

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

YMCA YOUTH PARLIAMENT 2023

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL CHAMBER

Monday 26 June 2023

2023 Youth Governor: Miora Trainor

Program Director: Tessa Buchanan

Hume City Council

Micaela Griffiths
Sarah Hanoona
Matthew Lillywhite
Riya Sharma
Lorjel Sia

Korin Gamadji Institute

Brigid Burston
Cindy Ming Chen
Thomas Hughes
Alexandra Madu

Mildura Rural City Council

Grace Albanese
Jesse-Lee Dass
Sofia Ghidinelli-Matheson
Evelyn Olley
Cooper Rawlinson

Moyne NextGen!

Hemi Edwards
Samuel Hall
Mijica Lus
Ashton Maher
Timothy Reesink
Ella Shelden

Newhaven College

Gabriel Pascoe
Leigh Pouw
Charlie Swan
Gabriel Winterson

Orbost Secondary College

Allyza Catapang
Seamus Donnellan
Chantelle Lloyd-Shrimpton
Sinead McClay
Jayden Ong

**Overnewton Anglican
Community College**

Charlie Biberhofer
Dylan Gekas
Lauren Grimaud
Elsie Holland
Scarlet Lee
Pippa Wiggins

Westbourne Grammar School

Sean Carpenter
Lily Decker
Grace Emezie
Taylah Fynney
Evie Redford
Shrika Vallabh

Whitehorse City Council

Amy Yizhen Bai
Sirasi De Silva
Lihan Guo
Harper Lam
Yuting Wang

Y Ballarat

Isabella Koros
Ash Nguyen
Vincent Nube
Jacob Osenaris
Keira Porter

Opening of the session

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 10:02 am.

At 10:02 am the Clerk read the following:

Proclamation for holding the 37th Victorian YMCA Youth Parliament

Whereas the Victorian Council of YMCAs wish to develop a project which will:

provide young persons with a state forum to express their views on matters of concern to them;

provide the state government with bills which would express the concerns and expectations of youth and which could be acted upon by the government; and

provide the opportunity for young persons to gain public speaking and debating skills and develop an interest in their own parliamentary system by actually being involved in the parliamentary process;

and whereas the Honourable the President of the Legislative Council and the Honourable the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly have graciously consented to the use of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly chambers for this purpose;

and whereas the Honourable Natalie Suleyman, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Veterans and Minister for Youth, has agreed to receive the bills passed by this assembly;

now therefore I, Miora Trainor, Youth Governor, command the selected members of the YMCA Youth Parliament to attend at the Parliament Houses on 26 June 2023 at 9:45 am for the carrying out of such business as the YMCA Youth Parliament shall deem appropriate.

Given under my hand on 26 June 2023.

Miora Trainor
Youth Governor

Opening speeches

Usher of the Black Rod announced approach of Youth Governor.

Youth Governor entered chamber.

Legislative Assembly Youth Parliament members attended in response to Youth Governor's summons.

National anthem sung by Danjo Nazareno.

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane): I now call upon Wurundjeri elder Perry Wandin to perform a welcome to country. Thank you, Perry.

Perry WANDIN: Good morning, everybody. My name is Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung elder. I am here to perform a welcome to country to this beautiful Parliament here. Congratulations, everybody, on your situation, and the Youth Governor of Victoria. So I hope youse get a long way down the future. Let us hope youse get in a position. But firstly I would like to acknowledge all my ancestors, elders past and present, and the next emerging generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I live in beautiful Healesville up there in the Yarra Valley, and that is where my family have all moved off the Coranderrk mission. My grandfather firstly, because he left the mission just before it shut in 1924 and he was not allowed to go back, going to the half-caste rule. So he got a job and started up his family and all that, and we have never moved, so it has gone down through the time. Simon Wonga was the first one to go out there in 1863. We were very lucky – well, my ancestors were, because there were 35 men, women and children just about wiped out by cholera. By 1924 there were 424 Aboriginal people living on the mission. If you ever get a chance to go out there, there are tours being done under our family name, Wandoon Estate, and it shows you a plan of how it used to look. As we are in beautiful Parliament House, there is no evidence of anything left there – the same with all the missions. They quickly wiped them out when they said they can go home. Home to what? But anyway.

My father was our last ngurungaeta, James 'Juby' Wandin, and the first Aboriginal player to play for that mighty team St Kilda. We are just dangling there at the moment, but hopefully we can move on. I just went down there with the 150th and I got a boomerang in there, because I returned. My father has been passed now 17 years. I took a boomerang down there and it is in the cabinet, and I am proud enough to say that my father has got the screen up there to say who he is: our last ngurungaeta, meaning 'head man'. It was passed down

from Simon Wonga, William Barak, my great-grandfather Robert Wandoo and then my father, but it has not carried on since.

So I wish everybody great luck today, or this week, because you are going to be really stretching out everything. I hope it does work out for everybody. In a last couple of words in Woi Wurrung, wominjeka yearmann koondee biik Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung balluk, meaning 'Welcome to the land of the Wurundjeri people.' I do welcome you. Great success. Thank you very much.

Members applauded.

The PRESIDENT: I am now very pleased to call on the Honourable Natalie Suleyman, Minister for Youth.

Natalie SULEYMAN (Minister for Youth): Thank you very much. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we have gathered here today and pay my respects to their elders both past and present and to all elders and First Nations people here today. Thank you for that warm welcome from Perry Wandin, our Wurundjeri elder.

I would like to begin by again thanking the President of the Legislative Council Shaun Leane for the warm welcome and of course my parliamentary colleagues Sam Groth, the Shadow Minister for Youth; Carolyn Morris of YMCA Victoria; Miora Trainor, the Youth Governor from Victoria YMCA; Tal Karp, the CEO of YMCA Australia; and Marcia Pallett, former YMCA Victoria president and founder of the Victorian Youth Parliament. Thank you so much for being at Parliament House today.

Good morning to you all. I am absolutely excited to see you all again here, in particular as the Victorian Minister for Youth. It is an honour to be here also on behalf of the Premier Daniel Andrews, who sends his best wishes for such an important occasion. As I said, I am really delighted to join the Victorian government and to be able to partner with the YMCA in Victoria again to support the 37th Youth Parliament program. This program has led to real change in Victoria, with successful bills from Youth Parliament used to inform government policy in areas like recycling systems and bike safety. More recently, the Andrews government made an election commitment to make sanitary products free and publicly available in schools across Victoria. This commitment came from a bill that had been passed through the Victorian Youth Parliament. This week really will highlight some of the exciting programs and will guide government. You will be able to see when government delivers things that you have suggested, debated and introduced bills on in this place during this week.

All of you here today are here to provide insights into issues that impact people across Victoria and to make that real change. Over the next couple of days you will be able to engage in discussions and debates and consider a variety of bills. I encourage you to focus your advocacy on issues that you are absolutely passionate about. I also want to commend you all for putting your hands up, because sometimes it can be a challenge. To see you here getting involved and coming together from all across Victoria to advocate what you are passionate about – we are truly proud to have you here. Thank you to everybody for your contribution and dedication and for making a difference in the future of young people in Victoria. This week is the perfect opportunity to make a real difference, and I encourage you all to make the most of it. It is also an opportunity to network amongst yourselves and to make real connections as well. I am always deeply impressed by the achievements and passions of Victoria's young people, and I really look forward to seeing the bills that will be passed by this Youth Parliament. I hope you leave Parliament feeling energised and of course inspired by the insights and ideas that you have shared. Most importantly, you will be able to take your experience from this week back to your local communities and be connected, whether it is your local not-for-profit organisation or your sporting club. Your ability to get involved and be active in your local community and also understand the three levels of government is so important.

Again, thank you to YMCA Victoria for inviting me to speak to you today but also for the opportunity to get to know you again. I wish you all the very best of luck through this week but also in the future and in particular in continuing the great work of the Youth Parliament of Victoria. Thank you again. Enjoy, and continue to have some vigorous debates. I am sure you have all seen some of the highlights from Parliament when we are sitting, whether it is in the Council or in the Assembly, and I hope to see some of those lively debates. I will be looking forward to making sure that I stay tuned this week to watch some of those highlights. Thank you so much. Have a lovely time in Parliament. Thank you.

Members applauded.

The PRESIDENT: I am now pleased to call on Mr Sam Groth, the Shadow Minister for Youth.

Sam GROTH (Shadow Minister for Youth): Thank you. President. Good morning, everyone. I am so pleased to be here at the opening of the Victorian Youth Parliament, and I know many of you have put countless hours of work in to make it here today.

Can I just echo the sentiments from the Honourable Natalie Suleyman, the Minister for Youth, about that terrific welcome to country from Perry that we received. I also acknowledge that we are on the lands of the Wurundjeri people and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I also just want to acknowledge any of my other parliamentary colleagues that are here today; as well as Michael Delaney, the acting executive manager for youth services for the YMCA; Miora Trainor, Youth Governor of Victoria – congratulations; Carolyn Morris, CEO of YMCA Victoria; Tal Karp, CEO of YMCA Australia; Marcia Pallett, the founder of the Victorian Youth Parliament; Oscar Harry, government stakeholder liaison; all of you youth parliamentarians who have given up your time and hopefully expertise to push forward some bills for Parliament today; and also members of the youth press gallery. This program would not be possible without your input, encouragement, participation and constant support.

Before we get started, I want you to put your hand up if any of you to here today have been told that you are future leaders at some stage. Well, I am going to say one thing. That is absolute rubbish, because you are not future leaders, you are current leaders, and that is why you sit here today. You are the future of the state, and we need to make sure that we are listening to you, not in the future but now.

More than 30 bills have been passed by the Victorian Youth Parliament and have gone on to become actual law in this state, including legislation relating to drug testing, helmet wearing and the availability of the morning-after pill. These pieces of legislation continue to have a daily impact on Victorians' lives.

Over the next few days you will be doing the work of an MP, debating 20 bills on a variety of important topics like gambling, emissions reductions, education, the voting age and protection of children, just to name a few. These issues are among the most important and topical in Victoria today. That is why it is so great to see teams represented from right across the state in this Victorian Youth Parliament. From Mildura to Hoppers Crossing, there is almost no part of the state that is not represented by a talented young team here today.

In my role as the Shadow Minister for Youth, I know engaging with young Victorians and nurturing their interest in public policy is the key to ensuring we have a strong and representative democracy for the future. In fact the work you do over the next three days can have an enormous impact for the future of Victoria. That is the difference that you make as a part of this program: you can be the catalyst for important policy change here in Victoria. As one of the younger members of Victoria's 60th Parliament, I have a unique appreciation for the importance of a youth perspective in creating a confident vision for Victoria. The courage each one of you brings and the conviction of your beliefs will help us ensure that the future of our state is strong for all generations.

I want to thank you for being here today, for sharing in our democracy and for strengthening our political system. Whilst you take on a big responsibility, you are also opening the door to a more positive future. I look forward to hearing the contributions that you make over the next three days. Enjoy your time as youth MPs, and I am sure that I will be seeing many of you in this house or in the Legislative Assembly in years to come. Thank you.

Members applauded.

The PRESIDENT: I am now pleased to call upon Carolyn Morris, CEO of YMCA Victoria.

Carolyn MORRIS: Thank you very much. I think they make us sit in this small spot here so that it gets us all to work together, which I think is really part of why you are here today – how do we work together better to advance Victoria and advance Australia? I concur with your words, Sam: you are the leaders of today, and that does come with a big responsibility.

But before I begin – Perry Wandin. Perry here is also known as Uncle Perry, and I can say that now because he is not here. He does not like to be called ‘Uncle’ because he does not think he is old enough or wise enough, but I think he is. He is a truly amazing individual.

Her Excellency Miora, Youth Governor – I do not think you thought you were going to be sitting here today in the middle, but your role is so important to this, so thank you, Miora. We have the Honourable Natalie Suleyman, Minister for Youth; Mr Sam Groth, Shadow Minister for Youth; youth parliamentarians; and the press gallery – where is the press gallery? Up there, yes. Hello, press gallery. You cannot even see me. I cannot see you either. We have got Marcia Pallett. Everybody, Marcia is sitting in the middle there. Please do not stand up, Marcia. All good. Marcia is an ex-president of the YMCA and the brains behind you sitting here. She advocated for Youth Parliament to happen. So thank you very much, Marcia – a round of applause. Thank you, Marcia.

Members applauded.

Carolyn MORRIS: So guests and fellow change makers – everybody in this room is a change maker – welcome to the 37th YMCA Victorian Youth Parliament. Today we are here to help shape the future of Victoria. You are all looking very expectant, and you probably are a little nervous, but by the end when Lindsay, the president of YMCA Victoria, speaks to you, I am sure you are going to have had such a lovely time debating. And you are not going to feel expectant anymore, you are going to feel very satisfied that you have changed Victoria.

Before I begin I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Elders are like Perry, and I want to thank him again. I met him last week and again this week. His words of wisdom when I asked him, ‘What can we do for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?’ were to listen – listen and act. So I hope that every single one of you will do three things: listen, understand and appreciate the 65,000 years of history, learn how to shape a better world together with our First Nations people and think about the injustices that have happened over so long – and continue to happen – and make sure that you understand that and do one or two things in your lifetime that will make a difference for our collectivity.

I say that this is the place where that is going to happen, in Youth Parliament. We have a track record. We spoke about the different legislation that has happened here. There have been 68 different pieces of Victorian legislation that have arisen from Youth Parliament. So this is both an achievement but also, if you think about it, as you are standing here, a reminder of the responsibility that you have to let your voice be heard, to push for what you want and the change that you want to see in Victoria. So many past participants continue to do that in a lifetime quest around their impact on community.

We do have some distinguished alumni. We have got two current members of the Victorian Parliament. We have got Prime Minister’s staff. We have got federal commissioners. We have got presidents of the law council of Victoria and multiple founders of social enterprises. That is the future that can happen to you. But it is a common misconception that the only path to youth parliamentarians is to go into politics. Other alumni have had amazing experiences and embarked on such a lot of varied and impactful careers into the future.

I am a passionate supporter of Youth Parliament, and that is because I have witnessed firsthand how change is made and how transformative it can be. I will never forget the day that I first met Kergen Angel; he was sitting in that chair only last year. Kergen is a fierce advocate for change and has inspired and motivated me to change as well. Today Kergen acts as the youth leadership and governance manager for Larrakia country in Garramilla, which is Darwin – I imagine over the future we might not be talking about Darwin anymore; we might be talking about Garramilla – where he is a dedicated supporter of young Aboriginal leadership. And in an exciting announcement: in 2023, the Northern Territory, the YMCA team, with Kergen’s incredible expertise, are relaunching Youth Parliament up in the Northern Territory, which I think does deserve a round of applause as well.

Members applauded.

Carolyn MORRIS: It will provide young First Nations people with a direct voice into the territory government, which is exciting.

And this year's Youth Governor, Miora Trainor, is a staunch advocate for the rights of women, LGBTIQ+ communities and those living with chronic illness. The YMCA are staunch advocates for those things as well, and I did want to say that, as a personal thing to talk to you about, did you know that what YMCA do in Lebanon is distribute chronic disease medicines when the government cannot do that? They raise funds and they distribute it because the government cannot do it. So it is relevant to this, because the YMCA do things that are relevant to community and listen to community. Kergen and Miora's passion is so contagious, and I cannot wait to see what you all achieve here today.

Of course this program would not be possible without our people and partners, and I would like to thank the President and Speaker for allowing access to the chambers and to Queen's Hall, our partners in the Office for Youth, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the Parliament of Victoria and the Victorian Electoral Commission; so James, thank you. Your support is instrumental in empowering the voices of our young people. And we are immensely grateful for the dedication of our volunteer Taskforce, whom you will get to know very well, and their tireless work in bringing this phenomenal week ahead of us. Furthermore my heartfelt appreciation to the passionate members of the Youth Parliament and youth press gallery again, high up there, who collectively contribute their talents and energy to make this week an unforgettable experience for all involved.

We know from the YMCA social impact measurements that this week will mean a lot to you. It will make a real difference in your lives. In addition to the civics education that you will receive, you will also be more mindful, self-caring, have more social connection, critical thinking and problem solving, so I look forward to seeing you grow as individuals around that. Furthermore the youth press program also nurtures skill development areas like videography, research, photography, teamwork, pitching to the media and social media, ensuring that you are our future leaders and very well-rounded for success.

As we embark on this journey ahead, I encourage you to make the most of your time here. Embrace the opportunity to learn and to grow and to collaborate with your peers, and hopefully make some lifetime friends out of this. I know your voices will be heard, and I hope you have and develop the confidence to use them to great effect. You are the future of Victoria, you are our leaders, and I think that Victoria will be bright as a result of having you as our leaders. So thank you, and good luck.

The PRESIDENT: I am now very pleased to call on Miora Trainor, the Youth Governor of Victoria.

Miora TRAINOR (Youth Governor): Hi, everyone. How are we feeling? Fine?

A member: Great.

Miora TRAINOR: First I would also like to acknowledge the traditional land on which we are on today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and pay my respects to elders past and present and anyone with us here today. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Minister Suleyman, Mr Groth, Carolyn Morris as well as Mr Wandin for coming here today and being part of opening this ceremony. I would also like to make special acknowledgement of Tal Karp, the CEO of YMCA Australia, and Marcia Pallett, the former YMCA Victoria president and founder of this very program. We would not be here today without Marcia, so it is a very honourable thing that she is here to witness this.

I would also like to acknowledge the partners which have contributed invaluable resources and assistance to this program, such as the Victorian Electoral Commission and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge all the work it has taken to get everyone in this room today, both by those that work behind the scenes – the Taskforce and Della – and by all the participants that have put an extraordinary amount of work and passion into their bills, their speeches and their commitment to this program. For many this is the first time they have set foot in Parliament House, something they might not ever have thought would be possible for them. It may also be the first time that they have been heard and taken seriously on such a large scale. This is what I and many other Taskforce members love about this program. What keeps us coming back? It is the ability to elevate and project the voices of people that may be traditionally overlooked and excluded in these conversations and at the table.

These youth parliamentarians are fearless. They are not afraid to jump and fall, and they are not afraid to fight for change. They have spent hours upon hours writing their bills, meeting with each other, writing their speeches and meeting stakeholders, and today their efforts are finally paying off. From today until Thursday

they will debate like it is going out of style. They will be compassionate, caring and empathetic. They will be strong and sure. But most importantly they will be passionate change makers. You will hear debates ranging from VCE reform, cybersecurity education and lowering the voting age, which are all very topical at the moment.

This year will be, for a lot of young people, the first time they have ever been involved in a referendum or a vote of any kind, shape or form. Now more than ever it is extremely important for our young people to be civically engaged and to be aware of what they are voting for and who they are voting for. It gives me insurmountable relief and hope for the future to see so many passionate young people in this room who are prepared to fight for what they think is the future. They are so capable of demanding the space that these conversations deserve. You are all here today for a purpose, and that is because you are all capable of doing these things.

To all youth parliamentarians and youth press gallery journalists, take this opportunity to cherish the memories that you will inevitably make in these chambers. Remember to ground yourself and to take deep breaths before speeches and that it is okay if you mess up. Always know that you are all extremely capable, both as teams and as individuals. Without further ado, I declare the 37th Youth Parliament of Victoria officially open.

Members applauded.

The PRESIDENT: It says we all stand when the Governor leaves, but stay seated – I am a slave to the script. Just letting the parliamentarians know that the bells will ring soon, and that means you will get down to business in both this chamber and the Assembly chamber. Twenty bills in a couple of days is going to be an amazing, huge amount of work. It is amazing to the point that I might have to have a chat to the whips of the Legislative Council when we come back in a couple of weeks time; we should be lifting our game. Thanks, everyone, for joining us today, particularly parents and teachers. It is a big event, and it is a fantastic event. If everyone here would like to head to Queens Hall for a morning tea, and then the bells will ring and you will be getting into it. Well done.

Members applauded.

Sitting suspended 10:38 am until 11:18 am.

Members statements

Korin Gamadji Institute

Thomas HUGHES: On behalf of the Korin Gamadji Institute, we want to extend our thanks and gratitude to Brady and the rest of the KGI team who have supported this Youth Parliament team as well as young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders all throughout Victoria with their hard work. We would also like to thank our Taskforce mentor Georgia, as without her we may not have been here today with a bill fit for purpose, so we thank her for her hard work as well. Finally, we would like to thank the Y and all of the Taskforce for their incredible work in ensuring we all can make our voices heard in Parliament throughout this week.

Mildura Rural City Council

Sofia GHIDINELLI-MATHESON: On behalf of the Mildura Rural City Council team, we would like to give thanks to our team coordinator at the council, Mariah Robinson, for organising our access to the Youth Parliament camp today. We would also like to give thanks to all the Taskforce members who are running this program, and finally we would like to give thanks to the Victorian Electoral Commission, who are sponsoring our team.

Hume City Council

Matthew LILLYWHITE: On behalf of my team from city council I would like to send out thanks to the council for their support of us in participating in the program. In particular we would like to thank Cruz Bakri, who was our organiser, and Cr Jarrod Bell, who was the lead councillor in supporting the program. We would like to thank YMCA, in particular Lily, who was our Taskforce mentor during the process. We would also like to extend our thanks to our family and friends for supporting us. I would also like to particularly thank our team

members Lorjel, Riya and Sarah – and Micaela, who unfortunately is not with us today. She is alive, by the way.

Moyne NextGen!

Mijica LUS: On behalf of the Moyne NextGen! team we would like to thank the following people that supported us: Rebecca Elmes, Moyne Shire Council and councillors and the three mayors from our local governments – they are Karen Foster of Moyne, Debbie Arnott of Warrnambool and David Robertson of Southern Grampians council; the representatives from the Department of Transport and Planning and Great South Coast Regional Partnership; the YMCA Taskforce team and staff; and our wonderful mentor and Youth Governor, Miora.

Newhaven College

Gabriel PASCOE: I would like to extend Newhaven College's gratitude to Bass Coast Shire Council for sponsoring our attendance at Youth Parliament camp. I would like to thank teachers Jason Scott and Ron Ruzzier for their organisation and support. I would like to thank YMCA Cowes, specifically Jenny for her transport from school to the arts centre. I would like to thank Taskforce member Anna for mentoring us and supporting us for our bill, and I would like to thank YMCA for hosting the camp.

Overnewton Anglican Community College

Scarlet LEE: On behalf of Overnewton Anglican Community College we would like to thank our head of resources, Simona Ceranic; all our Youth Parliament Taskforce members, especially our Taskforce mentor Lily; and all the family members and friends of our participants.

Whitehorse City Council

Harper LAM: On behalf of the Whitehorse City Council team I would like to thank all the Whitehorse councillors for sponsoring our bill; Renee Wilson, our resource person; Frankie, the head of youth services, Lachlan Shannon, our mentor; and our parents, siblings and teachers that have supported us on the way and allowed for us to be here. We would like to extend this thanks to Taskforce members, fellow youth parliamentarian members and the youth press gallery.

Y Ballarat

Vincent NUBE: I would like to thank Y Ballarat for helping us get here. I would like to thank specifically Caitlin and Asha from Y Ballarat, who unfortunately are not here today – not because they are dead. I would like to thank my team. They are all quite excellent people. I would also like to thank family members and friends who have supported them along their journey.

Orbost Secondary College

Seamus DONNELLAN: I would like on behalf of the Orbost Secondary College team to thank all the members here who are from Orbost that stepped up when they had to. I would also like to extend a thankyou to Tim Bull, MLA for Gippsland East, and Darren Chester, federal member for Gippsland, for their sage advice given to me during the planning process of this program. I would like to thank a teacher from Orbost Secondary College, Jackson Bates, for introducing me to this program. I would not be here without him. I would like to thank the YMCA and the Taskforce members, who are all volunteering and all doing an excellent job getting us here, training us and getting us prepared.

Westbourne Grammar School

Evie REDFORD: I would like to thank the YMCA for giving us the opportunity to speak as young people; our amazing resource person Mr Stojkovski for supporting us over the last six months; Noah and Lily for guiding us through the bill-writing and debating process; and finally, a massive thankyou to our sixth team member Lily Decker – although she cannot be here today – for putting in countless hours of dedication to writing and drafting our bills and speeches.

Ella SHELDEN: The government would like to request that we can remove our blazers, please.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Miora Trainor): Yes, you can.

Matters of public importance

Commonwealth human rights legislation

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Miora Trainor): Order! I have accepted a statement from the YMCA Victoria Youth Parliament proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

This house endorses the implementation of a federal human rights bill.

This House:

- a) Notes that human rights are fundamental to the wellbeing and dignity of all members of society
- b) Notes that there is a need for a comprehensive and unified framework that protects human rights at the national level
- c) Notes that shortcomings in current human rights legislation disproportionately impacts vulnerable and diverse populations
- d) Recognises that Australia is the only liberal democracy without a Human Rights charter or equivalent in federal legislation
- e) Endorses that young people be recognised as a distinct group within the Charter, with their own set of rights.

Ella SHELDEN: Colonised Australia became a unified nation in 1901. Over time we have grown together to move forward and better our country. The states of Victoria and Queensland and the ACT all have recognised and legislated human rights. Why shouldn't all states and every Australian citizen have that right? This bill at its core is about protecting citizens, uniting Australia and ensuring that everyone who belongs on Australian soil is safe, cared for and living a decent life. This bill puts the welfare of the Australian people, regardless of their background, at the forefront of politics, where they should be. It is honestly shameful that Australia does not have a federal rights bill already. To oppose this bill is to oppose and put down the Australian people. All of us are in here to speak on behalf of our communities, and when the perfect opportunity appears there is nothing else to do other than support it.

Today the government will present the numerous benefits that will occur due to the implementation of a federal human rights bill. By creating and passing a federal human rights bill, it holds our nation accountable and means that actions can be taken when breaches occur, which we know they do. It means acts of injustice will not go unchecked, and positive change can be made. I ask the opposition directly: do we really want to let unfair actions go unrestricted? I did not think so. This bill would also allow for reparations to be made from past human rights violations and prevent them from occurring again. Enforcing these human rights will also impact our reputation as a nation, as refusing to do so paints Australia in a less than stellar light, as we have said – on an international stage, mind you – that we would respect human rights. At the end of the day, how can we claim to care about the people in our communities both near and far when opposing this bill would directly place them in harm's way? The benefits of implementing a bill like this are beyond measure, and anyone who disagrees clearly has unclear priorities.

One of the bill's biggest strengths and advantages is the ability of this bill to unite Australia further and alter the division of powers. By passing this bill, it encourages equality across all states and territories and keeps everything the same. It prevents people from falling through the cracks of different state laws, and it means that it will apply to the states that do not have human rights entrenched in their legislature. Can we all take a moment, can we please all take a step back to register what a benefit this is to cement this in our law. This will remove the inconsistencies that may exist between states, particularly the lack of protection in some. It will protect the people and truly bring them together under one banner. No-one would ever be treated differently in this regard – or at least try not to be – as the Commonwealth will be able to treat everybody the same, and there will be no differences. It will make sure that every single person receives the rights that they are entitled to. It is beyond a pity that it has taken us this long as a nation to wake up and realise that everyone deserves to have their rights protected and for us to all be treated the same. Wake up to what this bill can do for all of the people in Australia and recognise the ridiculous nature of our lack of protected and unified human rights.

Gabriel PASCOE: I would like to begin by thanking the government for their views and concerns in regard to the endorsement of the implementation of a federal human rights bill. We are incredibly fortunate to live our lives in a diverse, inclusive and wealthy country. I think I can say on behalf of all of us in this house that we endorse the existence of human rights in our global society, as without them, Australia would not be the incredibly unique and inclusive country it exists as presently. However, there are glaring flaws in the establishment of the human rights bill at the federal level. I will begin by reiterating my previous statement

about Australia and it being a diverse, inclusive society. The reason we are able to achieve a society that is so inclusive and diverse is because we have a system that protects those who are vulnerable, different and/or under-represented in Australian society. Acts such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Racial Discrimination Act 1975 and the Age Discrimination Act 2004 all cover, in depth, many human rights that would be included in a federal bill.

Another issue with a federal human rights bill is that it lacks entrenchment, resulting in legislation that can be chopped and changed by successive governments. What is the point of having a human rights legislation if it risks being drastically changed or even repealed at the hands of a government that does not inherently support human rights legislation? I invite the house to pause and think about the political climate in other liberal democracies, such as America. In the last couple of years we have seen the breakdown of the core principle of the separation of powers, with the overturning of the likes of *Roe v. Wade*, which saw rights actually repealed for millions of women. The opposition fears that we leave human rights up to the interpretation of an over-represented group of individuals, that being older Caucasian men. Ultimately it is up to them to interpret how to enforce the legislation, and it leaves Australia vulnerable to the personal opinion of the undemocratically elected court judges, who may go against the public interest.

Continuing on, I want to highlight a concern regarding the motion. In particular, the subheading under the subheading 'This house', part (e). It states that it:

... endorses young people be recognised as a distinct group within the Charter, with their own set of rights.

Human rights are inherently about fairness and equality, but what is fair and equal about singling a group of individuals to recognise as distinct, compared to all other societal groups? If the motion demands a set of human rights for young people specifically, create legislation for that, just like we have for the other human rights acts I mentioned previously.

Ultimately, while the bill is good in principle, it lacks consideration for the separation of powers. It is not enshrined in the constitution. It would just be stating what is already legislation, and worst of all, it singles out a group of people while disregarding the rest. I implore those opposite to reconsider their judgement. After all, why fix a problem that is not already broken.

Isabella KOROS: Human rights are absolutely fundamental to the wellbeing and dignity of all Australians. The fact that we as a state do not have a federal human rights legislation is absolutely ludicrous. Implementing a human rights legislation for our state will ensure that all those who violate human rights are held accountable and served consequences accordingly. We as young people demand that everyone's rights be set into stone in order for those in power to keep our rights met, and the addition of this bill would ensure all of our rights as Australian citizens are protected. The government notes that the lack of a human rights bill disproportionately impacts minorities and those who are vulnerable within our communities, and the addition of this bill would keep all of us safe from human rights violations.

Lorjel SIA: The Australian parliamentary system is based off the Westminster and Washington systems of government, which ultimately stress freedom and liberty. Rights are inherent, and our rights are already assumed by society. Their systems and our system of government do not work if these rights do not already exist. The first US amendment states that there is a right of free speech. In comparison in our Australian constitution the structure calls for a responsible and representative government, which cannot be achieved if these rights are not inherent. This structure cannot work unless we have freedom of speech, elements of which have been confirmed by the High Court in the *Lange v. Australian Broadcasting Corporation* and *Levy v. Victoria*. This bill would tell us what we already know. It does not add value to human rights in Australia, and it is functionally unproductive.

Jacob OSEARIS: There are currently over 160 refugees in Papua New Guinea and Nauru still waiting to rebuild their lives and recover from the trauma the government has put them through in offshore facilities. The treatment of refugees in centres subjects them to physical, mental and sexual abuse, which children are often exposed to. It is time the government did more. Beyond those in offshore detention centres, a 2022 study found that 3.3 million people in Australia live below the poverty line, including 761,000 children. This means that over 15 per cent of Australia's population are at risk of or are currently experiencing a deprivation of their own human rights.

Federal legislation would help to create unity across Australia, as the honourable member Shelden discussed earlier. This would foster the inclusivity our nation prides itself on. Human rights are just that – the rights that we are granted for simply existing – and it is nothing short of a disgrace that we can call ourselves a developed nation when we are the only liberal democracy in the world that does not have any human rights protections implemented universally. We must keep in mind our most marginalised communities, such as First Nations peoples, and the disproportionate disadvantage they face in this country. It is time we line ourselves up with the rest of the world and become the great nation we claim to be.

Allyza CATAPANG: One of the current issues within politics and legislation is the lack of representation for culturally and linguistically diverse people and people living with chronic illness and/or disabilities. Simply put, there are not enough people within politics and legislatures that truly represent Australia's diverse population. Due to this lack of representation, is it even appropriate for those designing this charter to dictate what constitutes a human right? After all, many who would potentially create this charter come from privileged backgrounds and do not understand the lived experiences of those in vulnerable communities. They do not know their stories and they do not know what it is like to fear for the worst, witnessing rights being taken away and being dehumanised. I ask the government this: does their intention truly come from a place of goodwill or is this an attempt to consolidate and secure more power? Every state in Australia has its own distinct culture. It has its own identity. By taking a uniform approach that condenses distinct identities, it does not truly encompass the necessary topics to be put within that charter to properly address and protect human rights.

Keira PORTER: Before I begin, I would like to provide a warning that I may cover topics that will be sensitive for some, such as the stolen generations. Anyone is free to leave if necessary. We as the youth of Australia are aware of the stolen generations from the mid-1800s to the 1970s. We as a nation are aware of how our First Nations people were treated for far too long – considered inhumane and nothing. By now we should be learning from our history and its mistakes. For how long do we plan to avoid progressing further? Not only were our First Nations treated so cruelly, but as we know from our stolen generations, it simply ended far too late – 52 years ago. Don't we want to progress with the times? Victoria is the only state with a charter of human rights, and Queensland and the ACT have acts of human rights. Times have been changing for so many decades. Why can't we learn from the things that some never had? Why don't we realise how the Aboriginals, during and prior to the stolen generations, suffered because they did not have human rights? Australia signed treaties, and it is a known fact that simply we have rights to live. Yet those simply are not enough. We, as the current generation, in the future need to be assured that our lives will be protected, unlike those whose lives unfortunately were not.

Seamus DONNELLAN: Whilst human rights are an important concept that we should uphold, the lack of entrenchment in this proposal is simply unconscionable. Australia may not have a charter of rights, but a legislated statute is simply not going to be effective in upholding human rights. We need a measured and well thought out charter that the people of Australia can feel comfortable amending our constitution with.

A member: Relevance. Read the bill.

Seamus DONNELLAN: There is no bill. Have a look at the most successful constitution in modern history, the United States: it boasts a fully entrenched bill of rights and further amendments. This unentrenched statute – it is hardly a bill of rights – will simply allow the judiciary to interpret protections away and for politicians to legislate out provisions. It is extraordinarily dangerous for this house to pass this, and everyone who cares about protecting our democratic rights should vote no. Perhaps an entrenched bill of rights would sit well with me, but this is not what we are voting on. We are voting on an extremely dangerous legislated statute. I urge all those who want this state and country to have a future to vote no. I will ask you this once more: do we really want our rights to be eroded away by unelected judges and corrupt politicians?

Alexandra MADU: I propose that we implement this bill as it will serve as a powerful safeguard, providing a clear framework to protect the rights and dignity of every individual within our strong and inclusive nation. It would establish a robust legal foundation, outlining the rights and freedoms that are inherent to every person regardless of their background, race, gender identity, religion or belief. By enshrining these rights in law, we reinforce the principle that every Australian deserves equal treatment and protection under the law. This bill is paramount to protecting the rights of all Australians and ensuring that those who violate human rights are held accountable. By establishing a clear legal framework fostering accountability and aligning with international

standards, we can create a society that respects, protects and upholds the dignity and freedom of every individual.

Chantelle LLOYD-SHRIMPTON: The matter of public importance proposes that young people be recognised as a distinct group within the charter with their own set of rights. This recognition is significant but raises the question as to why other groups are not being similarly acknowledged. Granting young people their own set of rights while not extending the same recognition to other groups can lead to unequal treatment and unequal rights. It is essential to ensure that the rights and needs of all individuals and communities are acknowledged and protected, which only recognising young people disrupts. By recognising only one group specifically, there is a risk of creating a hierarchy of rights, where some groups receive preferential treatment. It is important to ensure that all individuals are granted equal rights in society. If young people are to be recognised separately, it is crucial to consider the rights of other groups also. This can be achieved by ensuring the charter encompasses provisions that safeguard the rights of all individuals, including minorities, marginalised communities and other vulnerable populations. Recognising and protecting the rights of various groups within the charter acknowledges the diverse needs and experiences of different communities. Solely addressing the rights of young people leads to inequality and unequal rights.

Sofia GHIDINELLI-MATHESON: Exploitation – that is what our inconsistent framework of human rights across state and territory enables. Prior human rights cases set the legal precedent that decides the outcome of future ones, and with varying laws on human rights nationally comes varying legal precedent. Malefactors can and will abuse this. They will push their human rights violation cases to be tried within other states containing legal precedent that favours themselves. As their victims often have limited independence, such as the elderly, or come from disadvantaged backgrounds, like a low socio-economic one, bringing these cases to court can already be a challenge, much less fighting for where the cases take place. Unifying our country under one federal human rights bill will ensure anyone who violates the dignity of others cannot escape the consequences.

Matthew LILLYWHITE: Before I continue, can we all just accept and agree: we all support human rights. No-one on this side and no-one on that side are saying we do not support human rights; we are a free, liberal, democratic society. Where the differences, however, lie, are that the particular approach this motion calls for demands one of two things: one, an honorific, pointless piece of legislation which will do nothing. Like, here in the state of Victoria, who even heard of the charter of human rights here in this state before reading this motion?

A member: That is irrelevant.

Matthew LILLYWHITE: Have you heard of it, though? Because it does not do anything. On the other side, however, you could look at a bill of rights, which is powerful, which is evasive and does give substantial powers to individuals and officials who may not necessarily share our individual concerns. The role of the courts is to interpret the law; it is the role of Parliament to write the law. If we give courts the power to write their own laws through this mechanism, like in the United States, you can have a travesty like the Dobbs case, where your rights are not protected.

Here in Australia, a similar case in the Peterswald case affected states' abilities to govern themselves and raise revenue to fund services. A government works best when democracy is respected and the separation of powers are adhered to. This bill would either do nothing, or damage that, and that is a concern we on this side hold.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: The floor is now open. Any honourable members that wish to speak on the government side can now stand up.

Timothy REESINK: Australians have a strong sense of human rights, equality and freedoms. Being free from government coercion, tyranny and treating people well is important. It is a surprise, then, that people's basic human rights are not very well protected in Australian law. Australia is the only liberal democracy in the world that does not have some kind of legislation that explains people's basic rights and how they are protected. Quite shockingly, in many cases, we rely on other people's rules. International law, though, is impossible to enforce. Australia, as an example, regularly breaks these international laws, even though we are a signatory to them.

Treatment of refugees is a recent example. Actually, in 2018 Australia was taken to the UN human rights body because of alleged breaches of international law. Australia does not comply with or meet its obligations under international law. In 2021 the Australian government was criticised by the UN and many other countries for failing to accept critical recommendations from an international review into our human rights record. This is wholly inadequate – in fact it is shameful, as Ella mentioned earlier, both at an international level but also here locally, that we do not have clear protections for our own people.

Shrika VALLABH: The refuters do not deny the existence of human rights. However, standards for human rights are constantly changing over time. How do we know that what we legislate today will not be considered strongly backwards in the future?

Jesse-Lee DASS: Firstly I would like to give a brief content warning for climate anxiety and natural disaster trauma. I would like to address part (c) of the proposal, shortcomings in current human rights – the disproportional effect on vulnerable and diverse populations. I believe that a federal bill of human rights, if passed, needs to include the right to a safe, stable and healthy ecosystem. In February 2009 I saw the Black Saturday bushfire from my backyard. I was terrified. I remember its distinct red colour and the smell of smoke. I did not know whether my house would burn down. While my family was lucky, I remember meeting those who were left homeless.

Never did I expect these fires to become the norm. Ten years later the 2019–20 bushfires destroyed more than 3500 homes, and smoke killed nearly 450 people, while the Prime Minister holidayed in Hawaii. In January 2020 the bushfires made Naarm's air the worst in the world. As Australia burnt each summer, our snow declined each winter. Millions of bogong moths used to migrate every spring; now barely a few can be seen. Australia has already warmed by over 1.4 degrees since 1910. If it reaches 3 degrees our country will be unrecognisable.

Climate change disproportionately affects Australians from lower economic backgrounds, people with disabilities and First Nations and migrant communities. Unsafe, unstable and unhealthy ecosystems affect human health, human agency, economic livelihoods and the ability to practise culture and appreciate nature. Without a safe, stable and healthy ecosystem there are no safe, stable and healthy populations. A federal bill of human rights that specifies this right will ensure that people who breach this right will be held accountable.

Taylah FYNNEY: The government has stated the importance of protecting rights in lacking states and fostering a unified approach. As addressed by the opposition, rights are tailored to each state. Having an additional, singular bill will infringe on state sovereignty in unnecessary reinforcement of existing values. I also implore the house to name a state that is so tragically deficient of values, as the government proposes, on immigration and First Nations rights, which are better addressed by specific bills.

Thomas HUGHES: Those opposite seem to be stuck on their Ls with their opinions on the human rights bill while we are speeding ahead within the limit, with a full licence. I mean, for all of those opposite to effectively cross their arms and say, 'We don't need this; we are already set for life and we don't need a change' – the fearmongering from those opposite really shows the flimsy arguments that they have come up with. First, there is a strong need for our international standing to be enhanced by enshrining our human rights within a federal statute to protect them. And I will say this: those opposite are fearmongering about judges. Firstly, I never knew judges were this scary, and secondly, I wonder how the Victorian human rights charter is upheld in the legal system. Oh, wait – judges and the courts. Quit the fearmongering. Back this motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Honourable members, the floor is open for people who have not spoken in the first six.

Dylan GEKAS: The government needs to know their place. Human rights is something that has to be carefully navigated, hence why a charter does not do enough to truly protect them and hold those who breach accountable.

Ash NGUYEN: As the opposition has said time and time again, freedom and liberty is what our nation is built on. That is exactly what this motion is putting forward: freedom and liberty for all members of society, as stated. Members have repeatedly stated that the distinction of young people will create a hierarchy of rights as well as including unequal treatment and unequal rights. We are in Youth Parliament, a Youth Parliament which shows the different levels at which youth are seen, as they are also a minority. The discrimination acts that

honourable member Pascoe has mentioned do not void the relevance of this bill, plus the set of rights for young people are presented as they are also a vulnerable group deserving of their unique rights.

Sirasi De SILVA: The opposition earlier mentioned how we would be prioritising or giving preference to young people. In section (e), we did mention that this endorses young people to be recognised as a distinct group within the charter, with their own set of rights. Young people are not independent when they are under the age of 18 – they rely on parents or guardians for support. Not every young person in Australia is protected by overarching rights. Therefore we are proposing this bill today.

Hemi EDWARDS: You say you do not deny human rights, but you refuse to acknowledge and protect them. Also, the best thing about legislation is that it can be changed, and if it is backwards, we can fix it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order! The time set aside to debate the matter of public importance has expired. The question is:

That this house places on record its support of the matter of public importance.

Remember that this is a conscience vote; it is what you personally believe.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Urban Area Heat Temperature Bill 2023

Sponsor: Hume City Council

Refuter: Y Ballarat

Matthew LILLYWHITE: I move:

That I introduce a bill titled Urban Area Heat Temperature Bill 2023.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Second reading

Matthew LILLYWHITE: I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Since the dawn of time, mankind has been a pioneer, pushing the boundaries of what is possible, making transformative discoveries and using our great minds to chart a course for the ship of dreams following the arrow of progress. But in our pursuits, time and time again the wake created by our determination makes for turbulent waters. At best this leads to happy accidents and allows for leaps and bounds in science, technology and medicine, but often it has required us to turn back and mop up our mess. Thankfully, in that too our species excels. Our ability and resourcefulness, the diligence with which we carry out the work and our unshaking perseverance have again and again come to the rescue in getting us out of the stickiness. Unfortunately, not all unintended consequences are so easy to resolve. In our pursuit of a more automated and technologically advanced world, which revolutionised our societies and economies, we had the unintended consequence of causing irreversible damage to our environment. In our pursuit of levelling up our state's infrastructure, we built big and dreamed large, but an unintended consequence is that our state finances are in shambles and many of those projects are now unfunded and at a standstill, leaving uncertainty in our economy and the taxpayer wondering where the value for their money is.

In our communities and our homes too, we have in our pursuit of the Australian dream of home ownership, of the big house and of living in suburbia, caused an unintended consequence that large swathes of our cities are becoming and inevitably will be – sooner than I think many of us would imagine – simply uninhabitable. And when I say 'uninhabitable', I mean it in the literal sense and the in same sense that I say the frozen tundra of Siberia or the scorching deserts of the Sahara are uninhabitable and as the depths of the Mariana Trench and the

peaks of Mount Everest are uninhabitable and as the lifeless surface of Mars is uninhabitable. Now, that may come across as a little bit dramatic, but unfortunately it is the truth of the matter.

The way in which we are designing our homes, suburbs and communities is terrible at managing the heat this land is famous for. In our pursuit to deliver for ourselves, our families and our communities the Australian dream of today, we leave ourselves with severe consequences tomorrow, and as our climate gets warmer – and it will get warmer – this problem will only get worse. When a colleague who sits in the other place asked me what motivates me about this issue, my answer was simple: the price of inaction is simply too high a cost.

In the great tradition of mankind mopping up their mess, so too can we here today commit ourselves to embark on the first step to attempt to address this very issue. My honourable friends and I have put together the first of what I hope to be several policies to be implemented that will tackle the unintended consequences we have created for ourselves. The legislation we present to this place aims to tackle urban heat through meaningful and targeted ways: changing roof colour and composition, increasing canopy coverage and tree planting, and improving education on this issue. These measures, although modest, will have a measurable impact on the temperature of our communities and most importantly on the quality of life of individuals living in these areas.

It is with such practical measures that governments have delivered successfully in the past. Utilising various subsidies, schemes and programs we have been able to identify and tackle issues by installing smoke detectors and insulation, developing drought resistance and improving water use and delivering solar panels and energy efficiency upgrades.

This legislation is not the final say on this matter. As time goes on, new measures will be needed to continue the development of management and mitigation strategies. But as this problem becomes even more serious, inaction can no longer be accepted or tolerated as a response. So to all of my honourable friends and colleagues, I say this: the best time for action was 20 years ago; the next best time is now.

Ella SHELDEN: On a point of order, Acting President, the government would like to request that we can remove our jackets and blazers, please.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Joe McCracken): No worries. That is fine.

Ash NGUYEN: The Urban Area Heat Temperature Bill 2023 attempts to reduce the urban ambient air temperature throughout Victoria. The government commends the thoughtfulness of this bill and what it represents, but there are clear discrepancies that need to be addressed by the opposition if they plan to move forward with this bill.

The bill is clearly misinformed on the notion of what ‘mature tree’ means as well as the wildly negative impacts the bill will have on small businesses. Moreover, clause 8 truly is a misplaced wonder, which adds stress to the already overcrowded curriculum, and is absolutely redundant. There are also clear logistical issues in relation to labour and specifically clause 6.1. We the government have found more affordable ways to reduce urban heating, which we implore the opposition to consider. The bill's deficiency lies in its lack of specificity regarding the acquisition of trees in suburban regions.

One of the crucial issues that we the government have found today within the bill is that there are substantial costs falling on everyday citizens that are simply unaccounted for. If we look at clause 4.2, it states that:

Any existing roof that has an albedo less than 0.35 shall take steps to raise the albedo to 0.65 by July 1, 2040.

In theory this would be an incredibly thoughtful way to reduce the average albedo within urban areas. But I ask the opposition to show us the clarity within this bill. May I ask: what steps are they asking us to take? Is it a full reconstruction or is that a covering on top? If we do not understand what this clause is asking, how can the public be asked to? Now, let us say by 1 July 2040 a private property has not improved the level to what the bill is asking for. Then what? There are no clear repercussions for those who have not met the guidelines as well as its neglecting those with disadvantaged circumstances.

Might I remind the opposition that not everyone is in a place where they can afford such a frivolous expense. Are you really asking for a parent to choose between paying school fees or replacing their roof to avoid just another unnecessary fine? Furthermore, this bill fails to acknowledge the consistently rising living costs. Dark roofs can actually assist in this ever-growing national issue. Dark roofs trap the sun's heat throughout the day

inside the house throughout the winter, so that a heating source does not need to run frequently. Within the summer the dark colour absorbs from the sun, keeping the building cooler.

Let us not overlook the specific challenges faced by higher altitude areas. In these regions the need for heating is far more pressing than air conditioning, as the temperatures tend to be cooler. Requiring the planting of trees without reconsidering the specific needs and conditions of each area can result in increased heating costs for residents, which the opposition clearly has not considered. This could have a disproportionate impact on those living in rental properties, who may lack control over the heating systems in their homes.

In addition, we must consider the financial implications of tree acquisition. Whilst trees undeniably provide immense environmental benefits, we cannot ignore the cost and ethical considerations involved with their maintenance, the space required to farm as well as the expense included in their transportation.

In essence this bill fails to acknowledge the burden it will impose on low-income families and individuals. It is essential to re-evaluate and modify the bill to ensure its feasibility, clarity and implementation for the betterment of our communities.

Seamus DONNELLAN: Hello, Council. I come to you today to affirm my support for the Urban Area Heat Temperature Bill 2023. This bill and the supplemental Plant a Tree Scheme will do so much for our built-up environments and make sure that they remain habitable and pleasant for many, many decades to come. Council, did you know that heat islands in urban areas have serious health consequences on their populations, leading to a greater rate of heart attack and heat stroke? This is unacceptable. This scheme and this bill will help to solve that, and it will take the stress off our already extraordinarily stressed health systems.

Heat kills more people in Australia than any other natural disaster – not floods, not fires, but heat. It seems so innocuous. Rising temperatures and trapped heat in houses pose challenges for vulnerable groups who struggle with the cost of cooling solutions. It is not cheap to run air conditioning 24/7 during the summer, and as we move forward with climate change it will be 24/7, 365. The solution is obviously here, in increasing the urban vegetation, such as planting trees and implementing rooftop gardens. This approach will help lower temperatures, fulfilling Australia's international obligations, for one, and enhancing the beauty of neighbourhoods, which increases house prices and will make property owners very happy indeed. The proposed Plant a Tree Scheme strategy helps promote a community-driven approach and empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to their local area, which is extraordinarily important.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Just a reminder: we have got 2 minutes per speaker, and I am going to go back and forth between government, opposition and crossbench. If you would like to speak, just stand up in your place and we will go from there, okay?

Isabella KOROS: While this bill raises multiple points on the issue of urban heat, this bill fails to correctly represent information based on the trees deemed appropriate by the writers of this bill. I come from a farming family and have grown up around orchards and Christmas trees, and the notion that a tree is considered mature at 10 years of age is absolutely absurd. It is commonly known that apple trees mature within four years, while the river red gum can live from 500 to 1000 years. I ask the opposition: where did they get the perception that 10 years is a broad approximation of all tree maturity?

What I have gathered from this bill is that small businesses will lose the ability to sell trees under the age of 10 years, as seen in clause 6.1, and should this bill be passed, small businesses would suffer to an even greater degree. The bulk of this bill's content is misinformed and worded in such a way that monopolises the tree market. Small businesses would be put into jeopardy with the implementation of this bill and its potential grip on the sale of saplings. The logistical side of this is also one to take into consideration: how will a family-owned business sell 10-year-old trees that have metres of root systems deep below their surfaces?

From what I can see, the bill deems the notorious river red gum to be an appropriate tree to be planted in urban areas. These trees are known for their tendency to drop limbs, so why is such a dangerous tree listed as suitable? Why couldn't this bill have included fruit trees as appropriate? The organisation Hidden Orchard, based in Ballarat, stated that in 2020 alone their volunteers gathered over 2 tonnes of fruit from public trees to give to schools with breakfast programs, homeless shelters and the Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre. How could this bill fail to see the positives of instigating the addition of more-useful trees to our communities? Because of

this inability to see other productive ways to change the rising urban heat level, I do not feel as though I can support the ascension of this bill.

Lorjel SIA: They say that trees are a man's best friend. Trees release carbon dioxide, which is essential to our survival as human beings. But what else is essential to our survival? Having a suitable and sustainable place to live, which is currently under threat as a result of rising temperature within our cities and states. Currently cities in Victoria are not designed their maximum capacity when faced with heat. Therefore the bill proposes the mitigation of the urban heat island effect.

The lack of sufficient greenery is characteristic of urban areas and contributes to the accumulation of heat in cities. Proven by research that analyses high solar radiation intensity, it is concluded that tree canopy coverage is the leading strategy to decrease temperatures from the highly dense CBD to the newly built suburbs of outer Melbourne, such as where I come from, the City of Hume. On a hot summer's day asphalt can reach a peak surface temperature of 48 to 67 degrees, where canopy coverage in our major cities is less than 20 per cent. Shamefully, Melbourne's CBD currently only has 13 per cent canopy coverage. It is a fact that canopy coverage contributes to a surface temperature reduction of around 15 degrees thanks to photosynthesis and the evaporation of ambient temperature. It is clear to see that the UHIE is fully realised, and we ought to plant more trees – but not just any trees, mature-aged trees and ones suitable to our climate, as specified, to allow sufficient outcomes regardless of what they may be.

Summer heatwaves are becoming more frequent, extended and extreme in Australia. Our cities are only getting hotter and hotter, and our bill serves as a call to action to implement a change for the environment. The government mentions low-income families – at the rate that we are going at the moment, there will be no families at all.

Vincent NUBE: While this bill has sound moral reasoning behind it, I would like to point out some flaws in some of the logistical impacts it has. To begin with, this bill states, according to clause 6.1(d), that:

Retail stores who sell trees shall cease the sale of tree saplings under ten years of age;

This will create issues for gardeners in a large number of ways. It will create difficulty transporting plants, as some of the plants mentioned can grow up to 25 metres in 10 years. How could anyone without a semi-truck realistically transport it?

I would also like to address the impact of what people are able to grow, especially in urban settings. Because of the minimum age requirements at which stores can sell these trees, people looking to plant trees will struggle to find species suitable for their yards that they are able to transport. Farms will also struggle, as they will not be considered as a reforestation operation. This will lead to difficulty planting mature trees as they are much harder to plant and much harder to keep alive if they are not planted as saplings. This will create economic tension in an already stressed field.

Riya SHARMA: Victoria is Australia's most urbanised state, with nearly 90 per cent of residents living in cities and towns according to last year's demographic data. Urban areas are a symbol of advancement, development and progress in our societies, highlighting years of human civilisation turning into a revolutionary and functioning society. But do you know what else urban areas symbolise? Pollution, heat and loss of greenery, essentially a destruction to the natural environment. The urban heat island effect is a lesser known issue that surpasses all in terms of impact, causing our cities to be up to 8 degrees warmer than rural areas. Roofs cover a significant proportion of the land and they absorb heat, which adds to the thermal energy trapped within our urban areas. Dark roofs, which absorb more heat than lighter coloured roofs, and roofs that lack vegetation are strong contributing factors to this temperature increase in our cities. In recognition of this, this bill proposes a strategy to implement the installation of green roofs, which remove heat from the air due to evapotranspiration, reducing citywide ambient temperatures while simultaneously increasing biodiversity.

So what does this mean for us? It means we have the opportunity to transform our cities into vibrant and livable spaces, enhancing their attractiveness, our quality of life and our overall comfort. Replenishing our surfaces along with other strategies to mitigate the urban heat island effect will decrease the impact of one of the most severe issues in urban cities today, and will work towards cities no longer holding the perception of being a destruction to the natural environment. We are only steps away from creating sustainable urban areas that promote healthier and more livable cities for future generations to thrive in.

Keira PORTER: The basis of clause 8 is simply illogical. As a student myself studying VCE, the educational curriculum is already cramped as it is. Say VCAA was able to implement it as a subject for both primary and secondary students, it would normally be expected that the time taken to produce a curriculum would be a lot less than it is to plant trees, though in reality, where would VCAA be able to find the expertise? It is mentioned the curriculum would:

be decided by;

- (a) Expert psychologists;
- (b) Environmentalists;
- (c) Science teachers.

in 8.3. But how are expert psychologists relevant to a clause about urban heat? Plus, if the curriculum 'shall consider the psychological effects on children', how are environmentalists and science teachers even relevant? As well is the fact science teachers already interact and socialise with children; wouldn't they already be able to recognise how children behave in the heat? Not only does clause 8 make no logical sense, but it has no relation to the intended purpose of the bill, to find the solution in regulating urban heat.

Allyza CATAPANG: While many of us struggle with deadlines, there is one deadline that simply cannot be procrastinated or completed last-minute, and that is climate change. The deadline to limit global warming, as of today, according to Climate Clock, is six years and 26 days. That is not that much time. This bill proposes a solution that can put into action a plan to slowly mitigate its effects, promote better health within the general public, while doing so in an innovative and discernible way. Urban heat islands are one of the products of rapid, dense urban and property development, and the rising heat levels due to climate change. According to an article published in the *International Journal of Environmental Sustainability*, studies conducted on the influence of green spaces and roofs – as this bill suggests, if the government just read the bill – help urban areas adapt to the impact of UHIs. In addition to this, by creating policies that focus on improving design through using materials that are reflective, taking albedo into account – it is one of the most important steps in slowly implementing climate policies into design standards to help mitigate the effects of global warming, for public good. Lastly, another article from the *Journal of Environmental Sciences* showed that a focus on green design for reducing the effects of UHI creates a better overall environment.

This bill is not only backed by scientific studies but is motivated by the goal of a better life and is ultimately a first major step in healing the environment and reducing harmful human impact. I see no fault in wanting to live in a world where people do not suffer as a result of rising heat levels and modernising the way cities and suburbs are designed.

Brigid BURSTON: This proposed bill lacks detail in regard to the acquisition of new trees and the outcomes for existing trees in suburban areas. In regard to acquisition it is clear that the growing of trees must be delegated to a private corporation. This would be a massive government contract that would cause a monopoly to form, as member Koros discussed. With over 70,000 City of Melbourne council-owned and maintained trees, this is a lucrative contract for many businesses beyond a monopoly that will manifest the use of unethical practices in order for businesses to produce more trees. The increased use of insecticides and pesticides will ruin the regions' vast natural habitat.

Why must those in regional and rural Victoria be forced to reconcile with the increased use of chemicals in their soil and the increased noise pollution in regard to removing the trees from the ground and the transportation, all so that a street 200 kilometres away does not get too hot for people outside during summer in a country renowned for its heat? The reality of this bill is that metropolitan Melbourne will milk the regions in order to have a slight reduction in heat. How is this fair? Furthermore, with over 70,000 City of Melbourne-governed trees, where will those that do not fit the specific requirements of this bill in terms of maturity and species be placed?

Sarah HANOONA: Education is the most important weapon to fight poverty. We are living in a world where everything is changing and where climate change is changing more than ever. We are living in a world where everything is continually changing, yet we have a lack of education when it comes to climate change – more specifically, urban area heat temperature. The education system should be continually updating to the world around us. I come from a refugee background and arrived in Australia three years ago. When this topic was mentioned, I had no idea what it meant – why is it important to talk about it, and how will it impact me, my family and my community?

Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself. Once I read about it, I became more aware of the consequences of having temperature rises. Urban heat temperature is a serious issue that has killed millions of people, killed people more than any other issues. Therefore by educating our schools, our people, we will be aware, and when we are aware of this we will be able to make the right choices, the right choices or the right kind of move in planting more trees. Education is the most important weapon to fight poverty. Poverty is the lack of education. Yes, I am talking about living in a world where we have a lack of knowledge. Let us stop this poverty by educating our schools, communities and newly arrived people to Australia. If you want to live in a better world, education is one of the keys to open doors of hope.

Jacob OSENARIS: To our understanding, one aspect of this bill is it seeks to address the rising issue of extreme weather leading to increased hospitalisation, especially of vulnerable communities. This bill fails to address this through a major flaw in regard to the albedo of roofs. While this is an effective measure for summer, it aids in the manifestation of cold air around urban areas, leading to colder temperatures in the winter. Why must addressing urban heat contain trade-offs? Rather than trying to reduce the temperature of the air around a home, which will cost millions, why not invest in climate-friendly, sustainable air conditioning and heating? This way we could sustainably cool homes in the summer and heat them in the winter, keeping vulnerable communities safe and climate friendly all year round. For as little as \$700 per home we could achieve this goal.

This bill outlines a way to address urban heat in the least cost-effective, most wasteful and, some might argue, most unrealistic way possible. The solution does not have to be as complicated as ripping up roofs and strategically planting new trees. Unless the opposition have some magic plan not stipulated in the bill to address the way in which we will dispose of over 2 million homes' roofs in Victoria, we see this as a major flaw which will ultimately lead to catastrophic pressure being placed onto landfill sites. Climate-friendly, sustainable air conditioning and heating is cost effective, easy to implement and does not take 10-plus years for trees to mature and 17 years to rip up old roofs. The solution to urban heat is not this bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Are there any further speakers? No further speakers. Now, I believe, Mr Lillywhite, you have time for a right of reply.

Matthew LILLYWHITE: Thank you, President. I hear the concerns raised by those opposite about some of the shortcomings in the nature of the bill, and I recognise and welcome those pointed-out measures that could improve upon the proposed legislation. Amendments would be welcomed, and had the process been in place, I would have endorsed them and voted for them had they been tabled. However, we cannot, so we have to make do with what we have. To that I say: it is a first bill. It is a first step. It is not the be-all and end-all; it is not the final say on this matter. It is the beginning of a range of measures which need to take place to manage heat in our communities.

There are a few specific points I would like to mention. The costs, logistics and curriculum that the bill would entail could be more than capably managed by the government. I do not think it fair to say the government, without the assistance of some specially crafted board, would not be able to deliver on the bill. The government is more than capable. In terms of useful trees in the communities, I fully acknowledge that point and welcome that as a valid point. I also recognise the point of ripping up roofs being wasteful, but have you ever heard of a coat of paint? That would also manage the effect just as well.

The cost of inaction is simply too high. Doing nothing can no longer be accepted as the status quo. The best time for action was 20 years ago; the next best time is now.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Thank you, members, for your debate on this matter.

Noah SLATER: We are now going to open the floor to other participants to present their part of the debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I thought we were bringing it to a vote now.

Noah SLATER: What we have gone through so far are the set speeches from the teams. Now we are going to open the debate to the rest of the floor for about another 20 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: You might get another right of reply. All right, we will do that, then.

Sofia GHIDINELLI-MATHESON: I would like to draw the chamber's attention to clause 6.4 in the bill:

Developers shall not be permitted to remove pre-existing trees to make way for new developments.

This is concerning to me. The absoluteness of this statement does not allow for any potential new developments where a tree already exists, even if the tree is in poor condition or if the land could be more effectively used for other projects, hypothetically – community centres, public and privately owned businesses, small businesses et cetera. Rather, I believe that while trees should be protected, it should come down to each different tree, and there should be a process available to deliberate between a developer's ideas and whether the tree should remain if it has cultural significance or is particularly relevant to the area. In addition, if the developer's submission does go through, I believe that the tree that is removed – or trees – should be replanted in an area that is more appropriate.

Leigh POWW: As members on the crossbench have said, if our roofs' albedo is changed and they do in turn reflect more light, then there exists a trade-off where in colder winter times heat energy is lost when it is definitely needed. Whilst it is important to recognise this aspect, this bill, as member Lillywhite has emphasised, intends to tackle the issue of climate change, a much more pressing issue. There has never been a mass extinction from high energy bills. A solution comes with compromise. Climate change is something we cannot afford to compromise on.

Thomas HUGHES: It has been suggested to me that I act as the driving instructor for the L-platers in the opposition, although I am more of a fixer than an instructor. I am happy to express concerns on this bill as well, the most central being the lack of support for those in buildings and houses with an albedo of less than 0.35, effectively telling them, 'You're on your own, and you have until 2040 to fix your roof.' No plan, no assistance, no compassion. While the intentions of this bill –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Hold on, I will just call order. Can we remember that while a speaker is speaking the member should be heard in silence.

Thomas HUGHES: I am fine, Acting President; all the interjections just fly past me.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: And I will bring you back to relevance too.

Thomas HUGHES: While the intentions of this bill are credible, the lack of support for home owners is incredibly concerning.

Shrika VALLABH: It was mentioned that there should be investment in climate safe air conditioning for disadvantaged communities. However, many disadvantaged communities already do not have access to air conditioning itself, let alone climate-safe air conditioning. Furthermore, this is a blatant cop-out in regard to climate change, as it is not addressing the actual issue.

Jesse-Lee DASS: I commend the opposition for this proposal, but I question the appropriateness of the species listed in clause 6.3(c). Three of these are eucalyptus species that contain flammable oil. I ask the opposition how they plan to reduce the risk of wildfire spread in urban areas. Furthermore I ask the opposition to explain their methodology for species choice.

Gabriel PASCOE: As the honourable member Hughes stated, the instructors on the opposition said they would leave small businesses and families alone. Well, if they read the bill, under clause 7, specifically clauses 7.6 and 7.5, it states that grants will be allocated to councils and also that aid will be allocated to private organisations, charities and other non-profit services and other government bodies. This is going to assist low-income families, as the government can support councils to establish programs for those who are vulnerable in our Victorian society. In terms of transportation, which was mentioned a few times by the government, that will also come under the private organisations being assisted under clause 7.6, as transportation companies will be financially assisted by the Victorian government.

Evelyn OLLEY: I would like to ask the opposition: if disadvantaged people do not have access to environmentally friendly air conditioning, how are they going to pay for that paint to change their roofs? And furthermore, if you are going to plant trees on sidewalks everywhere like that, to cover the roads, what happens

if the roots of those trees bust the roads, bust water pipes and bust gas pipes? That is thousands of dollars in repairs – for trees. There is already no room to plant the trees on sidewalks, absolutely none. I have lived in big cities, I have lived in little cities, I have lived in little towns – there is no room for any trees anywhere.

Sean CARPENTER: The sponsors would like to emphasise that a lack of tree cover, a key area that this bill addresses, invariably affects disadvantaged communities more greatly. Therefore this bill helps to provide equity in urban design and quality of life across Victoria.

Ella SHELDEN: Just talking about the white roofs or creating lighter coloured roofs – a Stanford University study reveals that the lighter roofs may actually lead to warmer temperatures in the long run. Researchers in the study believe that the roof reduces the vertical transport of moisture into the atmosphere. This reduces cloud coverage, leads to less rain and increases drought.

Cindy Ming CHEN: Frankly, the opposition does not seem to understand the central purpose of this bill, providing a string of contradictory messages. Firstly, they have heralded this bill as the ultimate solution to climate change, stating that it tackles the issue of climate change and that it will heal the environment. But why aren't we stopping coal mining, diversifying our country's economy so we do not rely on unsustainable energy sources? Why are not we concerned about coral bleaching? Instead, this bill is simply a bandaid solution. Somewhere along the way, one of their speakers did identify the central purpose of this bill, which is to help cities adapt to heatwaves. But why do we want adaption? We want to solve the climate crisis. As it stands today, the bill simply gives a justification for an action, something the opposition has contradictorily claimed they are trying to start action now. As it currently stands, we are essentially saying that by providing green infrastructure, we have solved the climate crisis – forget about waste, forget about renewable energy, plastic, ocean bleaching, coal mining – all this will apparently be solved by green infrastructure.

Pippa WIGGINS: As the government has pointed out, they see that this bill is offering the ultimate solution to climate. Rather, this is one step into further action in the future of sustainability of our country. Rather than being one solution to a very broad and diverse problem that is globally an issue, it is one part of the solution and is important for future changes.

Timothy REESINK: I would just like to draw the house's attention to clause 7.7, where it is talking about developing a database and talking about wanting to register each tree that is planted. I am concerned that this would actually increase bureaucracy and make it more difficult to plant trees in Victoria, and so the outcome of this would be likely be less trees, because it would be more involved to do that. My other concern with this bill is about the GGG, which is mentioned all across this bill and is apparently published by the City of Melbourne. So my concern as well is that we are taking policy from the City of Melbourne and the context that that is written for and applying it across the whole state, and there are not separate distinctions made for regional Victorians. So the context is quite different and it is not really applicable. The issues that are facing Melbourne are not facing regional Victoria, especially when we are talking about trees, and so it seems quite bizarre to me that the opposition would want to actually limit the amount of trees planted and reduce the amount of trees in regional Victoria by adding this extra bureaucracy.

Chantelle LLOYD-SHRIMPTON: This bill takes into account the future in the implementation of actual new policies for educating younger generations on the effects of urban heat and the development needed to stop further urban heat. This ensures that in future we are able to continue making valuable contributions to reducing urban heat.

Harper LAM: The amount of resources and funding to review every property, suggested in clause 4.3, would be a waste and better spent on other methods to reduce heat instead. Furthermore, trees with big and long roots could cause damage to buildings. People and cars have been seriously injured and damaged from falling limbs of trees.

Charlie SWAN: As stated previously on the fact that it would be difficult to find this information about the local trees, I would like to make the point that every local government has a database recording the trees of the area.

Lihan GUO: The opposition stated that this is a starting point, a first step, but why bring forward an incomplete bill? A concern arises: does the bill really have the solution to tackle this problem?

Grace EMEZIE: The government has stated several times that roofs will be a problem and a danger to our society, but I just wanted to say that I think the climate crisis is a bigger concern than that.

Sirasi De SILVA: I want to take a look at clause 4, where we look at regulation of cool roofs on private properties. Any roof that is constructed, altered, repaired or replaced on private property shall use materials that increase the albedo of the roof to equal or to be greater than 0.65. My main concern is: these are private properties with private owners. Who are we to dictate what these private owners do with their land? Therefore we should not invade the rights of these people. We should restrict our regulation of free Australians.

Taylah FYNNEY: The government previously discussed lacking space in urban environments. In each city there are designated spaces for parkland, to accommodate the aforementioned trees. Nature strips exist next to sidewalks too. Dare I say it, addressing climate change ought to be prioritised slightly more than having extremely spacious sidewalks. Safety was also considered, yet trees already exist peacefully in cities. The trees were here before we were, and we have survived for a while with them around. Roofs can be dangerous too. Are we supposed to get rid of roofs?

Alexandra MADU: I would just like to make the point that taking action now with a rushed bill will cause more harm than good. Why don't we take the time and iron out any kinks? Why take action now when we can make the bill as precise as possible?

Scarlet LEE: I would like to say: why take action now? As we have already mentioned, in terms of climate change there is a ticking clock. If we do not take action now, then when?

Mijica LUS: This bill imposes rising costs, and this puts a strain on resources such as time and the health conditions of the community. Although the bill mentions community engagement in clause 7.8, there will not be a community, as it will be meeting the costs proposed by the bill.

Sinead McCLAY: I would like to draw attention to how the government have assumed that the PAT scheme in clause 7 is a copy of a City of Melbourne plan, whereas it is actually based on a New South Wales program. So that assumption is absurd.

Dylan GEKAS: There are many convincing arguments for and against the logistics of this bill, but the bottom line is this: if we do nothing today, there will not be a tomorrow.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Are there any other members? Okay, we are right to go to the right of reply. You have now got a second right of reply.

Matthew LILLYWHITE: I hear the points raised by all members on all sides. I recognise that this bill could do with some amendments, and one of the advantages of our parliamentary democracy is the ability for all sides to contribute to the debate, to put forward their ideas, to put forward amendments and to make improvements to the bill. Such a bill would benefit from the contribution of all of the members of this chamber, but limiting the support of this bill based purely upon that, I think, is sending the wrong message. There is no opportunity to continue doing nothing. The bill sets out a time line for 2040 for a lot of its measures to be implemented. That is a very generous assumption – that we have until 2040 to make some of the changes that we need to in order to offset the worst consequences of the urban heat island effect.

This debate has got bogged down in some of the nitty-gritty of the logistics, of the trees, of sidewalks, of paint and of bits and pieces – and I again recognise that amendments would benefit that – but let us take a step back and just remember the specific issue we are dealing with. The climate is warming. That is not stopping. Climate change is happening, and we are struggling to deal with it. Mitigation must form a part of our strategy. If it does not, our communities will become so hot and unbearable to live in that people will leave and find somewhere else to live because they simply cannot live in them. That is what this bill is addressing – not buckled roads and not concerns about the colour of your roof but the physical ability to live in the home of your choosing. The bill is the first step to try and do that. The best time for action was 20 years ago; the next best time is now.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Thank you. The question now before the house is:

That the Urban Area Heat Temperature Bill 2023 be read a second and a third time.

Just so members are aware, this is a conscience vote, and this will decide the outcome of the bill.

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Read third time.

Members applauded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Reflections – wow. I was actually quite impressed by a lot of the speakers here today, I have got to say. Yes, wow. Very good. I have only been in this job probably six months or thereabouts. I got elected at the end of 2022, and I represent Western Victoria Region in this chamber. My seat is actually right up there next to the pole, so you are in the hot seat today. You want to swap seats, do you?

It has been interesting to hear a lot of the debate here. I started out my life as an accountant and then I became a teacher, working with a lot of young people. Having worked in schools for the last 10 years in south-west Victoria, I have a fair idea – I hope I still do anyway – of young people and how they think and the interests that people have. I am actually so thrilled to see you here today engaging in debate. Some have read the bill more than others, I think, but it was a really good debate, I have got to say. I am very impressed with the way that a lot of you in here carried yourselves as well. Quite often you see people on the news and in the media and all you see is question time, and quite often it can be seen as a bit of a rabble. But you guys did not do that; you guys held yourselves very highly and very respectfully. You should be commended for that. Well done. Give yourselves a round of applause.

Members applauded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: We might wrap it up there, but I am happy to catch up with any of you guys individually as well and say g'day if you have got any questions or anything like that. That is it. We are done. Thanks very much, everyone. You did a great job.

Sitting suspended 2:12 pm until 2:27 pm.

Indigenous Youth Job Hubs Bill 2023

Sponsor: Korin Gamadji Institute

Refuter: Orbest Secondary College

Introduction and first reading

Thomas HUGHES: I move:

That I introduce a bill titled the Indigenous Youth Job Hubs Bill 2023.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Second reading

Thomas HUGHES: I move:

That the bill now be read for a second time.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are gathered on here today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging.

Getting your first job is an important stage in the life of every young person, be it at the local cafe or supermarket. The confidence and security it gives us is incredibly important in such a crucial stage of our lives. Having a casual or part-time job in your teenage years is undoubtedly a great look on your résumé and also equips you with skills that stick with you for life. Unfortunately for many young Indigenous Victorians, obtaining employment is not only challenging, but it has become a stark reminder of the generational disadvantage that continues to divide outcomes in Victoria and widely in Australia. Currently for those aged

between 15 and 24, non-Indigenous Victorians have an employment rate of around 81.6 per cent, while Indigenous Victorians have an employment rate of 65.5 per cent. That is a 16.1 per cent gap; the issue is real, and it is there right in front of us.

As of 2021, the current secondary school retention rate for Indigenous youth is 59 per cent. Therefore there are still a large minority of people not completing year 12 and possibly falling into unemployment. Therefore we have sought to address this issue through this simple yet wideranging bill, which will help provide opportunities for young mob to attain employment, skills and a meaningful career early on in their working lives. This bill seeks to establish physical hubs whose location are determined by the Indigenous Youth Employment Board. These hubs will include the jobs readiness program, which offers resources such as cover letter and résumé writing, interview tips and attire to ensure there is a best possible chance for a person to get a job that they have been vying for. Workshops will also be facilitated by local Indigenous community members, representatives from stakeholder organisations and representatives from businesses which seek to create a conversation about different workplaces and career paths, providing valuable information about the real opportunities in employment.

The bill also seeks to set up a cohesive jobs network with businesses both statewide and local to create partnerships with the hubs and create an employment stream for those who participate within these hubs, giving them the best possible chance to start their working lives off on the right foot.

This bill seeks to address a fundamental issue with a cohesive framework that supports young mob, not shames them for being unemployed, because the best possible way to create change in people's lives is through support structures and a program that empowers them. I am proud that this bill delivers both, and I urge this house to support this great piece of legislation.

Seamus DONNELLAN: To speak on this bill: the government has not been thoughtful in the development of this program. This bill is simply not adequate in addressing the inequities faced by our Indigenous youth every day. This bill does not tackle the root cause of the Indigenous youth employment gap, which is education. The gap is simply too prominent at this point to ignore. Nineteen per cent of Indigenous Australians hold a bachelor degree, which is in stark contrast with the national rate of about 40 per cent. This is the reason for the employment gap, and this is what we should be focusing our efforts on, but this bill provides zero measures for lowering the gap – zero. This is simply a bandaid solution that the government wants to sell as an accomplishment, but it is in effect an abject failure.

Are we going to tell our Indigenous youth that they cannot aim higher, that they should be satisfied with a job that will not grant them opportunities for promotion? I think we need a content warning for the government, because they are fearful of the real issues at stake with Indigenous youth. We should not be getting them into the mines and we should not be getting them into the factories, we should be getting them back into high school, into university and into TAFE. Is that what the government is supporting – getting them into low-paid jobs for the rest of their lives? Throwing them off to the private sector?

Compounding this lack of educational focus is the massive stigmatisation that our Indigenous youth will face when trying to utilise these facilities. They already have to deal with stigmatisation every day in their personal lives – every day – and this will only increase with the implementation of this program. And of course there are other groups in our country. Will we be creating a body and program for every one of these groups every single time, or should we be creating a more inclusive program for all of our youth in this country?

The lack of cultural awareness is also a glaring issue. Are employers really going to be able to grant Indigenous youth the opportunities that they deserve? Can we really condense 65,000 years of continuous Indigenous culture into a set of rules and affirmations for some businesses? I do not think so. The government's job network program will be a failure, like everything their government has tried to pass through yesterday, today and tomorrow.

A member: Assumption.

Seamus DONNELLAN: There will not be an assumption soon.

Adding to this, the oppressive arbitrary cut-offs that this bill stipulates will remove tens of thousands of at-risk Indigenous youth from eligibility. Are we really going to tell these 21- and 22-year-old Indigenous individuals

that they cannot access a service because they were born a year or two early? I do not think so. Whilst we need to address the root causes and nip the bud of the issue, these Indigenous people, who are fundamentally still youth, need to be grandfathered into this system as well. We cannot leave them behind. We should not leave them behind.

And anyway, local Indigenous groups already exist to meet the demand of local Indigenous individuals. Anecdotally, my local Indigenous group already provides all the services stipulated in this bill. You could walk in there and get local industry connections that are relevant to the local town and the local community. They even facilitate other programs for non-Indigenous students and youths. This program is simply too exclusive. Why should we have these hubs when local Indigenous groups already provide such services and more? These hubs will simply pop up in communities with such pre-existing Indigenous bodies. Are we going to drive the local groups out with exceptional and unspecific programs and services? I do not think so.

Alexandra MADU: This bill holds tremendous potential to uplift our Indigenous youth, particularly those who face educational disadvantages in Victoria. By offering them targeted support and opportunities, we can pave the way for a brighter future, empowering our young mob to overcome barriers and succeed. Let us not ignore the alarming reality faced by Indigenous youth in Victoria: educational disadvantages persistently hinder their progress, limiting their access to opportunities and impeding the ability to thrive. By introducing this bill, we can address this pressing issue directly, bridging the gap and equipping our young mob with the skills they need to flourish in the wider world.

The benefits of this bill extend beyond individual success. Investing in this bill will yield a significant economic advantage for Victoria as a whole. Research shows that increasing employment rates among Indigenous Australians could contribute \$24 billion annually to our nation's economy. Let us finally draw inspiration from success stories emerging from similar programs across the nation. In places like Perth the Indigenous youth leadership program has transformed lives and propelled participants towards sustainable employment and higher education. By implementing this bill, we can replicate their achievements on a larger scale, empowering our Indigenous youth to reach their full potential and become active contributors to their communities.

Allyza CATAPANG: Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of this land. I acknowledge that this bill's intention is noble, as it attempts to bridge the gap in employment for our First Nations people. However, there are more effective ways than this attempt. I would like to direct the house's attention to clause 3(c), 'Definitions', which states that:

Indigenous youth means any person between the ages of 13 to 20 ...

According to the UN, the definition of 'youth' is those aged 15 to 24 or 25. To be employed in Victoria, a child must be 15 years of age. This bill's definitions fail to include the people within the age bracket that most crucially need this. This is an error that will make this policy ineffective and simply a waste of paper.

Lastly, I would like to direct the house's attention to clause 9.1, which states that incentives would be offered to businesses, including wage subsidies. First Nations Australians are not some quota to be filled by businesses who use them as a means to save money – that is tokenistic and disrespectful. According to an article in the *Conversation* written by Akshaya Kamalnath, a lecturer of corporate law at Auckland University of Technology, token appointments are harmful as they allow for underqualified people to be appointed, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and working against the true benefits of diverse hiring. This clause also implies that First Nations people are not skilled enough to be hired in their own right in the implementation of quotas to gain employment. Is this the message the government wishes to convey? To that I say: do better.

Cindy Ming CHEN: The purpose of this bill is to provide Indigenous youth across Victoria with valuable resources and support to help them secure employment and create pathways to fulfilling careers. By establishing Indigenous youth hubs, we are ultimately making employment accessible to Indigenous youth, aiming to bridge the gap and provide the necessary tools for success. The opposition has repeatedly harped on about education and have failed to read the bill. Instead, youth hubs will offer job-readiness workshops, connecting Indigenous youth directly with employment opportunities and fostering business networks to build skills and experiences in the job application process. Why is all this important? Because we are currently having a 16.1 per cent gap in employment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth.

We all know the clear and stark correlations between higher economic background and things such as health outcomes, wellbeing, stability and educational level. Essentially, improving economic outcomes will improve First Nations achievements within the educational system. Failing to close the educational gap will and already has had lasting and enduring impacts on the lives of Aboriginal people. This bill will allow us to break this vicious perpetual cycle of disadvantage that stems from colonialisation, allowing us to empower Indigenous youth, too many of which are disproportionately represented in our juvenile justice systems and out-of-home care.

Gabriel PASCOE: On a point of order, Acting President, the opposition would like to request blazers off.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Rachel Payne): I will allow everyone to take their blazers off, if they so desire. Thank you for checking. It is very warm in here, I know.

Sinead McCLAY: This bill has unintended consequences in regard to clause 7, regarding the jobs network, which fails to recognise the importance of cultural awareness training for employers. This can include informing employers on sensitive issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, such as men's business and women's business, which refers to how some information should only be talked about or negotiated and consulted on by people of the relevant gender. Hence in a workplace a manager needs to be informed on how, for instance, a female Indigenous employee may be less willing to open up to a male manager than if it were a female manager and vice versa. If employers are not made aware, Indigenous youth workers are less likely to be respected and feel as though they are heard. By not having cultural awareness programs in place, the risk of retaining Indigenous youth drops significantly, which undermines the end goal of this bill. I say this because without this essential aspect on inclusive and diverse workplaces, it is shown that there will be lower levels of staff engagement and productivity. Due to my previous points mentioned, Indigenous youth will be less inclined to keep their jobs, which certainly lowers the chance of them going on to gain substantial work experience, which in turn threatens their progression in their chosen career, which unfortunately reduces the chance of Indigenous youth reaching leadership positions.

Brigid BURSTON: As the honourable member Hughes stated prior, the current high school retention rate is at an astonishing 59 per cent, with many First Nations Victorians dropping out of school for various personal reasons: reasons of having to care for family members, being unable to afford basic school necessities, of simply being unable to travel to school due to the distance, or cultural significance. Thus high schools are becoming increasingly inaccessible for many First Nations Victorians. This proposed bill can and will help First Nations Victorians set themselves up for the future without having to cope with the consequences of not fulfilling their schooling entirely. The adaptability of this bill means that First Nations Victorians will be able to start building their careers from a young age and be engaged in and not intimidated by discussions relating to career prospects and aspirations for the future. The pros clearly outweigh the cons. This clear, concise and well-considered bill should – if not must – be implemented in Victorian legislation to benefit the futures of Victorian Indigenous youth.

Chantelle LLOYD-SHRIMPSON: I would like to express some concerns regarding the bill for the implementation of Indigenous youth job hubs. While the intention behind the bill is commendable, there are certain aspects that may hinder its effectiveness, particularly in relation to remote locations and the availability of jobs in certain areas.

Firstly, the bill does not sufficiently address the remote locations where eligible participants may be located. Indigenous communities can often reside in remote and isolated areas, which can present significant challenges in terms of accessibility. Without adequate positions to address these challenges, the implementation of job hubs in such locations may be impractical or limited in scope.

Furthermore, communities housing eligible participants may not necessarily be considered the most beneficial locations for job hubs for the wider community, as stated in clause 5.3. This raises concerns about the potential limitations in terms of the availability and effectiveness of job hubs. If youths do not have job hubs in their nearby location, there will be a reduction in the effectiveness of the hubs.

Another crucial consideration is the unavailability of jobs in certain areas, particularly in more regional and remote settings. Limited job opportunities in these areas could greatly hinder the ability of Indigenous youth to secure meaningful employment. This may result in Indigenous youth participating in the job hubs being unable

to find suitable employment in their local communities. This lack of diverse employment opportunities would not only compromise the effectiveness of the job hubs but would also undermine their long-term sustainability.

Sirasi De SILVA: I want to shed light on the immense benefits of establishing physical job hubs for Indigenous young people. The creation of such hubs would not only address the pressing issue of unemployment but also pave the way for a brighter future for our Indigenous youth. A physical hub would serve as a dedicated space where Indigenous young people could connect with a range of employment opportunities. It would act as a centralised resource, bringing together job vacancies, training programs and mentorship opportunities by providing a supportive and culturally inclusive environment. Moreover, a physical job hub would serve as an essential platform for cultural preservation and knowledge exchange. It could incorporate Indigenous cultural practices, language and tradition, thereby reaffirming the rich culture and heritage of our First Nations people. So why would the opposition not support a step towards narrowing down systemic inequalities?

Matthew LILLYWHITE: I would like to begin by thanking those opposite for their work and ongoing advocacy on this issue. In particular I would like to extend my thanks to my right honourable friend Mr Hughes for his ongoing work on this, and I recognise he is a proud Indigenous youth himself.

I would like to raise three matters regarding this bill. Firstly, on the matter of this program itself, I call into question the need for such a program. The Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety have delivered successive employment and career strategies developed in line with the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement. These employment and career strategies justify and support a list of programs aimed at supporting Indigenous youth. The programs include the Aboriginal graduate scheme, the Aboriginal tertiary scholarship scheme, the Aboriginal youth employment scheme, the Aboriginal undergraduate cadet scheme, the Pathways to Justice calendar program, the Aboriginal employment in corrections scheme, the Aboriginal workforce networks program and the Aboriginal mentoring program, and these are just the state government programs. There is a list of other organisations and programs which supply Indigenous youth employment services, including the Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency, the Waalitj Foundation, the Ganbina program, WISE Employment, most local governments and the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program funded by the federal government. There is already so much support out there. I find it difficult to believe that another program aimed at supporting Indigenous youth employment is realistically going to make a difference.

Quickly touching on the second point, why is a board necessary? Why is the Victorian public service not already capable of delivering the provisions in this bill? Finally, I believe this is an issue I personally would gain value and understanding from through a body like the proposed Voice to Parliament. I am approaching this issue from a white man's perspective, and I think there are issues involved here that I am simply not understanding. (*Time expired*)

Lihan GUO: I stand here today to advocate for the Indigenous Youth Job Hubs Bill 2023, specifically clauses 7 and 9, which address the establishment of a jobs network aimed at connecting young Indigenous Victorians with employment opportunities, having the potential to transform lives and empower our Indigenous youth. Imagine a future where every Indigenous Victorian has a fair chance at employment because of the help of this jobs network, which provides a simple and effective way for young Indigenous to connect with employers in local and global businesses. By establishing these hubs we bridge the gap between jobseekers and local businesses. To encourage participation we offer incentives such as wage subsidies and a logo businesses are able to proudly display as a member and partner in the program, a powerful marker of their effort in providing opportunities to young Indigenous. By encouraging businesses to employ Indigenous youth it provides them with fulfilling employment and a valuable workplace experience. We nurture talent, foster growth and build a stronger and more inclusive society.

Lorjel SIA: Now, I take issue with clause 4 – more specifically, establishing an Indigenous youth employment board. It begs the question: why would a whole new separate body need to be created when there are already an abundance of Indigenous services in operation within Victoria, including but not limited to Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation, Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association, Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place, Nairn Marr Aboriginal cultural centre, Sunbury Aboriginal Corporation, Frankston Aboriginal corporation, the Koorie Youth Council – you get the point.

The establishment is vague in whether these services should (a) amalgamate or (b) cede services. These services are established, ingrained, stable, secure and well-rooted within their communities, and they already cater to the needs of Indigenous employment, which only highlights how niche the establishment of the board is. These services already comprise Indigenous community leaders – clause 4.3(a) – which focus on their community as opposed to a standardised board. Let us just put it plainly: this bill will displace local Indigenous community services, counterintuitive to the bill's overall goal.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: That concludes final contributions. I open it up to the floor. Would anyone like to make a contribution?

Sofia GHIDINELLI-MATHESON: The first speaker for the opposition hammered home the point about this program being exclusive to this minority group. He made the point for his entire speech of focusing on why it was necessary to be exclusive to this group – why couldn't we just establish a board for every group and make it universal? Well, we would not need to be making it exclusive if there was not an unemployment gap. The reason it is exclusive to this group is because this group has experienced education gaps and unemployment gaps; they are more likely to go into our prison system at a younger age. Therefore they require some more support from the government to help close the gap between these disadvantages.

Keira PORTER: Clause 3(c) sets the age range of Indigenous youth as 13 to 20, even though the youngest working age is 16 years old, to allow them into the workshops cited in clause 8.1 and 8.3, which can train them in skills useful beyond the workforce – in other words, teamwork and communication.

Taylah FYNNEY: The bill lacks an education focus, such as the involvement in training – that is, practical training. The bill does mention job networking, such as interview skills and cover letters, such as mentioned in clauses 7 and 8, which will be beneficial. Yet practical training is needed to provide avenues and key skills to actually get prepared for the jobs. Networks will simply crumble if practical training is not considered or provided, as Indigenous Australians will not actually be able to be involved in the workplace.

Evelyn OLLEY: Now, my dad grew up in Wilcannia. He grew up with a lot of Aboriginal kids. He had a friend growing up; she had a lot of big dreams. She wanted to go to university in Melbourne, she wanted to have a good job and she wanted to live in the city. Her family, her friends and the entire town would just ask, 'Why are you working so hard?' Now she lives alone in their town with a kid that she had when she was in high school. The main problem about why there is such a large gap between unemployment rates, is because of peer pressure. They cannot go to school because people do not want them to. They want them to work, which means they keep them in the low-paying jobs that they get just out of – which is why programs like this are as important as they are. The workshops include cover letters, curriculum and selection stuff. It is just important, because otherwise they would not have those opportunities.

Jacob OSENARIS: I would just like to build off some points from my colleague Ms Ghidinelli-Matheson. We must remember the community at hand, First Nations people, have suffered centuries of oppression. This has placed them in a disadvantaged position in society. For those who want the facts, I will tell you to look at the incarceration rates: First Nations peoples make up 3.8 percent of the population, yet in prisons, First Nations people make up 50 per cent of incarcerated individuals. More must be done. I call upon all of us that do not belong to First Nations or Torres Strait Island groups to recognise their privilege in this society. First Nations and Torres Strait Island people need equity. We have to all start on the same playing field, and this bill enhances this. To those who possess the view of the opposition, I say shame. No one piece of legislation will fix the years of unjust and irreparable damage done to First Nations peoples. This bill is a stepping stone – a stepping stone to a just and fair future where we will all live in harmony and have access to meaningful employment. As clause 4.2(a)(i) states, research will be conducted to choose suitable locations to ensure the most vulnerable communities have access. We must understand that those of us who are not First Nations and Torres Strait Islander people have no place deciding what these communities need and what they will benefit from. The facts are there; we must use our privilege to correct the mistakes made by this country.

Gabriel PASCOE: I just want to make the government aware that while this bill may appear progressive, it actually is not the correct approach to do so. Forcing Aboriginal people into jobs is more of a conservative take, rather than the progression we need in our current society. To focus on getting Aboriginal individuals into jobs, we should take a more holistic approach, where we focus on their mental health, their stability and their living

conditions – we cannot just focus on getting them into the workforce, we need to focus on their lives and how they are living at the current time, and support them through that and then lead them on into employment.

Jesse-Lee DASS: Firstly I would like to commend the KGI for their effort in creating this bill, and I would like to address the arguments made by the opposition. Firstly, the opposition mentioned the gap in education, but if the opposition read the bill, clause 8 has a job-readiness program. The opposition mentioned it does not close the gap, but the opposition does not mention the 16.1 per cent employment gap. The opposition mentioned it is tokenistic, but if you have read the bill, it does not call for creating more Indigenous positions but rather a jobs network. Moreover, the opposition mentioned public service agency programs who promote Indigenous employment but failed to mention schemes that include the private sector, not just limited to APS. Lastly, the opposition mentioned forcing Indigenous youth into jobs, but I ask the opposition: where is it written in the bill? I call for the opposition to join the government in economic employment of Indigenous youth.

Leigh POWW: As many government members have stipulated, this bill has its intentions of equality between all Australians, First Nations or not. However, clause 9.1 directly contradicts the principles of equality. Never in our country's history have we given wage subsidies on the basis of race. This directly goes against the mission of equality and sets a dangerous precedent that double standards are awarded on the immutable characteristic of race. I will reiterate that this bill is no more than a virtue signal and bandaid covering up greater underlying issues.

Vincent NUBE: I think the opposition has mistaken what the government is trying to push for. We are not pushing for equality, we are pushing for equity. We are pushing for opportunities for Aboriginals to close the unemployment gap. Until the unemployment rate of Indigenous Australians has risen, we should be doing the most to help them establish the best future for themselves that they can. I think this bill is one of the best things we could be doing for young Indigenous Australians.

Pippa WIGGINS: I fear for our country with this bill – well, our state, I should say, sorry. First of all, young people are at a higher risk of being exploited in workplaces, especially those in the lower paying jobs, and I fear that this bill will place our most vulnerable communities that already marginalised in Australian society due to white oppression at greater risk of exploitation.

Ash NGUYEN: Stating that this bill – and I quote – has ‘zero measures’ and is ‘a bandaid solution’ clearly shows that the opposition not only has neglected to read the bill but also has failed to understand the fundamental issue that this bill is targeting and the generational disadvantage that Indigenous youth experience. Honourable members of the opposition have also listed organisations that are certainly supportive, but the statement made that this bill will not improve on what has already been implemented is nothing less than absurd.

Lauren GRIMAUD: While I would like to acknowledge the well-crafted nature of this bill, I would like to concur with my fellow honourable member Lillywhite, who has stated that there are already several organisations with the aim to achieve exactly what this bill provides. As we all know, in the words of another, repeating the same actions with the expectations of another outcome is the definition of insanity. There needs to be change, not a repetition.

Timothy REESINK: The opposition seem to be missing the point of this bill. They keep talking about education. Not every First Nations person is the same. Uni and higher education is not the answer for everyone; that includes Indigenous youth. This bill is about pathways. At times the opposition seem to be arguing that this bill does not go far enough; at times they seem not to support the bill at all, because they are not appreciating the need for resources and pathways for work, skills and experience. At times the opposition seem to be refuting minute details that have been left out of this bill that are not applicable. Please read the bill. I commend this bill to the house.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I now call on the sponsor of the bill for their right of reply.

Thomas HUGHES: In my short 1 minute and 55 seconds I will try to go over every single point made by the main refuters, but first of all I want to thank everyone on the government side for standing up and supporting this bill. It means a lot to me, it means a lot to KGI and it means a lot to Indigenous mob all across Victoria and widely Australia. I will try to go dot by dot, but I might not be able to get there. I have listed a few.

I will start off with arguments that I have noted down made by the main refuter, the honourable member Donnellan, in which he mentioned education. A lot of members on the government side during the open floor did speak quite in detail about the intentions of this bill. In terms of education, the school retention rate has already been outlined a couple of times as 50 per cent. The honourable member Donnellan made, I guess, a fair point of pushing Indigenous youth forward throughout their education, but at the end of the day there is still 41 per cent of mob here in Victoria who are not completing secondary school. That is one of the key purposes of this bill: to ensure those who drop out of secondary school early are able to obtain employment if they are unemployed and are able to obtain the skills necessary for a long and fulfilling future and a long and fulfilling career.

In terms of the argument made again by Orbost about the remoteness of communities, to the disdain of the honourable member Lillywhite, the board will decide that. The reason why is because I think trying to outline actual locations of hubs would create a bigger problem about accessibility, and the board will go over LGAs with high rates of Indigenous population as well as Indigenous youth unemployment.

Another refuting point brought up by the honourable member Lillywhite is about programs that already exist. There is still a 16.1 per cent gap in employment. I think that is pretty much the end of the debate in terms of the fact that the list of programs that may or may not do this, some programs do it for those who have actually –
(Time expired)

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Thank you, honourable member Hughes. Time is up. The question is:

That the Indigenous Youth Job Hubs Bill 2023 be now read a second and a third time.

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Read third time.

Members applauded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I would love to have a little chat. I do apologise for any names that I mispronounced; I am working on an upside-down diagram here, and I am normally on the crossbench there, so it has taken me a little bit of time just to get my bearings from this side of the house. Welcome to the chamber. It is such an exciting place to be. I do not know about you, but I always find when I am in this place I spend a lot of time looking at the ceiling, because it is such an interesting place to reflect on not only the history of Parliament but also the history of colonisation as well. There is a lot there to take in. There is also a lot to reflect on when it comes to Australian history, and that is both a positive and a negative. So it is such a fascinating place to be, and it is such a wonderful contribution from everybody here.

I would just love to highlight the honourable member Hughes. You did a fantastic job today with that bill. Your delivery was excellent. Clearly you are very invested in this topic, and it was so wonderful to host you here. You were my top pick of the speakers today, so thank you for your contribution.

Apologies for mispronouncing your name, honourable member Nube. I thought that you really did give it a go and just talked off the cuff, which not many people in this place feel comfortable to do, so all credit to you in presenting in that space. Particularly when we are talking in Parliament, because we are often talking about things that have to be reproduced in *Hansard* and recorded as part of legislation, we do tend to find that we read off things more often than not – me included. As someone who has only been in this place six months, I do tend to find that I do not want to mess it up, so I appreciate that.

Honourable member Catapang, I will say that your tearing up of the paper added a lot of enthusiasm to your contribution. Keep doing what you are doing. You did a fantastic job and were up there in my ratings as well.

Is there anyone that has any questions for me? It would be nice just to open the floor up to, ‘What’s it like in this place or working on the crossbench?’

Matthew LILLYWHITE: Could you tell us your story, please – like why you are in politics and how you got here, being a new MP?

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Yes, sure. Definitely. I am a member of the crossbench. I think there are 13 of us now on the crossbench. I am one of two from Legalise Cannabis Victoria. Our political party is obviously a micro-party, but we are here, and we are here to represent our cause.

My story is I have been interested in politics since I was about your age. At about age 17 was when I first decided I want to be a member of Parliament. I am nearly 42, so it did take me that long a time to get here. But I am also really grateful for that fact that I am here on a single-party issue, because it is something I really wanted to focus on and I think that there is a lot of power in politics of not being part of the major parties in many respects. My history is I have a sociology and political background. I have a masters in public policy. But I also spent quite a bit of time working with both federal government and state governments, and I have worked in politics before as an intern for Fiona Patten MP, who is the leader of the Reason Party.

A little bit more about me: I used to be a burlesque performer – I have travelled the world performing – so I bring a lot of different skillsets to this place that would not ordinarily have been welcome in this place, I suppose. It is nice to be able to showcase the fact that, not only as a woman but as a queer woman and also as someone who has come from a fairly diverse background in my upbringing, more often than not people are welcome in this place, now more than ever. This Parliament is the first ever that has been predominately women – 55 per cent. Thanks for having me.

Members applauded.

Shrika VALLABH: I just wanted to ask: how has your experience been as a woman in politics, and how have you navigated the stigma and the barriers that come with that?

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Great question. It has been interesting for me because in my last job I was the boss. It has been interesting for me to have to now come back into a role where more often than not my opinion is not sought. What I am finding, particularly when in Parliament or when working in committees, where a lot of the decision-making processes do take place as well, is that it is just what we bring in a different way of communicating. We may not be front and centre on every issue – and I do appreciate when people are – but more often than not we are seen to provide that sounding board or that advice. To other women wanting to get involved in politics I would say: stick to who you are, believe in who you are and be true to yourself. The fact that the system has been the way it has been for so long and in some ways quite intimidating for women to access is more the reason why we continue to be who we are and just be true to ourselves. We know that society as a whole is more progressive and more encapsulating when more women are involved in those decision-making processes, so stick to what you are doing.

Sofia GHIDINELLI-MATHESON: Hello there. I am very curious what it is like to be part of a micro-party with a very clear, specific agenda.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I appreciate it, because I think when we first got elected people were thinking, ‘Who are these stoners?’ I mean, I know that you all probably were as well. Both my colleague David and I bring wide and varied experience to this job. Coming to Parliament under just the banner of what we do, I always say, yes, legalising cannabis in our main priority, but when you consider where cannabis policy cuts through, it is economic, it is social, it is medicinal and there are always social equity issues there, particularly around the justice system. We insert ourselves in a lot of different conversations. We may have that cannabis lens, but it is a really exciting time for progress in that space. It is really nice to be at the front and centre of creating bigger conversations around cannabis more broadly but also more broadly around the criminal justice system, around youth, around mental health, around accessibility and around medicine. I feel as though stigma has played a huge part in gridlocking legislation in the space of cannabis in particular but more broadly on social justice issues. I think that being front and centre in a micro-party gives me the opportunity to really focus on these topics.

Gabriel PASCOE: Hello. I think you kind of answered in that question, but I am just really interested micro-parties and parties that have a really main focus. I was just wondering: what would you see happening with Legalise Cannabis once cannabis is legalised?

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Funnily enough we have discussed this, because if we are successful in what we are trying to achieve, does that mean that we do not continue in our movement? Maybe we just become the Cannabis Party. Front and centre of what we are representing is more of a human rights position, as well as

accessibility and for adults to be treated like adults. To continue on in that frame, we have always said that we are here to just focus on that core issue, but in saying that, there is always room for evolution. I have also focused a lot of attention around hemp and the fact that hemp is a viable alternative particularly around forestry. Timber is an industry that should be recirculated into something else – hemp is a really viable alternative, so we are looking at different facets of what we might be focusing on there. As I mentioned before, I am queer, so LGBTIQ issues are front and centre in a lot of policy development that I am focusing on. Young people – I experienced homelessness from a young age, so for me that is front and centre and an issue that I want to focus on, and particularly women in decision-making positions. Although I am under that umbrella of that micro-party, I am also an elected member of Parliament, so I do have that liberty.

Jesse-Lee DASS: Hello. I wanted to ask: why did you choose to run for state politics rather than federal?

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Good question. I actually have run for all levels of government. As I said, I have been interested in being involved politics, and I have always been quite political since roughly your age. I have run in elections for the state government, for the federal government and for the local government as well. For me state politics is where most of the decisions are made and probably where I felt I could have the greatest impact. On a local level I do love local politics, but I felt as though if you really want to create systematic change, and particularly change around regulations and general ways of doing things, state politics was the way to go. Also as someone who did not want to affiliate with a major party, it was more engaging – state politics would be the direction to go in.

Keira PORTER: My question for you is – you have probably answered this before – what was your cause for getting into politics, and what inspired you to get in?

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Good question. I think for me, I am so politically active and I was so sick of not seeing people like me represented. As mentioned before, I am LGBTIQ, I am a queer woman, I lived out of home from a very young age, and I felt as though a lot of those conversations are not on the floor politically enough. Having more people that are representing with lived experience was really important for me. There is a saying in politics: rather than get angry get active, or get elected. I felt I may as well try, so here I am.

Noah SLATER: Can we give our Acting President Rachel Payne from Legalise Cannabis Victoria one last round of applause.

Members applauded.

Noah SLATER: We are very honoured to have had you as Acting President today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Sitting suspended 3:21 pm until 3:36 pm.

Modernising the Education System Bill 2023

Sponsor: Whitehorse City Council

Refuter: Newhaven College

Introduction and first reading

Harper LAM: I move:

To introduce a bill titled Modernising the Education System Bill 2023.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Second reading

Harper LAM: I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Honourable members of Parliament, I stand before you today to express my solid endorsement of the Modernising the Education System Bill 2023. Victoria has earned a longstanding reputation as the Education State, a recognition even reflected on our vehicles' numberplates. According to the official website of the Victorian government, the concept of Education State entails:

... building a system that provides every student with the knowledge, capabilities and attributes that will see them thrive throughout their lives, to have the skills that industry needs, and that employers expect.

Nonetheless, in light of the perpetual transformation and progression of the world around us, it has become apparent that our existing education system falls short of achieving all the objectives we originally intended. Therefore it is crucial to change and improve to keep up with our ever-changing society. Change is what drives us forward, and change is what we the government wish to see in the education system to be able to provide to the new generation, and that is what this bill aims to do.

At the heart of this bill lies the recognition that education should not be confined to traditional boundaries. This bill is primarily targeted towards secondary educational institutes. The bill acknowledges that currently education is divided; public schools are hugely under-resourced, whereas private schools are over-resourced. The bill aims to bridge this gap by providing free and up-to-date technologies to public schools in Victoria. This came from our observation that showed many public schools are not able to provide technologies to their students. As a result, the learning of students is limited. By providing free computers or iPads we will also enhance the learning experiences while reducing stress on families and schools to buy expensive technology. This enables students to access education remotely, overcoming geographical barriers and expanding educational opportunities.

We the government aim to provide students with more flexibility in their schedules, accommodating extracurricular activities, part-time jobs and other commitments. This flexibility also benefits teachers by allowing them to achieve a better work-life balance. This is extremely crucial in our modern world, where even students have many responsibilities and unfortunately miss out on opportunities due to a lack of flexibility. Additionally, the bill encourages the use of diverse learning modes to make lessons more accessible to students. The bill also emphasises the adoption of alternative learning methods tailored to specific subjects, recognising and empowering students' unique learning styles.

The bill acknowledges that education encompasses not only the students but also the educators. The bill focuses on establishing a safer working environment for teachers and providing them with the necessary support. It is important to keep safe during work considering the rising cases of harassment in school. It has the objective to define clear limits and standards for after-hours workload, ensuring that teachers have an adequate amount of quality time to dedicate to lesson planning and supporting students. By implementing these measures, the bill seeks to prioritise the wellbeing and professional development of teachers, recognising their crucial role in the educational process.

The bill represents a transformative milestone in modernising the Victorian education system, fostering inclusivity and relevance. The time spent at school is regarded as valuable and crucial in a person's life. It is only natural that everyone should get the most out of their time. Because of this, we strongly support the bill. Together let us back this bill, paving the way for a brighter future where every learner can thrive and make a significant contribution to society.

Leigh POW: Firstly I would like to thank those opposite for their opinion. It is of utmost importance to all of us that our younger generations are taught relevant and diverse skills that are applicable beyond the classroom. The Modernising the Education System Bill 2023 is without a doubt good-hearted in nature. As the bill outlines, who wouldn't want students to experience school in a learning mode catered to them? Who wouldn't want the next generation of Australians to be well versed in their education and learn skills beyond the textbook? Who wouldn't want a safe learning environment for teachers and their students? These are all goals that we as Australians get behind. I would like to establish that this bill is not flawed in the what but in the how. It is about how we improve our existing education system with reference to institutional constraints and the empirical data that we have available to us. I am sorry to say it, but this bill does not tackle the issue it seeks to address.

Clauses 7 and 8 of the bill aim to diversify the student experience and skill set by injecting more subjects into an already overcrowded system. The Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority, or VCAA, offers over

90 VCE subjects alone, of which only a minimum of three, plus English or literature, will generate an ATAR score. This does not even include numerous VET, VCAL or IB options that schools commonly offer as well. However, there are simply not enough, according to this bill. They cite the National Skills Commission for skill shortages in construction, health, community services and farming, and what is their proposed solution? Secondary schools shall develop new courses for these areas and for them to be weighted equally to core subjects in VCE calculations. Do you know what other jobs the National Skills Commission also labels as being in shortage? Amusement centre management, metallurgy and meat inspection – I think students should all have the chance to learn the basics of meat inspection at school. I know it is a little bit of hyperbole on my part; however, I think it serves to demonstrate my point that a shortage of skills in a certain area does not translate to secondary schools being forced to teach extremely niche courses. It is a waste of time and resources to do so. If there are skills that are in serious need of workers, take the tried, tested and effective route of incentivisation. It is what is helping us get so many desperately needed nurses back in the public health system through subsidies and programs that make that career choice appealing.

On the theme of resource management, I would like to draw your attention to clause 7.2. The National Skills Commission also states that primary and secondary school teachers are in shortage, and yet those opposite want to stretch our resources further and include international courses such as A-levels and advanced placement in every Victorian secondary school. The Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates there are only 13,000 Australians studying at tertiary level abroad. A portion of those 13,000 are Victorians, and yet this bill would force schools to offer programs that students just do not have the demand for.

Clause 7.3 also enforces an already widespread practice of schools partnering with tertiary institutions. But I have an idea for the government – let that be up to the schools' discretion. Let the curriculum be flexible. If the school sees benefit in such partnerships, then all power to them, but do not make every school from Mildura to Mallacoota offer said courses when it should and always will be a relationship between the student and that tertiary institution.

Which brings us to clause 8, which piles more subjects and courses on top of the aforementioned specialisation subjects mentioned in clause 7. Yes, it is a very impressive, comprehensive list of skills and resources that without a doubt would improve and greatly benefit school-aged children. It is interesting, however, that the definition listed in clause 3 does not include the terms 'parent' or 'teacher', because the government seems to think they are the same bloody thing. Seriously, if this bill sees the need for teachers to be responsible for children learning social awareness and managing one's emotions, then I think the issue there is in the domestic setting and not an issue for our resource-starved secondary schools to be responsible for. Our teachers are not trained to raise children. They are teachers, and, yes, while some teachers are an amazing resource for students in that respect, there is no need for this legislation to force that. This lack of necessity drags on through every subclause – 8.2 is just forcing students to learn content that already exists in VCE general mathematics, such as taxes, budgeting, saving and investing. As 8.1 outlines, if we want students to learn these skills practically and not based on theory, then we need to minimise students' time at school and maximise their time in the outside world, because that is where they will learn the most.

Those opposite and everyone in this chamber: we can choose to pass this double-edged sword of a bill, or we can take a more practical and direct approach to these issues that will not cripple our education system.

Yuting WANG: I would like to bring your attention to clause 4 and discuss the significant benefits associated with flexible school hours and learning modes. We propose categorising the five subclauses into two distinct groups, each offering advantages. First, we consider subclause 4.1 as an individual category, as it primarily focuses on reducing the high school dropout rate. Flexible school hours have the potential to enhance student engagement and motivation in the learning process. By allowing students to manage their time according to their own preferences rather than feeling constrained by the rigidity of the school system, they will perceive themselves as active participants in shaping their education. Consequently, the motivation to learn will be heightened, resulting in increased confidence. Over time, this approach will contribute to a reduction in the high school dropout rate and give various unintended benefits, such as an enhancement in labour quality and an overall improvement in the economy.

On the other hand, subclauses 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 fall into another category, as they collectively contribute to improving students' educational outcomes. To gather insights into to what extent the strategies stated in the subclauses, such as providing recorded lessons, will be beneficial, we conducted a survey, and 90 per cent of

high school students responded ‘beneficial to a large extent’. Furthermore, different learning modes have been seen to be effective in different countries. For example, Singapore integrated robots into classrooms, and it showed encouraging results as it encouraged students to engage more in class and gain better results. Hence it is crucial for schools to provide a diverse range of learning modes and school times, as they allow students to study more efficiently, leading to enhanced educational outcomes.

Gabriel PASCOE: I want to start by reiterating what honourable member Pouw stated in his opening remarks, which is that the issue is not in the ‘what’ but in the ‘how’ of this bill. Specifically, I want to highlight the how of clause 5.1, which states:

Secondary schools shall implement alternative modes of learning ...

and then goes on to list modes, such as portfolios, exhibitions, debating, project-based learning, performance assessments and simulations. I will remind those opposite that these quote unquote ‘alternative modes’ already exist in current prep to 10 and VCE curriculums. Personally, I know many people who have done subjects such as VET music performance or theatre studies, where their assessments predominantly involve what is stated under these alternative modes of learning. Those on the opposite side of the chamber may argue, but that is up to the schools’ discretion. I might remind the house that the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority also does performances and portfolios as a form of end-of-year assessment for your final VCE results.

Furthermore, when we have one of the largest teacher shortages in Australian history, resulting in an increase of workload and stress for existing teachers in our state, those opposite expect teachers to adapt to six different learning modes for the subjects they teach. We should focus on supporting the current teachers we have and providing incentives for future educators to join the workforce. I fear that this bill will act as a further disincentive for our hardworking teachers, and we cannot afford to lose any more in an already sparse workforce.

Amy Yizhen BAI: I stand here today in support of this bill, specifically clause 7, diversifying subjects and courses. By developing new courses and extending the current curriculums, we the government recognise the evolving needs of students that exist in our society and provide our students with a well-rounded education that prepares them for the challenges of the modern world.

In regard to clause 7.1, statistics indicate that there are significant skill shortages in various sectors of our economy. According to a recent report by the Victorian government, the demand for skilled workers in industries such as health care, information technology and renewable energy is estimated to rise by 20 per cent in the next five years. However, the current curriculum in Victorian secondary schools does not adequately address these emerging fields. By diversifying subjects and courses, we can bridge this gap and equip our students with the necessary skills to succeed in these high-demand industries.

Next, regarding clause 7.2, in an increasingly globalised world it is crucial that our education system offers internationally recognised courses. This provides our local students with a competitive edge in the global job market by first providing them with opportunities to enter international universities through alternative college entrance programs other than the VCE. According to recent statistics, there has been a significant increase in the number of Victorian students seeking admission to prestigious overseas institutions. Therefore offering international-based courses will ensure that our students stand a better chance of securing admission to their desired universities.

Lastly, in regard to clause 7.3, forging partnerships between secondary schools and universities is essential for the holistic development of our students. By allowing students to participate in tertiary extension programs, we the government expose them to advanced learning opportunities and foster a seamless transition from secondary to tertiary education for them.

Chantelle LLOYD-SHRIMPSON: I would like to reiterate that the problems with this bill are not with the ‘what’ but the ‘how’. Directing attention to clause 9, clause 9.1 states that programs will be implemented to support the mental health and wellbeing of teachers. These programs may involve removing teachers from the classroom to participate. It is important to consider the balance between teacher wellbeing and student education. This bill fails to create a balance or address teacher wellbeing in a way that minimises the disruption to student learning. Further, the training necessary for the peer support program would continue to increase the

time teachers are out of the classroom. Adequate resources and support should be provided to schools to ensure that training can be completed without compromising the quality of education.

Additionally, clause 9.2 outlines workload limits for teachers. This method is set to ensure teachers have adequate time for their tasks but does not provide a specific definition of what constitutes 'adequate time'. This leads to a lack of clarity, resulting in misinterpretation and inconsistent implementation. Similarly, the phrase 'not assigned more work than they can reasonably handle' in 9.2(b) is subjective and open for interpretation. This could result in an overestimation of their workload capacity. It would be more beneficial to establish clear guidelines, taking into account factors such as class time. In summary, while the intent behind clause 9 is good, it is important to ensure that it is implemented in a manner to minimise disruption to student education and provide clear guidelines to prevent misinterpretation.

Sirasi De SILVA: I want to bring attention to clause 8. Clause 8 focuses on providing students with access to real-life skills. This clause represents a progressive step towards our education system, aiming to equip young learners with the essential skills that will empower them both in their personal and professional spheres. Education is not just about academic knowledge; it should also prepare students for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in the real world. By introducing practical life skills and knowledge, we are taking a holistic approach to education, ensuring that our students develop the abilities necessary for success in various aspects of life.

Clause 8 emphasises the need for practical-based subjects that move beyond theory. It recognises that true proficiency comes from practical application and hands-on experience. By incorporating practical learning into the curriculum, students will be better equipped to navigate real-world scenarios confidently. Financial literacy is one crucial aspect of the real-life skills. This is a clause that will address that. By introducing a dedicated financial literacy course, we are empowering students with the knowledge and skills needed to manage their finances effectively. Creating and managing a budget, saving and investing, understanding financial planning and navigating the intricacies of taxes are valuable skills that will lay a strong foundation for financial wellbeing throughout their lives.

In conclusion, clause 8 represents the efforts to equip our students with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in the real world. By incorporating practical-based subjects addressing financial literacy, emotional intelligence and career readiness and providing academic planning and advising services, we are investing in our students' future success. I urge all members of this esteemed Parliament to support this clause, as it is an aligned, collective vision of a well-rounded and empowering education system that prepares our youth for a prosperous future.

Gabriel WINTERSON: I would like to direct our attention to clause 4.2, which states that secondary schools shall introduce flexible start and end times to reduce congestion. However, I can say from firsthand experience this policy often does not work. The problem is that when you have siblings from different year levels finishing up at different times it often ends up falling on the parents to cover these gaps and pick up their kids at these different times, or more likely, they end up just having to wait. I know for a fact that this was a problem at my school when we tried this during COVID. You had columns of parents waiting around in the car park to collect their children from different year levels being picked up at different times. It was a complete nightmare for the parents having to wait aimlessly in the car park for half an hour or more for their kid to show up and then having to sit around in a queue of cars before finally being set free. Parents have enough to stress about, and I fear implementing these overcomplex hours across all of our schools will be pushing them to the limit. Another problem is that giving schools these flexible hours will destabilise our routines post COVID. Uniform start and finish times provide us all with a sense of structure in our routine and in our study. Research shows that it is stability, structure and routine which allows us to all to plan ahead, to be more productive, more focused and healthier than if we were to navigate these irregular hours. If we destabilise our schedules, we derail our learning. If we want to ensure the success of all students across Victoria, preserving a uniform structure is key.

Lihan GUO: I stand here today to advocate clause 9, which addresses the critical issue of mental health and wellbeing of educators, who play a fundamental role in shaping the future of our society. By implementing measures, we the government are taking the initiative towards creating a safe working environment for them. Teaching is a profession requiring immense dedication and effort, often investing hours on end planning lessons, attending meetings and more, extending their work well beyond regular school hours. It is vital that we

realise and address that this overwork can impact their overall wellbeing. Clause 9.1 aims at supporting teachers' mental health by offering stress management training to manage their stress levels, and it enables teachers to find a healthy balance between their work life and personal life. Furthermore, the introduction of a peer support program creates a safe space for teachers to let out experiences or thoughts and to receive emotional support led by trained mentors or teachers, fostering empathy and a sense of community among educators and enhancing their mental wellbeing while also promoting a supportive teaching environment.

Clause 9.2 establishes a workload limit for teachers, ensuring they have time for tasks such as lesson planning, creating or providing feedback to students but also preventing them from becoming overworked or overwhelmed with work, potentially resulting in a detrimental impact on the quality of education they provide. Let us come together to let teachers feel appreciated, valued and supported to continue educating the future generations.

Charlie SWAN: I would like to start by drawing your attention to clause 6; the DLT is established. I would like to say that we are barely finding qualified people to teach in these schools. With many companies struggling to find employees, how will this DLT be able to get enough people to not just teach and give resources to these teachers but to also do this all across our state? Who is going to create this program? You say professionals, but in such a new and emerging topic, are there any professionals that can do this? I would like to reiterate what the honourable member Pascoe said: we are currently in a teaching crisis. How are you going to find these educators to teach this new topic and to teach it to teachers who are already stretched so thin from doing too much because there are not enough of them?

I would like to move your attention to clause 6.1(d). You state that you will conduct audits of the digital technology in government schools, and these audits will be conducted once a year. But then in clause 6.2 you state that this program will be updated regularly to ensure optimal performance. If this is only getting audited annually, how will you ensure that it will be updated regularly?

Jesse-Lee DASS: In support of this bill, clause 4 is about the flexibility of school hours and learning modes. It will be a significant stride towards modernising our education system, accommodating diverse learning needs and fostering a more inclusive and flexible approach to teaching and learning. Clause 4.1 emphasises the importance of introducing flexible learning and flexible scheduling options in secondary schools. By implementing block scheduling, hybrid schedules combining in-person and online learning, and part-time enrolment, we empower students to personalise their educational experience. This flexibility acknowledges that students have unique learning styles, commitments and circumstances that may require alternative approaches. It encourages creativity and innovation, allowing students to explore their interests while ensuring a well-rounded education.

Additionally, clause 4.2 advocates for flexible start and end times at secondary schools. This provision not only reduces congestion during peak hours but also recognises that students have varying chronotypes and energy levels during the day. By offering different start and end times within a reasonable range, we cater to individual preferences and promote optimal learning conditions for all students. It is crucial, however, to strike a balance and ensure that learning commitments do not commence too early or extend too late, safeguarding students' wellbeing and allowing for sufficient rest and personal time.

Clause 4.3 introduces online delivery systems and supplementary resources to enhance access to learning activities. By live streaming and recording lessons, teachers enable students to review and revisit content, reinforcing their understanding at their own pace. The provision of online databases, websites and videos, and some resources expands students' learning opportunities, making education more engaging, interactive and adaptable to their needs. This approach also prepares them for the digital age, equipping them with essential skills for future success.

Furthermore, clause 4.4 emphasises the implementation of individualised instruction options for small groups of students. Recognising that students have diverse learning speeds, preferences and abilities, this provision allows for targeted instruction tailored for specific needs. Small-group instruction promotes active participation, fosters collaboration and enables teachers to provide personalised guidance, ensuring that no student is left behind.

Lastly, clause 4.5 highlights the importance of adaptive learning technologies, such as digital simulations. These technologies offer immersive, interactive experiences, enabling students to grasp complex concepts in a practical and engaging manner. By incorporating digital simulations, we enhance students' critical thinking, problem-solving skills and real-world application of knowledge. (*Time expired*)

Matthew LILLYWHITE: I understand it is an engaging debate. I want to begin by thanking those opposite for their ongoing work and advocacy on this issue. The bill asks us to ponder the question of whether the education system of today is fit for purpose. During my own time in an academic setting and conversations I have had with individuals and academic experts, it is clear to me that beyond removing the strap and replacing it with the computer, there has been very limited advancement in how education in the state and indeed the country is delivered. Victoria, for its part, has made a considerable effort in supporting education, and that shows in the academic results, with Victoria consistently outperforming compared to many other states, not just when comparing annual results but also in the long-term trends. It therefore makes sense that the bill aims to continue this tradition of Victoria being the Education State by offering a range of measures that modernise learning. But again, it is a case of not what, but how.

I am sceptical of the impact these changes will have. While digitising and offering flexible learning have been shown to help remove barriers for students with learning disadvantages and may improve overall student engagement and performance, schools today are poorly resourced as it is, and there are substantial challenges in the attraction and retention of teachers, especially in rural communities. It is all well and good that a student can start school at 10 am or have alternative digital assessments, but it will not make much of a difference if there is not a teacher to teach.

Further, I raise the question as to the necessity of the DLT. Structures are already in place at the Department of Education. Why is a whole task force required to implement the provisions of this bill? I do not think these points should necessarily limit our support for the bill or justify its rejection, but I do wonder, however, whether it is better to call for change that cannot be realised yet or call for the additional support to be delivered first before advocating for the change.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Joe McCracken): Spicy. I think we have now got through the speakers that have listed themselves down as speaking, so that is fine. I am happy to open it up to others that want to speak. I know there is a bit of an order, so what I might do is go government, opposition – back and forward like that – until we exhaust it.

Ash NGUYEN: The education system was made in and based off the industrial period, which we have so obviously progressed through, so the education system should also progress. Creativity and expression are largely ignored and neglected by the current education system. By diversifying subjects and courses, this bill can significantly improve on this. Moreover, parents and guardians are not always available. The opposition seems to need a reminder that able and knowledgeable guardians are an extreme privilege. As previously stated, teachers are not trained to raise our children. Why aren't they? In many cases teachers end up spending more time with the youth than the parents, so shouldn't they be able to deal with that responsibility?

Scarlet LEE: I would like to draw our attention to clause 7.1(c), which states that:

Secondary schools shall weight specialisations and electives equally to core subjects in VCE results calculations.

This absolutely should not be the case. Certain subjects are weighted differently for a reason. If a student, for example, is to undertake specialist maths, it is far more challenging and by nature more competitive than, say, general maths. Thus it is only fair that students are recognised for their skill and academic contribution. Furthermore, equal weighting only encourages students to take the easy option and not challenge themselves, as it is weighted the same as the easier options. How does the government claim to empower student learning if students are no longer being recognised proportionately for their academic talent and achievement?

Ella SHELDEN: On a point of order, Acting President, this is just a request that we can remove our blazers for the rest of this debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Yes, of course. You do not have to ask me, though; you can just remove them. That is fine.

A member: Yes, they do.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Do they?

A member: Yes. It's our rule.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Oh, it's your rule. Okay. All right. You can take them off if you want.

Vincent NUBE: I would like to point out that clause 5.1 supports neurodivergent people and people who are looking to support different pathways. I do understand that some VCE subjects do have extra practical activities as assessments for their coursework, but a lot of VCE subjects do not. For maths, for instance, there are no practical activities; it is entirely based off an exam. English is the same; there is no practical activity.

I would also like to point out that clause 6.1 supports people with mental health issues, especially anxiety or depression, and especially people who are not necessarily able to get out of their house or are in more rural areas.

Taylah FYNNEY: Whilst keeping schooling up to date is essential, this bill depicts a heavy overlap with existing programs. VCAA updates their study design every four years. As part of the new English study design in 2024 I personally know that it is being modernised via a dismissal of comparatives and a more creative outlet to engage students. This is extremely similar to means discussed in clause 9. Therefore I question the overlap in certain aspects with existing programs.

Alexandra MADU: As someone who was raised in England and was halfway through my A-levels before moving to Melbourne, I have seen both sides of these ways of teaching and learning. I must say that doing my A-levels was a more mentally stimulating experience and made it easier for teachers to provide aid and support to students. Clause 7.2(a) would bring a more wholeheartedly supportive and well-rounded education, especially for year 11s and 12s, who suffer the pressure of five to six subjects, some of which they may never use in the wider world. I support this bill not just for the betterment of youth education but for the betterment of youth mental health.

Charlie BIBERHOFER: I would like to draw attention to contradictions related to clause 9 and the stress levels of teachers. The newer alternative learning modes from clause 5 that must be learned by all teachers across the state, as well as the workshops, seminars and resources aimed at reducing stress, will only add to the already burdensome workload of teachers, and the workload limits will be ineffective to address this due to the lack of clarity in their implementation. Teachers are one of our most crucial and important groups, and their wellbeing should be a priority.

Sofia GHIDINELLI-MATHESON: The opposition has brought up teacher stress and teacher shortages a number of times now. Does anyone in this chamber know the average time a person spends as a teacher before quitting? It is five years. I have parents who are teachers, and I can tell you one of their highest points of stress is the work that is done behind the scenes – the correction work, the planning. Even when teachers take time off from classes, they have to write out lesson plans for the substitutes. If you take a week off, you have to write every lesson plan for every class. As stated in clause 9.2 of the bill, workload limits shall be set in place to ensure that teachers are not overloaded with work. Teacher shortages will go down if we give them the reasonable level of work that they can manage. Additionally, clause 9.3, which records all the after-hours work, will ensure that teachers are not doing after-hours work to excessive levels and hypothetically could allow for us to pay our teachers accurately for the work that they put in.

Seamus DONNELLAN: I would like to bring to the government's attention – and I am sure the opposition already knows this – to clause 2 of the bill, commencement. It reads that:

This Bill shall commence upon receiving assent from the Youth Governor of Victoria.

What does that mean? It means that the programs stipulated in this bill will go into effect immediately at the commencement. You could be in the middle of the school year doing some general mathematics in VCE, and the next day you will be training to be a meat grinder. That just seems very inefficient, and I think the government needs to relook at that.

A member: Relevance?

Seamus DONNELLAN: It is very relevant. As the honourable member across from me was saying, I do not think giving teachers more work than they already have will increase productivity. I think that is extremely anti-intuitive, and I do not think that is how it works.

A member: You just misinterpreted my words.

Seamus DONNELLAN: No, I did not. I am repeating what you said: give them more work and they will work harder. I do not think so. That is all have to say. I just think that the government has not thought out this bill very well.

Hemi EDWARDS: Clause 8 talks about the real-life skills education in schools. Recently the Victorian government introduced a vocational major, which gives students a VCE certificate at the end of year 12 to stop the stigma that those who do the VCAL do not end up going anywhere. The vocational major gives students a VCE certificate, and that will help them develop their skills to go to uni if they want to – through TAFE. The downside is that they do not get an ATAR, but the best part about it is it gives students a head start for the vocational, which gives them life skills and training for when they leave school. As a current student of the VCE VM in a town called Warrnambool, I have been able to complete the white-card training, which gives access to the ability to work on job sites or in construction if I wanted to leave school. Another one I was able to do was first-aid training to learn the basics of first aid in order to help others. I was able to do an RSA – responsible service of alcohol – which gives students work in the hospitality sector and also work as a bartender. Another benefit is we are able to gain a cert at TAFE – from cert II to cert IV. Our local TAFE provides us with the skills and knowledge to work in a VET-supported industry like IT, hair and beauty, electrotech and more in a trade.

Allyza CATAPANG: I would like to direct the house's attention to clause 4.2, where schools introduce their own start and end times. This will make it harder for students to get accustomed to a stable routine. When students switch schools with a drastically different timetable, that can greatly impact their circadian rhythm.

Additionally, this bill provides no new changes, as many VCE programs offer variations of this subject already. Clause 7 is a repetitive block of words that is already telling me the same thing as the VCAA website about subjects offered.

Clause 8 also discusses access to real-life skills education in schools. Need I remind them once again that these lessons are already in place. I implore the government to think that perhaps the reason most schools require students to learn numeracy and literacy subjects is because they teach skills such as logical and critical thinking, which are fundamental if they truly want students to learn skills to fill in skill shortages, unlike what the honourable member Nube implied about mathematics' lack of application. The quality in schools varies because of this little thing called lack of funding.

Lastly, I would like to direct the house's attention to clauses 9.2 and 9.3. These clauses allow for teachers to be even more exploited than they already are. Schools can use clause 9.2(b) as a reason to cut teacher shifts to save money, and clause 9.3 does not outline how this work will be tracked. Therefore schools themselves can take advantage of this loophole by wrongly tracking the hours and depriving teachers of their rightful pay. If the government truly wishes to modernise the education system, then I propose two very straightforward ideas: pay teachers more to cut the shortage, and increase government funding to schools – not a repetitive bill that tells people what they already know.

Cindy Ming CHEN: The opposition has repeatedly expressed concerns over the consequences of the bill on various stakeholders. However, it is not an either/or situation. It is a win for parents, it is a win for students and it is a win for teachers.

Addressing the concerns over the bill turning away teachers, I would like to call your attention to clause 9, which explicitly states that workload limits shall be set in place and that government-funded secondary schools shall track and report after-hours work conducted by teachers, thus reducing stress and the overworking of teachers and making jobs in teaching positions more appealing. Furthermore, clause 4, which details the implementation of flexible school hours, rather than making it inconvenient to parents, will actually make it more convenient. The traditional times of 7 am to 3 pm directly coincide with working times, making it extremely stressful and hard for parents to juggle both sending and dropping off their kids to school and going to work. Instead, making school hours more flexible allows parents to be able to juggle both, making them less

stressed and more able to support their kids' schooling. Furthermore, we have already seen successful implementations of these holistic school systems in countries such as Finland, which has individualised subjects and classes that have already been shown to be successful.

Evie REDFORD: I would like to draw attention to clause 8. When will these additional subjects be held? How will the addition of subjects fit into an already overloaded curriculum? There is limited depth explained in the actual introduction of these subjects. Furthermore, does this not add on heavily to the workloads of teachers, therefore blatantly contradicting the workload limits outlined in 9.2?

Keira PORTER: The opposition clearly cannot comprehend how times are changing rapidly. This is not the older generation anymore, this is the modern day: 2023. So what exactly can the current curriculum provide to the youth? Absolutely nothing if someone wants to study something tailored to them for a future career or university. If they were to tailor schools to get them into life, it may possibly, more than likely, also increase the rates of how long students stay in school for, because personally a lot of friends that I used to know dropped out because school was not for them. If we change the structure of how everything is presented to them, it will do something. Also, read the bill. Teachers around the world are able to provide tailored online learning. We did it before in COVID; we can do it again.

Lorjel SIA: Thank you, government, because I have an issue with the decreased productivity perpetuated by the abstract pandemic-inspired learning adjustments. Now, we are all youth parliamentarians, and personally during online school, if a class started at 9 am, I woke up at 8:59. As Sam Smith once said, I know *I'm Not the Only One*. Acting President, you are a teacher. You know how hard it is to get students engaged and have retention. I would also like to point out clause 7.2, which suggests that we take up A-levels and the IB as opposed to VCE, and, yes, whilst VCE is not perfect, it works. Other states in Australia have actually been inspired by the VCE, so why should we ditch it in pursuit of other curriculums?

Modernising education – well, there is a reason why classrooms have stayed the same for centuries, hundreds of years. There is a reason why this parliamentary chamber has mostly stayed the same as well – because it simply works.

Jacob OSENARIS: I do want to place a quick trigger warning in relation to suicide, so if that does trigger anyone, please feel free to step out.

I would like to point out some irregularities with the VCE curriculum. I personally come from Ballarat. That is a town of roughly 140,000 people, and during the time that I have been in high school, I have lost five young people in all the schools within the city. That is way too many people. Although there may be other contributing factors, at the end of the day school played a major factor in what happened to those students. It is clear, and we know this.

The school system does not work all the time, and I want the opposition to really think about the fact that the school system is not just some universal fix for everyone. Everyone is different and everyone must be catered for. I would also like to highlight to the opposition that in Melbourne there is a very big culture, especially in the state, around private schools often trying to race to the top to get the best VCE results. Oftentimes what this does is place student care at the very bottom of the list of priorities; it places ATAR scores at the top. This means that the skills outlined in clause 5.1 are often heavily neglected, leading to students often feeling not cared for and feeling as though they do not fit into the school system and must adapt to a system that was not made for them.

Dylan GEKAS: Teachers are burnt out. The answer is to encourage a larger workforce, before the teachers reduce their workload. If a small workforce of teachers were to work less and less, the students will be left behind.

Ella SHELDEN: Courses, as suggested in clause 7.1, will address the broad skills that are needed for the jobs that are in shortage. Courses such as basic horticulture will encourage students and show them a different side to farming, and first aid, for example, can help inspire a career in nursing. Offering these courses and these subjects can help create interest and can help push kids towards experience. It can show people a different side to something that they may not see otherwise, which can grow interest and support in these industries and ultimately grow the workforce.

Pippa WIGGINS: For a bill so predominantly focused on safe working environments, as outlined in clause 9, I fear for teachers having to extend their hours to be able to accommodate for varying school start and end times. If students choose to start at, say, 7 am and end at 2 pm, that means the teacher also has to be there at those times. But if a student chooses to, say, start at 9 or 10 and go till 4, that elongates the workday, and it completely contradicts the safe working environment that the government has so continuously preached for.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: If there are no other speakers, I might ask the mover to have their right of reply.

Harper LAM: I appreciate and acknowledge the points raised by both sides, and while there are indeed places that can be improved on, not approving this bill due to those issues is simply unwise. As the honourable member of the government stated, the key points of this bill are to support and allow students to be able to learn efficiently and well and to thrive and be able to contribute to their communities. It is also for teachers to be able to continue to do what they wish to do by prioritising their wellbeing. We should start forging a path toward a more promising future for our young students, who are not only learners but also future leaders of our society. Because the time that students spend in school is valuable and crucial in a person's life, it is only natural that they should get the most out of their time. That is why I ask you all to support this bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: The question is:

That the Modernising the Education System Bill 2023 now be read a second and a third time.

I note that this is a conscience vote, so this will indicate that the bill has either passed or failed.

House divided on question:

Ayes 21

Noes 25

Majority against 4

Question negatived.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: The bill has not passed. Thank you very much again. That is the end of this session. Please thank the clerks as well for their work.

Members applauded.

Youth Council adjourned 4:33 pm.