

Saturday, 2 August 2025

PREMIER'S SPEECH TO VICTORIAN ALP STATE CONFERENCE

I want to begin today in the way that I think we always should – By acknowledging the Traditional Owners of this land, the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, by paying our respect to their Elders, past and present.

And of course, I want to extend that same respect to any Elders and Traditional Owners who are joining us at conference today.

I don't say those words because I have to.

I say them because there are still people who'd rather they weren't said at all.

And I say them... because I'm proud –

Proud that when it comes to treaty, and when it comes to truth – our state leads the nation.

I'm proud, to be the first Premier in Australia's history to sit before a truth-telling inquiry.

And more than that, I am proud that, as a government, and as a party, we've chosen to stand for respect, for recognition – and for justice.

Because if we stay silent – other voices will fill the void.

Voices that sow doubt, spread hate, and silence truth.

We heard it at the Shrine on ANZAC Day.

And we saw it the other week in Federal Parliament.

People who wish this history would simply just go away.

People who will tell you the past is behind us.

That it's time to move on.

Well, Delegates – we don't walk this path because it's easy.

We walk it because it's right.

That's what we have always done.

When something's broken – we fix it.

When something's missing – we build it.

When something is unjust – we stare it down.

That's what Labor does.

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We don't admire problems. We solve them.

We show up. We do the work. And we believe in something.

Labor is the party of free TAFE.

We are the party of free kinder.

We're the party of school building.

We're the party of paying nurses.

We're the party who build the bridges, the tunnels, the train lines.

Who cut the energy bills and build the houses.

We're the party of free public transport for kids.

It's not abstract. It's real.

It's a kid getting their first pair of glasses – and finally being able to read the board.

It's a mum who can pay the power bill – and still put dinner on the table.

It's a nurse who finally has someone else on the ward to share the load.

Or an apprentice turning up to TAFE – knowing she'll have a good job and a big future.

Everyone in this room has made that real.

Because we're not just a government – we're a movement –

A movement powered by people – and powered by workers – who believe in something bigger than themselves.

That's the difference between us and them.

Never forget, the Tories have already had their turn.

And they didn't just sit on their hands – they swung the axe.

They shut TAFE campuses – and locked young people out.

They closed hospitals – and made families travel longer.

They cut schools – and asked why kids were falling behind.

They sold off the SEC – and my dad lost his job.

Deep down – they don't believe working people deserve better.

And maybe that's the biggest difference of all.

When you think fairness is someone else's problem –

When you think struggle is a choice –

Then you blame. You cut. You sell.

You leave families to manage on their own.

And then you pat yourself on the back and call it leadership.

But they aren't leaders.

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They're just Liberals.

And they don't deserve to govern.

Delegates, next year, Victorians will have a choice.

And we're going to give them a choice about the future – and how we'll build it.

Because right now, a lot of Victorians can't see that future clearly –

Some can't see it at all.

There are young people out there today who've done everything right –

Studied hard, worked hard – and still feel like they'll never have what their parents did.

There are families who feel like life is just happening to them – with no control, no choices, no room to breathe.

And they aren't asking us to perform miracles.

They just want to know that someone's in their corner.

That someone's on their side.

In this job, you sit at a lot of kitchen tables –

You spend time on factory floors, in hospital wards, at schools, and TAFEs.

You meet a lot of people – and you listen to them.

And Delegates, what do they keep telling me?

It's hard.

People are struggling.

The cost of everything is up.

They're stretched at work. They're stressed at home.

They're worried about their future.

Here's the hard truth:

For most working people, politics has nothing to do with parliament or parties.

Politics is about the gap in their pay packets.

The cost of new school shoes.

It's the search for a doctor.

It's the security of a good job, and a decent income.

It's a future for their families.

Control over their lives – and control over their time...

Time to care for the people they love.

Time to drop the kids off at school.

Time to work. Time to play.

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Time to think.

Time to breathe.

Their time.

Delegates, recently I spoke to a young mum who knows exactly how precious that time is.

I can't share her real name, because she's in the middle of a workplace dispute with her boss – and identifying her could make things even harder.

So, we'll call her Jane.

Jane is impressive.

She's a single mum with two young kids.

She works in aviation, in a role that keeps passengers safe in the air.

It's stressful work – but it's important. And she's good at it. Really good.

She's a respected leader. A model employee. She cares deeply about her job.

But it's a lot to juggle.

She lives in the outer suburbs. And commutes over an hour each way to work – if the traffic's good.

Her mornings are a marathon – while she's getting herself ready, she's wrangling kids, packing lunches, doing the school drop-off –

To keep it all together, she leans on her parents – both in their seventies – to help.

It's a big ask. And it's exhausting. But like so many Victorians, she's been doing everything she can to keep all the plates spinning.

For the past few years, her workplace agreement gave her one thing that made it possible – one day a week working from home.

One day. That's all.

And that one day changed everything.

It meant she could drop off and pick up the kids herself.

It meant two hours where she wasn't sitting in traffic.

It put money back in her pocket – without tolls, and fuel, and parking.

It meant she could focus on her work – and actually get more done.

And most importantly – it meant real, quality time with her kids.

For Jane, that one day kept her life in balance.

So, you can imagine how it felt when, during her agreement renewal, Jane was told she'd have to come back to the office full-time.

And not even told in person – but on a Teams call.

From a boss working from home themselves.

They told her it was no longer sustainable for her to work from home.

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But Jane knows that isn't true. She's more productive at home. She's been doing it for years.

She's not the only one.

More than a third of Australians regularly work from home.

It's a common practice.

But for Jane – it still wasn't a right.

Now she's paying the price.

Losing that one day has taken a toll – on her, on her kids, and on her parents.

She's had to cut back her hours. She's earning less. She's spending more.

And she's stressed – constantly.

Across Australia, thousands of workers are being backed into corners just like this.

By companies who put profits and control ahead of people.

By employers who refuse to change.

But here's the truth:

If you can trust someone to keep a plane in the air – you can trust them to do their job from home.

If you can trust them with people's lives, you can trust them with their own hours.

This isn't about whether work gets done. It gets done.

This is about power.

It's about who gets to call the shots – and who gets pushed around.

And we won't stand by while workers – especially women, single mums, carers – get punished for needing balance in their lives.

This is about respect. This is about dignity. This is about fairness.

And it's about people like Jane – the kind of worker our movement exists to defend.

Jane is at home listening to this speech today with her kids.

And I want her to know this:

We are changing the rules – not just for you, Jane, but for every working family in this state.

Delegates, I can announce something important here today...

My Labor Government will make working from home a right.

Not a request.

We will enshrine it in law.

If you can reasonably do your job from home, you will have the right to do so for at least two days a week.

Public or private.

Delegates, I know not everyone can work from home, but I really believe that everyone can benefit.

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Because when we give workers back their time – to be parents, to be carers, to simply live –

We create a fairer Victoria for everyone.

But make no mistake –

There are plenty of bosses who will fight us on this. I'm sure of it.

Bosses who cling to outdated ways of working because they don't want to give up control.

Bosses who think being seen at a desk is more important than a parent getting home for dinner with their kids.

If they want to look their workers in the eye and tell them their time with their families doesn't count...

...they know where my Government stands.

If that's a fight they want – they'll get it.

Workers are simply asking to keep what they've already proven works –

For them, their families, and even their employers.

And plenty of businesses across our nation have already embraced it.

They know flexibility doesn't weaken a workplace – it strengthens it.

They're proud of it. Look on Seek – they advertise it.

But some take a different view.

Every time working people win a bit of progress, the same old voices try to say the sky will fall.

They said it when you fought for parental leave.

They said it when you demanded safer workplaces.

They even said it when your unions won the eight-hour day.

But they were wrong then – and they're wrong now.

Everything workers have gained, workers have had to fight for.

Labor has always stood firm – holding on to the changes that make life fairer and better.

Now we'll do it again.

To give Victorians like Jane time back with their kids...

...more dignity, more fairness, and a better life.

Delegates, I make you this promise.

As Premier, I'll always fight for people like Jane.

I'll always fight for workers like you and your hard-earned gains.

And I'll make sure that no boss, no boardroom, and no Liberal ever takes them away.

Today, I want you to make me a promise too:

That you won't leave here just thinking about politics.

I also want you to think about people.

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About the families wondering if they can pay the next bill.

About the young person who just wants a home of their own.

About everyone who simply wants a bit more time, a bit more opportunity, and a bit more help.

They are why we do this. They are why we're here.

The next 483 days won't be easy.

We've got a fight on our hands.

A fight for what we've built.

A fight for the people who rely on us.

A fight for the future of this state.

But let me tell you – it's a fight we will win.

Because our cause is just.

Our record is strong.

Our vision for the future is clear.

And our movement – this movement – is unstoppable when it remembers who it's fighting for.

So let's remember it, every day between now and November next year.

At every doorknock and on every phone call.

Around every kitchen table, every tea-room, every toolbox.

Because we know what's at stake.

It's the schools and hospitals we've built.

The TAFEs and trainlines we've reopened.

The nurses and teachers we've employed.

The tens of thousands of jobs we've created.

And the trust of the people who are counting on us.

Our message to working people is clear:

In a changing world.

In a changing economy.

You deserve good jobs, good services and a good, secure life.

You're on your own under the Liberals.

But Labor is on your side.

Thank you, Delegates.