit sceptical of the whole set-up of it. Are we rushing this bill through for the upcoming music festivals around regional Victoria? Are we rushing it through so we can say, ‘Well, we’ve tried to do something,’ just so we can tick that box off and make sure that we feel good about ourselves legally? How about we harden up and have discussions in the chamber and discussions when we sit down and have these bill briefings. One of my issues when I am sitting there listening to it and it is going on is: are the Labor MPs being briefed differently to us? They are standing up and telling me as I am listening, ‘No, this is the way we need to go, and it’s going to do A, B, C and D.’ Well, that is not what I got out of the bill briefing.

It is really incredibly worrying, the fact that it is something so important and that it affects so many people in our community. Everyone is standing up and saying that we have got to have trust in our kids, whether they be 13 or 14 or up to 21 or 25, whatever it is. They are going to make choices. If they choose to actually use these party drugs and have a good time and they walk up with confidence to get their pill tested, what is the result going to be? Is it going to be only a tokenistic result, where they will say, 'It hasn't got this in it,' and give it back and say, 'Oh, and good luck. Go on your way.' I do not want that. As a Parliament we need to make sure that if we do need to make better commitments to our young people, with these amendments we get pill testing right the first time. It is not good enough that we hope no-one will die in this round of music festivals, especially if they are out in regional Victoria, where if someone does have an episode and we have got to call an ambulance, there is that wait time.

It just does not make sense to me – and I will use it – as a father with kids of that age but more importantly as a person that is standing up trying to make sense of this controlled substance amendment for pill testing, about which everyone is saying, 'This is great.' For me, going through that bill briefing, I did not get the sense that it was great. That is why I wonder sometimes when we try and push bills through and we do not have time to engage with Labor and the minister and ask them hard questions – if you do not have the answer, say so so we can actually force that issue and find out the answer. It is very easy sometimes to be blasé and come up with an answer – 'I'll take it on notice and find out.' The week before, we are in here talking and standing up, the member for Lowan is on her feet talking and we still do not have answers to these questions about pill testing. I find that to be very, very poor form from any government. We need the answers. We need to make sure and know that when these festivals are taking place, or when someone is in a nightclub and they are taking a pill, they have got the opportunity to do the right thing by themselves and go and get the pill tested, for one. But, two, they need to know with confidence that the results they are getting are true and well managed.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (17:49): I am pleased to have the opportunity this evening to follow on from others and contribute to debate on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. As others have mentioned, the genesis of this bill is what has been a long-running discussion and debate in many instances within our community. I have heard members reference some of the work that was done previously, quite a long time ago, to bring this very important piece of legislation to the house.

As I have said on numerous bills that we have had the opportunity to bring through this chamber and of course debate as part of the Allan Labor government, we are a team that is committed to listening to experts, listening to those that work within the field and following the science and indeed the data. Listening to this debate, as I am sure others have done, has been interesting in a number of different ways. We had the Premier's contribution, which in my view was both powerful and passionate and spoke to a changing of mind. I think in so many instances what we need to see in this place is leadership that is exactly that – listening to experts; listening to the community; and working with those that, as I mentioned before, work within and with communities – to formulate legislation, initiatives and policy that are responsive to the needs of the community.

What I think is in many instances disappointing and is really the counter to sound and strong leadership is not having the courage to follow your convictions when it comes to changing one's mind when it comes to an issue this important. We know that one life lost, one Victorian life, is one too many. Having the leadership to come into this place, to go out to local community and to speak to the media about an issue that is incredibly important and touches the lives of so many, particularly those who have lost a life because of these matters, I know on this side of the house is something that I am incredibly proud of our leader for doing. For members on this side of the house to be able to do the same thing I think is incredibly important; it goes to the heart of what separates us from those opposite.

I do want to get to a number of the mechanical aspects, if you like, that are contained within the legislation, but I do just for a moment want to speak about what I think we have seen from those opposite within this debate. That is a team that is poles apart when it comes to not only this bill but a

whole range of matters within our state. There are of course different views when it comes to any matter that comes before this house, but what I think we have seen in many respects is a quite measured contribution from some over the other side on this piece of legislation and a will, if you like, to learn more, to ask more questions in what is a really complex space. I cannot knock that, but what we can knock is an ideological position that was taken by a couple of members that goes to fear and goes to spreading misinformation within our community, which is frankly shameful. Those opposite need to be called out on it. I am actually not sure how you could park yourself in the party room, have what needs to be a considered, respectful debate on these matters and then have members of your own team going around spreading misinformation and fear – no. What the Victorian community deserve, those that have lost loved ones to the harm that is caused by drugs, is of course a government that is respectful, that is measured, that is mature in a way that listens to the community and provides the framework that is there for those who need it when it comes to this legislation.

I think what this piece of legislation does first and foremost is save lives. We see time and time again, frankly shamefully, from those on the other side of the house, a whole series of stunts and performances that go to perhaps leadership, perhaps ego, perhaps a whole range of different things, but the internal machinations of those opposite should not dominate and reflect legislation that needs to be brought to the Victorian people, that saves lives, because a government's first and foremost responsibility is to our community, to make sure that we are listening and to make sure that we are working hard every single day for the people of this state.

Unfortunately what we have seen in the relatively short couple of hours that this piece of legislation has been up for debate are really disappointing and shameful actions – but I will say not from all. What I think that shows is division. Victorian people deserve a whole lot better than that. They deserve leadership. They deserve a team – that is on this side of the house – making the hard decisions, and I mentioned the Premier's contribution before.

I also just really briefly want to touch on the member for Frankston's contribution. Acting Speaker, you know, and I think everyone in this house knows, the member for Frankston has done some outstanding work as a first responder. Knowing and understanding that contribution – and I can see my good friend the member for Melton has just wandered into the chamber – and the important work that is done by our first responders, particularly within this space when it comes to harm reduction, prevention and supporting our community, is something that needs to be taken on board in the context of this debate. That is something that I know we as a team are very proud of, not just their contributions on this bill – the member for Frankston spoke and the member for Melton has not spoken as yet, I believe.

We make sure that we are listening to and working with our communities right across the state to ensure that this legislation is robust and, as I said before, goes to saving lives. We know that local and international experiences show that drug checking is an effective public health intervention that does not increase or encourage illicit drug use. In fact there is proven efficiency over many years around the world – 31 programs operating globally, including in the UK, North America and New Zealand. Closer to home, the house will be familiar with, and I have heard others mention, the services that are in operation within the ACT and Queensland. The efficiency of the testing is clear and we know that it works. The question as to the implementation of this service within the Victorian context goes to why we are providing those provisions around embarking on the 18-month implementation trial from December 2024 to June 2026, comprising both mobile services and fixed site services, to understand the very best model for Victoria.

Making sure that we are supporting all Victorians at each and every opportunity should be a very simple proposition. We are not prepared to roll the dice with not just young lives but the lives of people as they go right through the journey of who they are as individuals. We want to make sure that we are providing a service that supports them and is about that proposition of harm minimisation. I go back to the ability to spread fear, the ability to spread misinformation and the ability in so many ways to take the cheap, lazy, nasty road, if you like – that should never be an opportunity that comes to this

place. But what we sadly see, time and time again, is that. What I am proud to say is I know that all of the members on this side of the house, who I know and work with very closely, put their community first, put people first and work hard every single day to listen to communities. They also are not fearful and not ashamed to change their view. I think that that is both political leadership and political maturity. For those reasons and many more, I commend the bill to the house.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (17:59): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

And I desire to move that this house condemns the Hamas terrorist atrocities of 7 October 2023, which saw 1195 people murdered and 251 taken hostage, and that this house grieves for those killed –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): Order! You can only move one thing at a time, and that is that the debate be adjourned.

John PESUTTO: I am speaking to the issue – that this house grieves for those killed and calls for the immediate release of all hostages, supports Israel’s right to self-defence and stands with Victoria’s Jewish community amidst rising antisemitism. On 7 October 2023 the world witnessed an atrocity. Not only was it an atrocity that visited unspeakable violence on innocent people living in Israel, it was a direct and violent and horrific assault on the international liberal order – the idea that the rule of law ought to protect all peoples wherever they may live. Whilst the global community has never been able to achieve that for all human beings wherever they may live, wherever the rule of law pertains we should fight to defend it. The people of Israel deserve that. They were denied that on 7 October, and those hostages who remain in violent and dark captivity deserve their freedom, their peace and a reunion with the families they miss and love and the communities they cherish.

The people of Israel had done nothing wrong. It was Hamas, an evil terrorist organisation, that undertook this incursion – an atrocity in breach of international law – and it is Hamas that remains at the core of this problem. It is Hamas that is the source of military operations that are necessary to protect the people of Israel and its borders but also, hopefully, in the future Palestinians of goodwill who continue to live under the violent hand of Hamas and those who continue to live under the yoke of an equally evil and terrorist organisation in Hezbollah. That must always be recalled in debates about this very serious matter – that Hamas and its allied organisations are the source of violence and horror in the Middle East and beyond.

I wish also to impress upon the government that Australia’s Jewish community and in particular Melbourne’s Jewish community deserve the protection and security they are entitled to receive. We have seen rising signs and activities that constitute rank antisemitism. We cannot and should not allow that to stand. I know my colleagues and I on this side of the house in this motion, in earlier motions and in commitments we have given to the Jewish community of Victoria in previous gatherings, not only express our strong support and our emotional unity with the people of Israel and Victoria’s Jewish community but also our commitment to take real action to protect all peoples and in this case members of Victoria’s Jewish community.

It is a disappointment, I must say with some regret, that the government is not joining us in this motion today. We feel it is a necessary and important motion to express to all Victorians, not just to Victoria’s Jewish community but to all Victorians, that the principles which underpin the liberal international order must be defended anywhere and everywhere at all times, because a threat to the freedoms and security and harmony within Israel and violence directed towards members of the Jewish community here in Melbourne or anywhere else in the world represent a threat to the security and dignity of all peoples no matter what their religious, racial or ethnic backgrounds. So we stand ready to work with the government to ensure the safety of all peoples and in particular Victoria’s Jewish community.

I finish by reminding the government that we must stand strong and must always remember in our rhetoric and discourse on this important matter that the source of this conflict and the source of the instability and the insecurities that have been spawned are the actions of Hamas and now the actions

of Hezbollah and other evil associates and proxies who wage a war of violence on innocent peoples. Peace cannot long endure, and it will elude our best efforts to build harmony across the world if we allow assault on the principles of freedom and democracy and equality to successfully be perpetrated by evil organisations like Hamas and Hezbollah. To Victoria's Jewish community, to the people of Israel: we stand with you.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (18:05): I follow the Leader of the Opposition and was obviously on my feet previously for the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. I take the opportunity to say to members of the house, those that are streaming and of course anyone within our communities right across the state that this government and indeed, I should make the point, all members of the house express our deepest sympathies to any of those people within the Victorian community, those across our nation and indeed those that are in the Middle East right now dealing with the horrors and the atrocities that are happening as we have the opportunity to speak in this house.

As I am sure so many members do, both as a local member and, when tucking my five-year-old daughter into bed at night, often having a laugh and a game before she goes to sleep, as a parent, I do reflect on what is occurring in the Middle East and what we are seeing throughout that broader region. This government and of course the Premier and others have since the beginning of this most recent conflict I think articulated a very sound and important message, and that is that in no instance is it ever okay for violence, for harm, for damage, for lies and for misinformation to be spread within our community and for harms to be perpetrated against one community by another.

What I think we know and understand through a whole range of work that has been done by this government and broadly I think in many instances in what should be in a bipartisan space is, being a previous Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, that we have done some significant work around our anti-racism taskforce. What that work showed and continues to show – and I thank and acknowledge the members that are on that committee – is that there are of course opportunities for division and fear to be cast within communities. Our role as a state – and this has I think been very strongly prosecuted and articulated by the Premier and of course the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and others – is to provide for peace within our community.

What I think is shameful is when we see some that should be in positions of leadership – and I do not think those people are in the house right now – spreading fear and division and causing damage to be done further. This may not reflect in the way that you are thinking it is reflecting, Leader of the Opposition. What I am saying, to be very clear, is that in no shape or form is violence within our state okay and that this government will continue to provide for safety right across our community. We of course have a strong working relationship with those men and women of Victoria Police and initiatives like the anti-racism taskforce and so many other agencies which do very important work within our local communities to provide for peace and security, but in no shape and in no way is it ever okay for that violence to be spread through communities. We will, certainly as local members, continue to work with our multifaith communities to ensure that we are doing everything we can to prevent harm and violence and to call it out when it presents itself within our community.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (18:10): I rise to support the motion that this house condemns the Hamas terrorist atrocities of 7 October, which saw 1195 people murdered and 251 taken hostage; grieves for those killed and calls for the immediate release of 101 hostages; supports Israel's right to self-defence; and stands with Victoria's Jewish community amidst skyrocketing antisemitism.

Can I say at the outset, 7 October saw the largest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. It is something that many of the Jewish community have been grieving for 12 months now. Even the federal Parliament took time out to debate a motion to consider how important 7 October was. Although the words may not have been agreed upon, they at least debated the spirit of a motion. It is very disappointing today, as a sign of good faith, to put this motion forward to the government and for it to be rejected and for us not to be able to do the same here in the Victorian Parliament, particularly since the state of Victoria has the largest Jewish community in Australia.

We have the largest Holocaust population outside of Israel per capita, and we have such a strong, steadfast Jewish community that has contributed so much to our way of life, not just in Jewish causes but in health and in education. In just about anything, our Jewish community has been there for Victoria in the time of need. And yet in their time of need, following 7 October, unfortunately the backs of the government have been turned. I think that is very, very disappointing. I would hope, in a sign of good faith, that the government would support this motion today, because it is a very basic motion. I would still implore the government to support this motion.

On 7 October and since 7 October we have seen an escalation in antisemitism here in our home like we have never seen before. I want to relate what happened in the Parliament in November 2023. We had October, but in November we had families of hostages come into this Parliament. Many of us got to meet those families and hear about their desperation, their calling for their loved ones to be returned. Two of those were friends of Noa Argamani. Many of you will remember Noa Argamani, who was dragged away on a motorbike and taken hostage for 245 days. Her boyfriend was also dragged away, and he is still a hostage and has not been returned. Noa was released on 8 June. She was released on a day when I, the member for Brighton, the member for Mornington and Renee Heath and David Davis from the other place were in Israel visiting the Nova site from which she was kidnapped. Kids at a dance party – kidnapped; celebrating life and peace, they were kidnapped and taken hostage by terrorists. She was liberated. Unfortunately many have not been – 101 hostages remain in captivity, and we plead for their release.

What Noa did do, despite people thinking she would never do it, was dance again. She danced and celebrated life, because she believes it is important to show those that she will never be held in captivity again and that freedoms are so important. That is what we want: the message to be felt by everybody, no matter who. We understand loss of Palestinian life is horrific, but the real enemy is Hamas. This whole situation happened on 7 October because of Hamas terrorists. Unfortunately the left want to cancel 7 October like it never happened.

A member interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The left, many of those that march in the streets. I did not mention the Labor Party; I said the left want to cancel 7 October like it never happened. We as members of Parliament should not be doing that. That is why this motion is so important: to memorialise 7 October each and every year as an important mark of respect for those people that lost loved ones during that time. That is why this motion is so important. It is no different to what we do to memorialise the atrocity of the Holocaust and every other significant day that people experience for other communities that also experience grief. That is all we are asking. We are pleading for that. We want the antisemitism to stop, we want the hate to stop, and I would implore the government to support this motion.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:15): I think one thing I do want to very carefully express is that what we have here is a procedural motion, and that should not be conflated with an extraordinarily serious and very emotional – for all the correct reasons extremely emotional, because it is extraordinarily upsetting – situation that is happening in the Middle East. I should say I along with many other MPs from different parties attended the commemoration on 7 October, and I did that with genuine empathy and compassion because of the sadness that I feel on a personal level and that I think many people would certainly feel with regard to the horrific situation that has been unfolding since that day. Certainly what Hamas has done – it is clearly a terrorist organisation, and no-one is resiling from that here and now, least of all me. But that particular issue is distinct from the government business program that has been agreed on, and it can sound and it can look unemotive and can actually look harsh when we are conflating a procedural motion about a government business program that we have to do every week with discussing a whole range of extremely complex and difficult issues.

I think it would be extremely unfair if this particular procedural motion and the premise upon which we have procedural motions was to be distorted for the purposes of in any way conveying a lack of conviction or empathy for the suffering that is going on in the Middle East. I just think, in fairness, we

are all adults here, and if we are going to be really prudent but also really compassionate on this issue, then we must be really prudent and compassionate in the way we discuss this particular procedural motion. I would be absolutely mortified if anyone were to take advantage of the motion which we have here, the procedural motion, for the purposes of interpreting a particular position on this horrific conflict in the Middle East. That would therefore mean we would then be interrupting the government business program all day every day in Parliament, and then we would lose the structure and process and certainty. We have to have some certainty and processes so that the community understand that we actually come here with a purpose to deliver outcomes on particular legislation that is before the Parliament.

I would like to seek a level of unity and respect on the premise upon which this procedural motion is based, and I would ask and I would appeal to the best in humanity to not conflate that with the horrific circumstances of what has been occurring in the Middle East, not least for the poor hostages who are enduring their incredible suffering and indeed suffering on all sides in the Middle East and also here in the communities that we represent. Certainly I will say that we feel it deeply. I do not wish to speak for everyone, but I know with my colleagues we are all feeling it deeply. I am not worried about my own suffering; I am worried about the suffering of those directly impacted by the horrific circumstances that are unfortunately continuing at the present time. So just to be clear, the reason we have not been launching into proceeding on the particular matter that has been raised – which is extremely serious, and no-one is resiling from that – is because of the procedural elements and actually the agreement that we seek each parliamentary sitting to be able to have a government program, otherwise it would undermine the premise of ever having a government program. I hope that that is very clearly understood and is not misinterpreted as me or anyone else having any lack of empathy for the circumstances upon which the motion has been put forward.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:20): I rise in support of allowing an opportunity for this Parliament to debate this important commemoration of the atrocities of 7 October. That is what the vote that will shortly take place is – allowing this Parliament an opportunity to not only debate the important motion but also vote in commemoration of the atrocious events that happened on that day. It is a similar motion in many ways to the one that was put through the federal Parliament. This morning the coalition sought to move a motion, and the government denied leave. I think the record stands clearly in relation to the government denying the opportunity to debate this, and at no point in this week is there any time set aside by the government to put through a motion in this place to acknowledge the darkest day not only for Israel, not only for the Jewish people and not only for the friends of the Jewish people but more broadly for all good people in the Western world. All we have asked for is an opportunity to put through a motion in this place and for this Parliament to recognise the atrocities.

One year ago a number of us stood to speak in a bipartisan way on the atrocities of 7 October. It was almost one year ago today; it might have even been 15 October one year ago. A number of speakers on that day said, ‘True friendship will not be measured by the speeches of today, but it will be measured by the friendship over time.’ It is easy at the time to deliver words that you think are appropriate, but for many since, they have talked out of both sides of their mouth. That is a fact, and the community knows it. People are talking out of both sides of their mouth, because this Parliament could have been provided with an opportunity to commemorate not just the atrocities of those affected. The member for Caulfield spoke eloquently about him, me and a number of others being in Israel and visiting the sites of the most tragic and horrific events, which are absolutely burnt into my memory for the rest of my life. Today, and this Parliament this week, should have been an opportunity to commemorate those horrific events. It is not something that you simply do once afterwards and say, ‘Well, tick that one off, and we don’t need to do it again.’ One year later there are still hostages being held, and they deserve to have people around the world speak on their behalf. We could have done that, and we could have done that in a bipartisan way. That is what the coalition is seeking to do: to say to this chamber, ‘Please, let us have an opportunity to not only debate but put through a motion in recognition of those

who have passed, of those who have been held hostage and also of the fight for the free Western world, which this fight is in the Middle East.’

I know a number of members have spoken about the recent commemoration event and the Jewish community’s feeling. The feeling in the community is so incredibly strong because we have seen a rise in antisemitism that is ripping at the fabric of the welcome that people in the Jewish community feel in our state. We should find every opportunity to stand up with them and say, ‘What you are feeling is wrong and we will never allow that.’ And that is what this, today, could have been: an opportunity to stand up in friendship and walk in partnership with the Jewish community through a motion of that kind. There is little wonder that the foreign minister, having accepted attendance at that event, was forced and shamed into not attending by the community. So strong is the community, both Jewish and broader, on the outrageous and disturbing acts of the Minister for Foreign Affairs over the last year – the lack of empathy and friendship shown by the Minister for Foreign Affairs – that the foreign minister was forced to not attend that event. This would have been an important bipartisan opportunity, and it is disappointing the government has not provided it.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (18:25): I want to start by acknowledging my good friend the member for Albert Park. I think she put very eloquently the reason that the debate should not be adjourned this evening. That is not to say that there are not sentiments in what the Leader of the Opposition said that I do agree with. There are many people in this place who continue to mourn what is happening in Israel and in the wider Middle East and grieve for the hostages that are still there after a year.

I want to reflect on what the member for Brighton just mentioned, which was about what he would claim was a lack of respect from members on this side in terms of the Jewish community. Respect does not only have to happen inside this chamber. In actual fact it is a lot more important that it happens outside this chamber. The member for Brighton referenced the 7 October commemoration event, and I think it was very important. There were many people both from the Liberal Party and from this side of the house, the Labor Party, that attended – including the Premier, the Deputy Premier and many local MPs – to show their support. It was a fantastic gathering. It is sad that that gathering could not happen in a perhaps more public place. People had to register, and the venue was only notified a couple of hours beforehand. This is the security situation that the Jewish community now live with in Melbourne, which is a tragic circumstance. The best way to show our support is actually by attending these events.

As I said, the Premier, the Deputy Premier and many people on our side did attend that event, along with – numbers have varied – somewhere between 5000 and 10,000 members of the Jewish community. In a community of maybe 50,000, 60,000, almost 20 per cent – 15 to 20 per cent of the entire community – turned up to an amazing evening of testimony and of song that was really just a moment of reflection for everyone. I think those are the occasions where it is important that leaders on both sides stand up and are present. And in terms of some of the most egregious forms of antisemitism that we have seen on our streets when we have seen the flags of terrorist organisations flying, that is when it is important that those incidents are called out. We have seen the Premier call them out and we have seen the Prime Minister call them out. That is where people are watching; that is where people are seeing what is actually happening and where the leadership occurs, much more so than trying to create a procedural debate to move off the government business program.

I want to reflect briefly also on what the member for Sunbury mentioned about having a conversation with his children about this issue. I know how difficult it is to have a conversation with my children. They are now 11 and eight and they are starting to be much more aware of what is actually going on in the world and have so many questions. I find it so difficult to actually answer those questions at the moment on what it means to be a Jewish child growing up in Australia and all the security issues that need to go with their school. It is a difficult conversation for any parent, let alone a parent of a Jewish student at a Jewish school. I think they are the opportunities to have those discussions, not necessarily in the chamber.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): The house is debating the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. The Leader of the Opposition has moved that debate on the bill be now adjourned. The question is:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Assembly divided on Josh Pesutto's motion:

Ayes (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, 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 Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner

Noes (51): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, 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, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:36): I think it is really fundamental and it is always important when you are looking at any legislation, or any reform for that matter, to examine what the purpose behind it is. That is fair and reasonable. With regard to this legislation, the purpose behind drug checking is to reduce harms, including preventable deaths associated with the use of drugs obtained from unregulated drug markets. Fundamentally, I think one of the most important elements here is the health intervention, and I am going to speak a little further to that in a moment.

Somebody was asking before why we are rushing this through, and I think that it has been overwhelmingly proven that there is a clear and very much apparent evidence-based imperative to proceed with this particular reform. I want to clarify that. In Victoria there have been 10 coronial investigations since 2021 that have recommended urgent implementation of a drug-checking service to reduce the number of preventable deaths and other harms associated with the use of illicit drugs. I did hear earlier an assertion: 'Where's the evidence? Where's the backing behind these particular reforms?' Well, I am very happy to say – happy is probably not quite the correct word – that this is backed by evidence not only locally but also globally.

We have to be really honest about the changing dynamics of narcotics as well. A contributing factor to an increase in harm from illicit substances has been the increasing potency of synthetic drugs and the emergence of new psychoactive substances. We could just pretend it is not happening and hope, but all the while we have to think about the risk that this would leave for our community and particularly those who are electing to use illicit substances. I should be clear that it is not in any way about encouraging or coaxing the use of illicit substances – no one can vouch for the safety of narcotics. That is not the issue at all. But if we think about it, having this particular reform in place and having the drug-checking mechanism actually opens a conversation that many young people would not otherwise have to unpack not only exactly what the particular narcotic that they are putting forward has but also the side effects and dangers that can result from those drugs. That sounds to me like a really important and helpful conversation, at a minimum, to have. We do need a non-judgemental mechanism that is not going to act as a deterrent for a young person coming forward with a particular substance, because what an amazing opportunity that is to be able to intercept and inform them about the drug that they may or may not proceed to use after having that particular health intervention.

I think it is important to be really clear about the premise on which we are putting forward this legislation to the Parliament. It is not about endorsing illicit drugs. It is not about asserting that they should be taken or that it is a good idea to take illicit drugs – far from it. But it is about having an important health intervention mechanism in place that facilitates a data-based, should I say, but also non-judgemental discussion. I am saying ‘young person’, and I think it is broadly accepted that that is kind of the scenario in which this is likely to occur. It may be someone a little older as well, so I will allow for those contingencies. Nevertheless it is a really important conversation that may very well divert them from taking a risk over and above the risk they are already taking if they choose to proceed with an illicit drug.

I just want to clarify some of the processes which this particular legislation is supporting. What does drug checking look like? What does it actually mean? Because I have been hearing some fairly confusing and I am not sure necessarily fact-based discussions and concerns. At least this is a good opportunity in the chamber to be able to peel away some of the myths and to explain what it actually means for the younger person who is interacting with the health professional.

Drug checking involves the chemical analysis of illicit or unknown substances to inform individuals about the contents of what they are planning to consume. I think that is probably broadly understood, but I just wanted to start there in that component of the process. When a client enters a drug-checking area, they first meet with a trained harm reduction worker – because that is the purpose here; we are really seeking to reduce harm to Victorians – who walks them through the process. Clients are informed – and I think this is really, really important for those opposite who are feeling a strong sense of reservation about proceeding on this reform – that no drug is ever safe to use and drug use always carries risk. I think that is a really important thing to be conveyed to a person who is considering potentially taking an illicit drug – that they should have clear information about the risks involved in what they are doing. Then a qualified analytical chemist takes a small sample of their substance for analysis. This is usually a very small scraping of a pill or sample of powder. Following the analysis, the special drug-checking worker will communicate analytical findings to the health professional or harm reduction worker, who will then share these findings with the client in an accessible way that is easy to understand.

A client may receive information about the chemical compounds detected, including information about their purity if available; the known effects of each compound, and if multiple compounds are detected, how they may interact; and if any unknown or inconclusive compounds have been detected. That is also important, because I also heard a discussion about, ‘What about the unknown?’ Well, isn’t that a point: that if there are elements in there that are unknown and that you cannot necessarily detect the impact of, that surely is important for that person to know – because when we are looking at the level of risk, I would think that one would be potentially factoring that in. The discussion will also include advice on how to minimise harm should the person still decide to use the substance – yet again telling them about the potential ramifications of what they are about to do. So again, it seems to be a really good, commonsense approach.

What is the evidence that drug checking works? In 2022, drug-checking clinics in New Zealand tested 1720 samples, with the following findings: 29 per cent of individuals decided to take a lower dose than initially planned, 27 per cent chose to avoid mixing drugs with alcohol or other substances and 29 per cent stated they would test any additional drugs they intended to use. In April 2023 an evaluation of the ACT’s CanTEST service found that 53 per cent of substances tested matched the expected drug, with an additional 2 per cent containing both the expected drug and another substance. Thirty-two per cent of people who discovered their substance contained an additional drug or a different drug or returned an inconclusive result said they definitely would not use it. Here we are seeing the benefit of having that important health intervention, because if we did not have that, then we can imagine the very many contingencies that would otherwise unfold.

I did just want to also provide a little bit of clarity about the briefing that was provided to the opposition. There was a 30-minute briefing, which is standard. There was a 7-minute presentation; the rest was

allowed for questions. Seventeen questions on notice were provided on Thursday night. All answers were provided before debate commenced this afternoon, just to provide clarity about that for the chamber. But when we have heard –

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is misleading the house. That is actually not correct. I did not receive an email before I spoke on the bill, so that is incorrect.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): There is no point of order.

Nina TAYLOR: Okay, so there are a variety of opinions on this matter, but – *(Time expired)*

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (18:46): The evidence has been long, loud and clear. Pill testing saves lives. When people use pill-testing services, they are less likely to take drugs containing dangerous substances, they are more likely to take a reduced dose and they are less likely to be at risk of overdose if they do take drugs. I want to acknowledge the years of advocacy from the community, from the harm reduction sector, from people who use drugs, from the friends and family of those who have died from overdose, from the health professionals and from the progressive crossbench and the Greens. At long last this historic co-sponsored bill from the Greens, Legalise Cannabis and Animal Justice will mean that Victoria will have pill testing at music festivals across the state as well as at a fixed site in the city. Covered by legal protections, participants will be able to share a sample of their drugs for testing and receive back information on the composition of the drugs and any potential impacts. They will then be able to make an informed decision to either keep their drugs or safely dispose of them. If participants do decide to take the drugs and keep them, workers trained in harm reduction will be able to provide information on how to make drug taking safer. The drug-testing results will also inform the surveillance of the illegal drug market and will enable public alerts to be issued.

We are thrilled with this bill. We are also thrilled that naloxone vending machines will be introduced by this bill. Naloxone is a fast-acting, easy-to-administer safe medication that reverses opioid overdoses. This bill is welcome and necessary, and it signals a really significant shift in the political approach towards drugs and harm reduction. But it is also bittersweet because at the same time as agreeing to support this bill, the government has also walked back a critical harm reduction initiative to open more medically supervised injecting rooms. Last year over 547 Victorians suffered from a fatal opioid overdose. 2022 and 2023 recorded the highest number of fatalities ever on record in this state. With the possible introduction of potent synthetic opioids like fentanyl and nitazenes into the illicit drug market, that risk becomes even more acute. Given these stats and given that the City of Melbourne has the highest number of heroin deaths out of any Victorian local government area, it is devastating that the Labor government has abandoned its promise to open a medically supervised injecting facility in the CBD. The advocates and the experts that have been pushing for pill testing and widespread naloxone access both –

Belinda Wilson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: relevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): I bring the member for Richmond back to the bill.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: The advocates and the experts that have been pushing for pill testing and widespread naloxone access know that both measures save lives. Those same advocates and experts have been pushing for more supervised injecting rooms, and they will continue to push for that because medically supervised injecting rooms also save lives.

In my electorate in North Richmond we know the impact that a supervised injecting room can have. In just a few years over 9115 overdoses have been successfully managed, over 3800 referrals to health and social services have been made, over 1000 people have been put on opioid pharmacotherapy and over 2000 people have been tested for hepatitis and other bloodborne diseases, almost 400 of whom have started hepatitis C treatment. This is thanks to the incredible work of the North Richmond Community Health centre and their dedicated team of staff offering support and saving and changing

lives. I commend this bill but warn that pill testing and naloxone do not remove the need for more medically supervised injecting facilities. There is more work to be done, and I truly hope the government reconsiders and opens more medically supervised injecting rooms before more people die of preventable overdoses.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (18:51): I have got to say I am very proud to be speaking to this legislation, and I honestly believe that it is one of the single most important pieces of legislation that I have spoken to in my time in this place so far. For the very first time in our state's history this bill, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024, will give the express legal authority for both mobile and fixed-site pill-testing services to operate here in Victoria. This is something that simply would not have happened without a number of advocacy groups and of course HACSU, the Health and Community Services Union, who have worked tirelessly advocating for this to occur.

This bill will establish a licensing framework to authorise, appoint and regulate both fixed and mobile pill-testing – so drug-testing – services, and it will support the government's commitment to introducing secure naloxone vending machines in key areas of need. The science behind pill testing is very, very clear, and I was having a conversation with one of my colleagues earlier – it saves lives as well as reducing harm. We know that no drug is ever truly safe, but Victorians deserve to have all of the information possible to help them make better, safer and of course more informed decisions – decisions that ultimately will save lives.

Like in other jurisdictions around the country and around the world, drug harms are increasing here in Victoria. Tragically a total of 547 Victorians died from drug overdose in 2023, our state's second highest ever annual figure and well above the annual road toll. This is too many Victorians, and it is important for us in this place to, without judgement and without stigma, reflect on these lives that have been lost and acknowledge the grief of the loved ones who have been left behind. But more importantly, we must act.

In Victoria for the close to a decade it has been in office this Labor government has always taken a health-led response to addressing drug- and alcohol-related harms. It is why we are so proud to be the home of one of only two safe injecting facilities in the Southern Hemisphere – and it is a pity that the oh-so-passionate member for Richmond, who was just lecturing us about safe injecting rooms, has already left, because having two safe injecting facilities in the Southern Hemisphere, with one here in Victoria, is something that we as a government are proud of. It is why we have doubled our annual investment in drug and alcohol treatment services and supports, and it is why we are proudly introducing pill testing from this summer. With the global drug market becoming increasingly unpredictable and more volatile, the need for pill-testing services has become even more important.

Over the past 10 years more than 1100 new drugs have been identified, and the potency of longstanding synthetics is increasing. Of the 547 overdose deaths reported in Victoria last year, 42 involved new substances. This has been accompanied by an increase in drug-related emergency department admissions. Victorian paramedics responded to more overdoses at festivals in the first three months of this year than during all of last year. Like most people, may I dare say, in this place, when I was younger I too went to a number of festivals, and I loved them. I had a great time. I was there with my friends, and I went to too many to remember. We had wonderful times together, and we made long-lasting memories. But I shiver to think that any of my friends, who I love, my family members, me or any of the thousands of other people at those festivals could potentially have lost their life there just because they made a choice without being able to be fully informed of the risks they were taking. Some people may think that those who consume drugs are stupid, but no-one has the right to stand in judgement and say that someone else deserves to die just because that person makes a choice which they may disapprove of.

The case for action is clear. Local and international experiences all show that drug checking, also known as pill testing, is a highly effective public health intervention that does not encourage or

increase the use of illicit drugs. A pill-testing service will reduce the risk of people overdosing on both unexpected and high-potency substances as well as reduce illnesses or death from drugs obtained from unregulated drug markets.

People may be familiar with the pill-testing services which already operate in the ACT and Queensland, but while these other jurisdictions have commenced their own pill-testing trials under already existing legislation through operational guidance, Victoria will be the first jurisdiction in Australia to explicitly make the provision of pill-testing services legal, with no grey areas whatsoever. Legislation means that staff and clients can have confidence that no-one is breaking the law by using, operating or hosting this service. The bill provides that clients using the drug-checking services will be authorised and therefore exempt from criminal liability for the offences of possession and supply when they are using a drug-checking service in respect of possessing a substance, supplying the substance to the drug-checking service for the purpose of testing or disposal and receiving the remainder of a substance after a worker takes a sample. This exemption from criminal liability will only apply when the client is at a drug-checking place and for an amount that is less than a traffickable quantity.

When a person or client enters a drug-testing area they first meet with a trained harm reduction worker, who walks them through the entire process. The client is informed that no drugs are ever safe to use and drugs always carry a risk, as we all know, then a qualified analytical chemist takes a small sample of their substance for analysis. This is usually a very small scraping of a pill or a sample of powder. Following the analysis, analytical findings will be communicated to the health professional or harm reduction worker, who then shares these findings with the client in an accessible way that is easy to understand. A client may receive information about the chemical compounds detected, including information about their purity if available; the known effects of each compound; if multiple compounds are detected, how they may interact; and if any unknown or inconclusive compounds have been detected. The discussion will also include how to minimise harm should the person still decide to proceed and use that substance. This could include information on the effects of different dosages, information on interactions with other substances the person has already ingested or intends to ingest and advice about the importance of sleep, hydration, adequate nutrition, the weather, environmental conditions et cetera.

I have gone into all of this at such length because I want to emphasise that this is expert technology and expert advice. It is not something that we have just made up on the run. Nobody is ever told that they are good to go. Nobody is told that their drugs are pure or safe. The importance of this health intervention can simply not be overstated, because we know that people who use pill-testing services are more likely to take immediate action to reduce harm as well as engage in longer term harm reduction, including reducing the amount of the drug used and avoiding polysubstance use. For many people this will be the first time that they discuss their drug use with a professional. This unique opportunity for education will shape behaviour.

Various professional organisations, alcohol and other drugs services and health, community, justice, social and youth service sectors have publicly championed pill testing for a number of years. I am very proud to single out and pay special tribute today to the mighty Health and Community Services Union, otherwise known as HACSU, for their strong and consistent advocacy for these services. HACSU represents the thousands of workers in our alcohol and drug public mental health workforces –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required by sessional orders to interrupt business. The member will have the call when the matter returns to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Bulleen Plaza bus shelter

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:00): (851) It is an important issue I want to raise tonight for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it is in relation to buses at Bulleen Plaza shopping centre on Grant Olson Avenue. Bulleen Plaza is one of those old suburban shopping centres, community shopping centres, that has got so many people that use it as just their local community hub. It is not a Westfield; it is not like Fountain Gate, Southland or Shoppingtown up in Doncaster. It is, as I said, like a community centre. People go down there for medical reasons; there are medical hubs down there. There is a Coles down there. My office was there for some years. Particularly for what is an older demographic in the suburb of Bulleen, it is so much a community precinct. A lot of the Greek senior citizens will come down, play cards and use it as a place to meet, but what it is lacking is proper and active bus facilities for people to get on and off at Bulleen Plaza.

As I have said, I have been down there many times. For many years I was in Bulleen Plaza in my office, and what we always noticed was – unlike, say, the Pines, which is in Doncaster East up the road, or even at Macedon Square – there is no proper covered facility for bus usage there. What is amazing is that less than a k down the road this North East Link Project is being built and yet they cannot even upgrade the facilities at Bulleen Plaza before they do that. The Bulleen park-and-ride has been built, which very few people use, but you do not have any upgrades in a place people do use, which is the Bulleen shopping centre.

Bulleen itself is used by a lot of, as I said, the Italian and Greek community in the area. If my old Ukrainian grandmother was still alive, she would say of the Labor government: Я не знаю – те мокра кыпка! They are a pack of wet chooks; just hurry up and do it. And why wouldn't they do it? Because it is a community centre, a community facility, a location where people go, and I think it just needs the bus shelter to be rebuilt in a proper and sensible way. Once it is covered they might lose six car parks, but centre management and I are keen to make sure that we get a new facility there. The Labor government need not be wet chooks. Can the Minister for Transport Infrastructure please upgrade the bus facility at Bulleen Plaza shopping centre on Grant Olson Avenue to have a covered facility for the route 280 and 282 buses to use.

Tarneit Business Association

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (19:03): (852) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Small Business, and I request that she join me in meeting with members of the Tarneit Business Association. Established in early 2022, a passionate group of business owners came together to form the Tarneit Business Association. The association works with business owners from a range of different industries, including hospitality and catering, home-based businesses, local shopfronts, training and construction businesses, professional and medical services and so much more. The Tarneit Business Association recognises the vital role that small businesses play in our local community. I want to thank president Rashi Dhagat for her work in bringing together such a passionate group of people. Rashi is the owner of the wonderful Little Growling Cafe, and she played a core role in the development of the association. Her passion and drive are truly inspiring, so I want to thank her for all the work that she has done in our fantastic community.

Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (19:04): (853) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Racing, and I am glad to see him at the table. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with the Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club to discuss its future. Greyhound Racing Victoria suspended racing at the venue in July after issues with the lure, and members are unsure about whether racing will resume or what the future holds for the club. The club entered into voluntary administration with GRV in July 2023. After 12 months under GRV, issues with the lure continued, and management of Traralgon was transferred to the Sale greyhound racing club. It was then that racing ceased altogether at Traralgon. I am told planning and costings were done for a new conventional cable lure system but GRV decided the project was unfeasible and made no alternate offer for a solution. Aside

from a notice on the GRV website, members have had little communication about their future, and this is also affecting the trainers in the area. The ongoing uncertainty of whether racing will resume has had a dire impact on the club.

The Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club has been a fixture of the Gippsland community since racing commenced at Glenview Park in 1973, and it contributes enormously to the local economy. Millions of dollars have been spent on the facility to turn it into one of the premium facilities in Victoria, and it will be a travesty to lose this once-thriving asset just because it seems too hard to come up with a viable solution to an issue with the lure. Minister, will you commit to sitting down with the Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club for an honest discussion about the club's future?

Greenvale electorate sporting facilities

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (19:06): (854) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide me and my community with an update on the progress of just some of the important community sporting infrastructure projects that the Allan Labor government is funding across the Greenvale electorate.

I was thrilled to join the Roxburgh Park United Soccer Club community for their end-of-season celebration and awards night on Sunday. Led by Ayad and Dunia Botres and a team of passionate and dedicated volunteers, Roxy United has grown so much from its foundation in 2016 and is now a pillar of our local community. It is a welcoming, supportive club that is home to many hundreds of players across girls, boys, men's and women's teams. The focus is always on positive coaching and development of players on and off the pitch. So it was a joy to congratulate all players, coaches, volunteers and sponsors at Sunday's wonderful celebration of the season.

To support the club's continued growth and success, I was delighted to join the minister at Arena Recreation Reserve recently to announce a major investment to install new lighting on the second oval, which will enable competition and training into the night through winter and effectively double the club's capacity. I know the club community as well as other uses of Arena Recreation Reserve, like Hume Cricket Club, are looking forward to these lights being installed.

Likewise, the cricketing community across the north is very excited about the impending opening of the world-class Greenvale indoor cricket facility, which has been delivered in partnership with Hume City Council and supported by a \$1.5 million investment through the Allan Labor government's community cricket program. Can the minister please provide me and my sporting communities with a status update on these important projects, which are going to improve and expand the sporting and recreation opportunities for residents across Greenvale?

Portland District Health

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:07): (855) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Ambulance Services, and it is simple: I am asking for a copy of the risk assessment that led to the baffling decision to close Portland's helipad. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) have confirmed that closure was not due to compliance issues. The community of Portland would love to know what the real reason is. Many regional hospitals have helipads and manage to mitigate risks to the public. I recently inspected the Cairns Hospital helipad and saw how public safety is successfully managed there. Portland has not had an operational helipad since 2022, and frankly it is a disaster waiting to happen. When patients require air transfers it is generally because they are in a critical condition. Time is of the essence, where every minute can mean the difference between life and death.

In 2023 I raised a constituency question regarding the decision to cease Ambulance Victoria helicopters landing at the Portland hospital helipad. This nanny state is being strangled in red tape. The buck-passing for the reasons behind the helipad closure must cease. First CASA was blamed, then Ambulance Victoria. Who is next in line for the blame? In 2024, after multiple complaints from concerned constituents, I launched a petition calling for the reopening of the helipad, which garnered

substantial community support. However, the helipad is still closed, and let us not forget the biggest slap in the face: the Portland community fundraised extensively to build this helipad. They did not wait for the government to just step up on its own, they took matters into their own hands and ensured patients could be transported quickly and safely to major hospitals. Yet here we are, their efforts nullified by bureaucratic red tape. The community deserve some answers and, more importantly, action.

Portland has been more than patient. We need the government to stop the excuses, stop passing the buck and deliver what the community has fought so hard for. Our community cannot afford further delays. We need action now to ensure that our residents receive the timely emergency care they need and deserve.

State Electricity Commission

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:09): (856) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for the State Electricity Commission and concerns the recently announced SEC consumer pilot. The action that I seek is that the minister join me to visit a local home to see how this pilot program supports people in my electorate of Narre Warren South.

The SEC is back. It is enshrined in our Victorian constitution. This program will help electrify homes and was launched across three local government areas, including our local City of Casey. This puts the power back in the hands of my constituents and gives them the tools that they need. For residents in my electorate who are eager to make the switch to electric, the new SEC pilot program gives them a one-stop shop for guidance and support. Narre Warren South has a strong record in renewable energy and has seen over 7000 Solar Homes rebates processed, ranking amongst the top 10 uptakes in the state. It is important that customers can have access to affordable and quality electrical appliances, and they must have faith in their installers and their products, with government accreditation and a resolution process for any issues. Information and support regarding suitable appliances, indicative costs, government rebates and emission reductions are key to switching to electric. I welcome the SEC consumer pilot initiative being selected for our area, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Albury Wodonga Health

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (19:11): (857) I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for the minister to reject any business case for Victoria's \$225 million investment in Albury hospital's \$558 million makeover unless it meets the number of beds and operating theatres set out in the 2022 clinical services plan. Minister, you have to make a decision for the people that you grew up with. The minister is a local. She knows that. We have had many discussions. You need to talk honestly with the people you grew up with.

Back on 5 April 2023 deputy secretary of health infrastructure Chris Hotham wrote to his New South Wales equivalent confirming Victoria's funding was contingent on a business case. The minister now has that business case. I believe it does not meet our needs, and it is a far cry from what was promised. In October 2022 the then premiers of New South Wales and Victoria promised a single-site world-class hospital for Albury Wodonga Health. It was all based on a clinical services plan, basically an assessment of future needs for beds and theatres, concocted in the months leading up to that announcement. But it was version 2.0 of the plan. The original and, some would say, best plan was approved by the minister's department in 2021 and was validated by the Victorian Health Building Authority, but the cost of meeting the number of beds and operating theatres in that plan did not fit the two premiers' budgets. It was gutted to meet the premiers' needs for an election promise.

Now we find that we are likely to get even less. It is not one site as promised; it is still going to be two. A 10-storey medical tower is now cut to six storeys, and there are just 80 new beds, but not before 2029, when Albury Wodonga Health start every day 50 to 70 beds short of what they need. Planning for the Wodonga hospital says they need an additional 40 beds by 2026. A multistorey car park was

cut down to two decks. The Premier promised a helipad, which is gone. Ten operating theatres were slashed to six and a shell. Already the upgraded emergency department is overwhelmed with current demand, let alone the extra 29,000 presentations that will soon shift to Albury when you close the Wodonga emergency department, and all because the money is not enough.

It was never enough. I believe when the two premiers made their 'future faking' promise back in 2022 that state bureaucrats already knew the money was not enough, even for that modest promise. The minister, I believe, was hoodwinked by all the departments, but by August 2023 the executive steering committee had come to the same conclusion. In February this year that committee costed the project at \$621.5 million, yet ministers from that meeting say the business case must be limited to the \$558 million election promise.

Family violence

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:14): (858) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is for the minister to discuss our government's prevention strategy with key community groups in the Glen Waverley district. Helping someone you know at risk of family violence is so daunting because it requires a different solution in almost every situation and services can be difficult to access. That is why under this government a royal commission brought this issue to the front of people's minds and all 227 recommendations have been fully implemented. It concluded that too many victims of family violence suffer alone. The royal commission edified that we must save crucial time by simplifying the ways people can find help. In response the Allan Labor government created a new government service called the Orange Door. This service fits all family violence supports in one place, and I wish to advise community groups in my electorate on how they can refer this service to people who otherwise slip through the cracks.

Groups like the Bengali Association of Victoria and the Victoria Tamil Senior Citizens Benevolent Society have done incredible work and are the social fabric that many people rely on. I would also like to thank support groups such as IndianCare, who have also had an invaluable personal touch for those in need. A big thanks is also needed for Veera Brave Girl for their organisation's educational, financial and legal advice that saves lives.

In Parliament this week we have the community legal centre exhibition, which is showcasing our wonderful community legal centres that provide so much support to our community in this space. I would also like to give a special acknowledgement to the Eastern Community Legal Centre and thank Michael Smith and his team for the backup and support they give to the people in our community. Preventing family violence requires others to step in, and my community is ready to embrace those that need and deserve help through the Orange Door. I look forward to hosting the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and discussing how my team and our community groups can stand up against this scourge.

Fruit fly

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (19:16): (859) My adjournment is to the Minister for Agriculture, and the action that I seek is that the minister immediately reinstate the Queensland fruit fly eradication program. Many in this Parliament do not understand the fruit fly program that has existed. This is not a program subsidising the fruitgrowers, and it is not about saying it is time fruitgrowers manage their own pests, because fruitgrowers in Cobram, Mooroopna, Invergordon and Shepparton already manage fruit fly and the outbreaks on their properties. It is their responsibility, and they manage it. What this program does is manage fruit fly infestations in townships like Cobram, Numurkah and others where unkept or poorly managed vegetable patches can be the location of fruit fly outbreaks and then infestation can occur across the farming region.

The Allan Labor government has turned its back on fruitgrowers by saying it will no longer support fruit fly outbreaks from town infestations. This is now asking farmers to manage rogue fruit fly outbreaks that occur in other people's backyards but that will determine the viability of fruitgrowers

in northern Victoria. The minister needs to stand up to the bullies in cabinet who continue to run the heavy roller over regional businesses and communities. Fruit fly is well managed on farms, but asking farmers to manage fruit fly in regional town backyards is a mistake – a massive mistake – and an indictment of the goodwill that regional farmers have to deliver fresh food to our city cousins. Turning your back on fruitgrowers will cost some fruitgrowers their livelihood and will cost Labor at the next election. It is not too late to reinstate the funding.

Kingswood Primary School

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:18): (860) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest update on the Kingswood Primary School upgrade and modernisation. Kingswood Primary School is a fantastic local school located in Dingley Village. Principal Aaron Cox has been a great advocate for this project, along with the school council and the broader school community. This advocacy has been long running, and I have been proud to support this advocacy wherever possible to deliver the upgrade in its entirety based on its original scope. This has included extensive discussions between the minister's office, the Victorian School Building Authority, Kingswood's principal and the member for Mordialloc, and it has ultimately seen the announcement of a further \$1.293 million to support the Kingswood Primary School in delivering the project. This was on top of a \$6.249 million allocation in the 2020–21 state budget. The result is a great result for Kingswood students and for the community, delivering a competition-grade gymnasium which features a flexible learning space suitable for physical education and community activities, a storage area, amenities and a foyer space. Again, I commend the principal and the whole school community. It has been a rewarding experience working with the school leaders to ensure this work helps them to achieve their educational goals and that improvements are targeted where they are needed most. This investment will ensure that every child at Kingswood Primary School has access to a great education, and I am proud to think that the project will be opening soon.

I am also very proud of our work more broadly. Across the Clarinda electorate and across the state our government schools are better equipped to prepare students for the 21st century. Modern learning environments help to develop creative thinking, promote STEM literacy and inspire learning for life and critical thinking for future success. New and modern school buildings contribute to school pride for students, parents and the wider community, building their engagement with education. Finally, by upgrading and modernising schools the Victorian government is transforming communities. By sharing sport, cultural and health facilities schools are becoming neighbourhood hubs, and Kingswood Primary School will be another great example of that. I thank the minister, and I am looking forward to his response.

Responses

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:20): Firstly, the honourable member for Bulleen raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure regarding buses at Bulleen Plaza and rebuilding the shelter facility there for commuters, particularly for the 280 and 282 buses. I will pass that one on to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The member for Tarneit raised a matter for the Minister for Small Business, seeking that she join him in meeting the Tarneit Business Association. They are doing amazing work advocating for traders and providing jobs for people across the electorate of Tarneit.

The member for Morwell raised a matter for my good self in regard to the Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club, and I look forward to accepting his request to meet with the Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club. We may well also engage some further advice from Greyhound Racing Victoria, particularly about the racing efforts that we would like to see picked up and proceeding again at Traralgon. They do great work there. As people would know right across the state of Victoria, the greyhound sport provides some \$643 million in economic activity right across Victoria and 4700 effective full-time jobs across the state for families and so many people who are engaged in providing for not just the industry of greyhound racing but the sport of greyhound racing. It has a great tradition that provides

great opportunities for people to get involved and engaged. I will be very pleased to catch up with the member and the Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club to see where we can take things next to progress the volunteer efforts and the great work that the club is doing. I will be very pleased to do that.

I was recently with the member for Morwell when we opened the \$3 million redevelopment of the Moe Racing Club – just staying on racing for a moment – a \$1 million investment from the Allan Labor government, and \$2 million is a magnificent effort from the Moe Racing Club. While we are touching just there on thoroughbred racing, we should note that nearly \$90 million in economic activity in the Latrobe region alone and some 700 jobs across the Latrobe Valley and the Latrobe region come from thoroughbred racing. When you add that to the significant work and the opportunities that are provided through greyhound racing and the sport across the valley, that is a very significant sport and a significant industry. I am very keen to catch up with a strong advocate for racing across all its codes, the member for Morwell.

The member for Greenvale raised a matter for the Minister for Community Sport seeking an update on progress on a range of infrastructure projects, particularly around local sporting clubs in his Greenvale electorate. He took us on a tour of those. Many of them are very significant, and I am sure the Minister for Community Support looks forward to updating him on the progress and probably getting out there to visit some of those projects as they come to fruition. The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Ambulance Services seeking a copy of the risk assessment that relates to the closure of the Portland helipad, and I will see that that is passed to the Minister for Ambulance Services.

The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for the State Electricity Commission particularly with regard to the consumer pilot program. He sought that she join him on a visit to his local electorate, particularly to constituents at a local home in his electorate, to see how that consumer pilot program will help local homes in the City of Casey across his electorate to drive down their power prices and provide relief to local residents in his community. The member for Benambra raised a matter for the Minister for Health regarding the rejection of the business case regarding the \$558 million makeover – it is a big makeover – unless the 2022 clinical services plan is backed in in full, and I will be sure to pass that on to the Minister for Health.

The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence with regard to discussing those prevention strategies with key community groups in his Glen Waverley electorate who advocate and advance the interests of the prevention of family violence for women and children in his electorate. The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action he sought was to see the reinstatement of the Queensland fruit fly eradication program. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the Minister for Education, the Deputy Premier, with regard to an update on the Kingswood Primary School upgrade in Dingley Village, another significant project across the Clarinda electorate that the member is working hard to deliver for his community. I commend all those matters to the house.

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

House adjourned 7:25 pm.