



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 17 March 2026**



## **Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

### **60th Parliament**

#### **Speaker**

Maree Edwards

#### **Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

#### **Acting Speakers**

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

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

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

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

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

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

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024 to 18 November 2025)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024 to 28 January 2026)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

#### **Leader of the Nationals**

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

#### **Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

#### **Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

#### **Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025 to 13 October 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

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

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John <sup>8</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim <sup>9</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Cleland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan <sup>10</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam <sup>5</sup>	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam <sup>6,7</sup>	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>11</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel <sup>12</sup>	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 13 February 2026

<sup>6</sup> Greens until 1 November 2024

<sup>7</sup> Resigned 23 November 2024

<sup>8</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

<sup>9</sup> Resigned 6 January 2025

<sup>10</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>11</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

<sup>12</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

**Party abbreviations**

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

# CONTENTS

---

MEMBERS	
Member for Nepean .....	877
Resignation.....	877
BILLS	
Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026.....	877
Introduction and first reading .....	877
Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026.....	877
Introduction and first reading .....	877
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion and orders of the day .....	878
PETITIONS	
Knife crime.....	878
COMMITTEES	
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee .....	878
Alert Digest No. 4.....	878
DOCUMENTS	
Documents .....	879
BILLS	
Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025.....	880
Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025 .....	880
Crimes Amendment Bill 2026 .....	880
Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026.....	880
Royal assent .....	880
Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026.....	880
Appropriation.....	880
MOTIONS	
Motions by leave .....	880
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Program .....	880
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
<i>New Girl in School</i> .....	886
In One Voice.....	887
Community food relief.....	887
Ciara Allen .....	887
Cairnlea Park Primary School.....	887
St Albans electorate small business support .....	887
Commonwealth Games.....	887
Stony Creek Racing Club .....	888
Hastings electorate tennis clubs .....	888
Ehlers–Danlos syndrome.....	888
Police resources .....	888
Melton electorate transport infrastructure .....	889
Community safety .....	889
Waverley RSL .....	889
St Patrick’s Day .....	890
Black Dog Ride .....	890
Ovens Valley electorate housing.....	890
Commonwealth Games.....	890
Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre.....	890
St Patrick’s Day .....	891
Malvern Cricket Club.....	891
Anne-Marie Mason and Natalie Roberts .....	891
Armstrong Creek Sports Centre.....	891
Malcolm McCann.....	892
ResearchED Ballarat .....	892
Hawthorn electorate student leaders.....	892
Avalon Airport bus services .....	893
Fuel supply and prices.....	893
Ramadan.....	893
Donnybrook Road upgrade .....	893
Kala Primary School .....	894
St Mary’s Tennis Club, Greensborough.....	894

# CONTENTS

---

Holi Festival of Colours .....	894
Ramadan .....	894
BILLS	
Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 .....	895
Second reading .....	895
MEMBERS	
Minister for Emergency Services .....	899
Absence .....	899
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Construction industry .....	899
Ministers statements: fuel supply and prices .....	900
Construction industry .....	900
Ministers statements: energy policy .....	901
Construction industry .....	901
Ministers statements: Get Active Kids voucher program .....	902
Public transport .....	903
Ministers statements: cost of living .....	904
Fuel supply and prices .....	904
Ministers statements: fuel supply and prices .....	905
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Eildon electorate .....	906
Narre Warren South electorate .....	906
Euroa electorate .....	906
Pascoe Vale electorate .....	906
Brighton electorate .....	907
Glen Waverley electorate .....	907
Sandringham electorate .....	907
Laverton electorate .....	908
Warrandyte electorate .....	908
Box Hill electorate .....	908
BILLS	
Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 .....	909
Second reading .....	909
MOTIONS	
TAFE funding .....	946
ADJOURNMENT	
Comeng trains .....	955
Filipino community .....	955
Mooroopna police station .....	956
Geelong bus services .....	956
Housing .....	957
Monash Medical Centre .....	957
Government performance .....	958
Broadmeadows electorate ministerial visit .....	959
Narracan electorate ministerial visit .....	959
Point Cook Homestead .....	959
Responses .....	960

**Tuesday 17 March 2026**

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

*Members*

**Member for Nepean**

*Resignation*

**The SPEAKER (12:05):** I wish to announce that on 13 March 2026 I issued a writ for a by-election for the electoral district of Nepean to be held on 2 May 2026.

*Bills*

**Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:06):** I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to repeal the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 and abolish Cladding Safety Victoria, to make related amendments to the Building Act 1993 including in relation to the building permit levy, to consequentially amend the Public Administration Act 2004 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:06):** I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:06):** Cladding Safety Victoria was established in 2019 to rectify or make safe buildings with flammable cladding. The Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 marks the successful completion of Victoria's world-leading achievements in protecting apartment residents from combustible cladding.

**Read first time.**

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

**Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:07):** I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to re-enact with amendments the law relating to the regulation of the building and plumbing industries, the enforcement of building and plumbing work standards and the discipline of building practitioners, plumbers and endorsed building engineers, to impose a levy in relation to building work requiring a building permit, to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:08):** I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:08):** The Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 is a new principal act for the building system which formally unifies the Building and Plumbing Commission and gives it tough new powers to weed out dodgy builders. The bill also builds consumer

trust in the regulator by setting out clear governance rules and transparency measures at both the BPC and the department.

**Read first time.**

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

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion and orders of the day**

**Notice given.**

**The SPEAKER** (12:09): General business, notices of motion 22 to 23 and 69 to 73 and orders of the day 4 to 6, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

### *Petitions*

#### **Knife crime**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) presented a petition bearing 406 signatures:

##### **Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that the Queensland Government has introduced Jack's Law in response to rising knife crime, and that Victoria is also seeing a massive increase in knife-related offences, with many involving young people and occurring in public spaces.

Named after 17-year-old Jack Beasley, who was tragically killed in an unprovoked knife attack, Jack's Law is already saving lives in Queensland. In its first 12 months, Queensland police conducted over 5,200 wandering operations, seized more than 400 weapons, and laid 250+ charges for weapons offences. It's a proven, practical tool that helps police stop violence before it happens.

In the last twelve months there were more 11,000 edged weapons seized by Victoria Police and over 11,000 offences committed with a prohibited or controlled weapon (which includes knives) committed in Victoria.

By introducing Jack's Law in Victoria, we can:

- Empower police with preventative search powers (wandering)
- Deter people from carrying knives in public
- Save lives and prevent further heartbreak

Queensland acted. It's time Victoria did too.

##### **Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Victorian Government to urgently introduce Jack's Law as a crucial step in giving police the power to proactively prevent knife violence through the use of handheld metal detectors (wandering) in designated high-risk public areas.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### *Committees*

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

##### *Alert Digest No. 4*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:10): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 4 of 2026, on the following acts and bills, together with their appendices:

Crimes Amendment Act 2026

Electoral Amendment Bill 2025

Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Act 2026 – house amendments

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026  
Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026  
Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2025.

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

*Financial Management Act 1994 – 2025–26 Mid-Year Financial Report incorporating the Quarterly Financial Report No 2* – released on 6 March 2026

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

Benalla – C45  
Cardinia – C271, C285  
Casey – C296  
East Gippsland – C171  
Glen Eira – C269  
Greater Dandenong – C250  
Greater Geelong – C483  
Greater Shepparton – C250  
Kingston – C227  
Knox – C194  
Latrobe – C153  
Melbourne – GC287  
Moorabool – C108  
Mornington Peninsula – C243  
Mount Alexander – C101  
Nillumbik – C143 Part 1  
Northern Grampians – C64  
Pyrenees – C50  
Stonnington – C339 Part 1  
Wellington – C130  
Wyndham – C282  
Yarra – GC287

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – SR 15

*Trustee Companies Act 1984* – SR 16

*Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983* – SR 14

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 14, 15.

**PROCLAMATIONS** – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

*Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Act 2025* – Remaining provisions – 15 April 2026 (*Gazette S134, 11 March 2026*)

*Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2025* – Part 4 – 16 March 2026 (*Gazette S134, 11 March 2026*).

*Bills***Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025****Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025****Crimes Amendment Bill 2026****Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026***Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:11): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025, the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025, the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026 and the Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026.

**Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026***Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (12:12): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026.

*Motions***Motions by leave**

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

That this house notes that since the United States and Israel began attacking Lebanon and Iran earlier this year at least 2300 people have been killed and another 20,000 injured by their attacks and that Victoria produces weapons that are being used in Israeli and US aggression and commits to ensuring that no weapons components that are manufactured in Victoria are exported to fuel US–Israeli aggression and urges the state government to call on their federal counterparts to open humanitarian pathways for refugees from Iran and Lebanon.

**Leave refused.**

*Business of the house***Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (12:13): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 19 March 2026:

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026

Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026.

It is excellent to be back in the Parliament. I must say I am looking forward to universal support for this week's government business program, on the basis that it is all about reforming the regulatory environment that we have here in Victoria, ensuring that we are, where appropriate, streamlining reform, removing regulatory burden and making it easier for a range of businesses to get on and do their work here in the state of Victoria.

I might first speak to the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. This is reform that was committed to by our government in the *Economic Growth Statement* in 2024, and it will make Victorians safer and it will ensure that it is easier to do business here in Victoria. Obviously as Minister for Health I have a real interest in this bill, and I want to thank my colleague the Minister for Agriculture for the work that she has done in bringing the bill to this place. Maintaining food safety at all times is a very big and significant role and responsibility held by our government and regulatory authorities, and it is always

important that we get the balance right, ensuring that we have safe food at all times but that we have a regulatory environment that is fit for purpose and does not present an unintended drag on business.

It is also important to note of course that the nature of risks in the food environment changes all the time, and so we need to be conscious of the need to be responsive to this new food environment. The need for change and the absolute requirement to safeguard the health of Victorians is at the forefront at all times, as is the world-class reputation of our agriculture sector. This bill is about ensuring that our agriculture producers have a regulatory environment that is not overly complex but is, as I have said, one that makes it easier for them to do business, because right now there are four Victorian acts – two responsible ministers – regulated by the Department of Health, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and 79 local councils. It will be really interesting to hear diverse viewpoints in this chamber. I know that there are people who have experience as farmers and people who have experience in the hospitality industry and as greengrocers and so on – and that is just on our side of the chamber – so I do look forward to hearing the diverse views. Of course as Minister for Health I will have some things to say on it as well.

The Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 is a bill that we bring in every year. It supports effective and efficient regulation, promotes greater clarity and consistency with existing legislation and policies, streamlines processes and reduces administrative burden. We are always looking to do that. It supports our Business Acceleration Fund and is backed with almost \$40 million in funding. The reforms that this bill seeks to deliver are expected to deliver around \$250 million in annual benefits by reducing red tape. As I said, these two bills should receive the support of everyone in this chamber.

In an election year it is really important that we use time in this place to outline the different positions of the different parties in relation to the matters that are at the forefront of the minds of the Victorian people when it comes to choosing who should govern them. That is why I am delighted that there will be time in the agenda to continue the debate on our TAFE motion – which due to popular demand is back on; we will be debating that motion further in the chamber, Manager of Opposition Business – and I expect we will have another motion, which we look forward to debating too. We will give those on the other side an opportunity to tell us about their housing policy.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:18): I rise to speak on the government business program, and the coalition will be opposing the government business program. For the parliamentary weeks this year we have done a little bit of a dance in this chamber on the government business program. Each week we have done a little bit of a dance, where the government have said they have a program and have said they have legislation that Victorians should feel is important and that this Parliament would debate it, and then we have got part of the way through the week and the government have stopped debating their motions and have gone to random sledge attacks on the opposition. Of course they have. Each week we have played this little game where I have called out, on the government business program, the fact that the government would be doing this. The government has denied it, and then halfway through the week that is where we have got. The government has wasted this Parliament's time with debates, often procedural, of waste-of-time sledge substance. The Leader of the House is hoping that I engage in procedural debate this week. I take up the opportunity and always stand ready to speak to a procedural debate, as you would know, Speaker. So each week we have played this silly little game, and the government has then wasted the Parliament's time with political sledge motions. I have to pay the Leader of the House a compliment.

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** Yes, I know. Everyone get ready. The Leader of the House has admitted on day one of the parliamentary week that she is going to be wasting the Parliament's time this week. You have to give the Leader of the House a compliment in saying that two sledge motions are going to be debated this week and that the government is going to waste the Parliament's time doing that –

as they said, because it is an election year. I mean, how much more raw, straight politics can you get that the –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a –

**James NEWBURY:** I am speaking to what you spoke about.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Brighton, when someone stands to raise a point of order it is not appropriate to interject.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member on his feet is required to be truthful in all that he says, and he is misrepresenting my contribution.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order.

**James NEWBURY:** I am speaking directly to the substance of what the Leader of the House spoke to in her contribution, and that was that the government agreed and revealed to Victorians that for multiple occasions this week the Parliament would not be debating legislation and would be debating political sledge motions – no surprise there. So, as I said, we call out the fact that the government is doing this. What a disgrace it is.

The one thing that the Leader of the House did not note is that during this parliamentary week what I suspect and hope is that a private members bill that is being considered in the Council will pass and be brought back to this chamber. I hope there is a very long debate about increasing IBAC's powers. I hope that the Council passes that bill this week, and I look forward to looking in the eyes of the members on the other side of the chamber as we vote on that bill, if it passes. There will be two types: there will be the type that do not want IBAC to have new powers, and there will be members who do it because they have to. We on this side of the chamber, I can assure you, are going to be speaking very strongly to it.

Back on the government business program, we are concerned by the way the government is being political. I know that in only a handful of weeks time this government will stand up on the government business program and say they do not have enough time to pass all the legislation. That is what they will be saying in a few weeks time. Yet they are wasting weeks and weeks of this Parliament's time on dirty little sledges – and Victorians can see it. Victorians can see that these are just nothing short of political sledges. It is a waste of the Parliament's time. We will not support a government business program when we know – and the Leader of the House has flagged – that is her intention. It is a shame. It does not stand this Parliament in the stead that it deserves to be and in the historical standing that it has for the government to be playing games in the way it is in this chamber, so we will oppose the program.

**Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (12:23):** I rise to speak on the government business program. The member for Brighton's contribution there just referred to silly little games that we are playing in terms of motions. I had the absolute pleasure of speaking to the free TAFE motion just last sitting week, and I noted in my contribution that this is all about the people that we represent and the people that have had their lives changed through free TAFE. I was able to share a speech made by a wonderful TAFE teacher at the Fed Uni TAFE excellence awards. I bring this up because I know that many on this side have just such stories about lives that have been changed through free TAFE and what an incredibly important program it is. For the member for Brighton to refer to it as a political sledge really starts to make me wonder. I mean, I did note in the past that the only time that the Leader of the Opposition has mentioned free TAFE was to refer to it as a waste of money, so perhaps in the member for Brighton's contribution he is categorising free TAFE as a political wedge. I guess what he is saying here is that there is no support from those on the other side for free TAFE, and perhaps that is why they are opposing today's government business program, because they do not want to discuss what is such an important part of our education system. I am really surprised to hear that free TAFE is nothing but a silly little game to those on the other side.

I am really looking forward to the debates in the house as well, and I will be absolutely delighted to speak on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. I would like to acknowledge the wonderful Minister for Agriculture, as well as of course our wonderful Minister for Health. They have worked very closely to bring this bill here to Parliament. It is such an important bill, as the Minister for Health said in her contribution, that there are many of us who want to speak about our experiences. Certainly, having come from a farming background, I know how important these regulations are but also how important it is to get that balance right for farmers, who obviously have a lot going on in their lives at the moment. A bill like this is incredibly important in its opportunity to get that balance right and to relieve some of the regulatory burden that is upon them.

I am somewhat amazed that the opposition are opposing basically a program around regulatory reform. I know that we have brought these pieces of legislation forward so that we can support the many small businesses, the many agricultural enterprises in our state, and I am amazed, to say the least, that those on the other side have said that they are going to oppose it. It is pretty shameful. I mean, I know agriculture makes up 25 per cent of Victoria's gross state product. It is an incredibly important part of both our economy and of course also just all our livelihoods and all that we eat. So we are trying to make it easier for farmers when at the moment there are a lot of headwinds; we have just been through a pretty awful period of drought, and I know that there is a great deal of concern in the agricultural industry as we look to what is happening overseas. So anything that the government can do to support our agricultural business has surely got to be supported by all sides of the house. I am somewhat amazed that those on the other side do not support this bill, which is really about supporting our farmers and supporting small business.

But in the moments that I have left, I do just want to reflect again on the comments from the member for Brighton in his contribution about silly little games. To refer in that way to a motion that celebrates free TAFE and all that it has brought for so many people in this state is just extraordinary. We also want to discuss housing. Have they got something to hide on the other side?

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (12:28): As the Manager of Opposition Business said, we will be opposing the government business program this week, namely because, as he said, two bills and two sledge motions are hardly an effective use of time – the Parliament's time and the taxpayers' time. Whilst we have heard a lot about free TAFE – and we do support the education, particularly in the regions, that TAFE offers – there is no such thing as free. We know that. Just like there is no such thing as government money; it is taxpayer money, and in this place, the people's house, we should be using it effectively. So the lack of a legislative agenda, with only two bills on the program this week, flies in the face of the effective use of time.

Last sitting week I drew attention to the incredible rainfall that happened in Mildura, and I did thank the SES for the incredible work that they did. It was remiss of me not to mention the CFA crews who were out assisting the SES and doing an amazing job, as they always do. We have seen this week that those CFA volunteers – working for free, using their fuel to get to jobs and often in stations paying through the nose for fuel – are getting slugged the emergency services tax for the pleasure. But this week you will be happy to know that the golf courses that I spoke about reopened, and I did also mention the Swing Society tournament that had been cancelled. That has been rescheduled to 26 April.

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM:** Swing Society is to do with golf. It is golf, let me be clear.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mildura, I bring you back to the government business program.

**Jade BENHAM:** Of course, Speaker, apologies. I was taking up an interjection from the other side just to clarify some things. The government business program this week allows my colleagues from the Nationals to speak on a plethora of issues, particularly through the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. There are 13 acts, I believe, being reformed in that, so that opens it up to a wideranging debate, obviously. There are a wideranging number of issues that need to be taken

up, particularly in the regions, and after last week, when the bill was rushed through for compulsory acquisition in renewable energy zones for renewable projects and transmission projects, that has escalated. Add to that the fuel crisis that no-one is talking about, and yet we have regional areas running dry of fuel. There are a number of things we would like to discuss.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, you already pulled the member up for straying wide from the government business program. I ask that you bring her back to the GBP.

**James Newbury:** On the point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the House spoke to a number of motions and other matters that would be debated in the house this week, which gives us every right to speak about the same.

**The SPEAKER:** I do not mind members varying from the government business program briefly, but I do ask you to speak to the government business program.

**Jade BENHAM:** In speaking to the government business program I am referring to the regulatory reform bill that is on the program today, which allows for quite a wideranging debate with regard to all sorts of reforms, particularly those that concern me and my colleagues in the Nationals, in regional and rural Victoria, who are hurting now, and it will only get worse.

I do want to state also that with the lack of legislative agenda from this government, with only two bills on the program and two sledge motions, would it not be a more useful use of time and taxpayer money to finish off the take-note motion on the budget? My poor colleague the member for Morwell – we have not finished that yet – feels like he has been gagged because he has not been able to speak on the budget. The member for Narracan has not been able to speak. He is also feeling like he has been gagged. We are counting down the days now until the next budget. Are we actually going to finish this take-note motion before the next budget? There is something we could put on the government business program, and in that case we might actually support the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (12:33):** It is always a pleasure to follow a statement from the member for Mildura. Whilst those opposite have been busy making cringey Instagram reels over the last few days, those on this side of the house have been concentrated on governing for all Victorians and bringing forward the reforms that matter most. I actually thought this may have been the week where the Victorian Nationals showed some gumption and voted in a different way to their coalition partners on this government business program, given its contents – both the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026, which is incredibly important to people all over Victoria, and specifically the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, which is so incredibly important to those primary producers that the Nationals claim to represent.

And whilst we are coming into this house with that incredibly important reform, we have got the member for Brighton standing up in front of the Nationals, calling this government business program a waste of time, a government business program that has in it reform that helps small businesses but also helps, incredibly, our primary producers. As the member for Eureka said, 25 per cent of Victoria's gross state product is made up of agriculture – 25 per cent of Victoria's GSP. This is reform that not only maintains and helps food security, which we know is an ongoing issue all over Australia and all over the world, but also helps Victorian businesses with a simpler regulatory framework. And those opposite, both the Liberals and the Nationals, want to come in here and call that a waste of time. They say that legislation is a waste of time.

I can tell you that I will be going back to my electorate, and I will be crossing the road to the member for Point Cook's electorate with him to talk to the primary producers in Werribee South, like the said family of Fresh Select, which supplies about 75 per cent of Victoria's lettuce and broccoli. If you eat lettuce and broccoli in Victoria and you get it from Coles, most likely it has come from Werribee South. You can bet your bottom dollar the member for Point Cook and I and the member for Werribee will be going to talk to those families to inform them that the Liberals and the Nationals think that a

simpler regulatory framework for their food safety and supporting their businesses is a waste of time. It will be an absolute pleasure for me to go and inform them of that, member for Morwell.

It is incredibly disappointing; I did come into the chamber this morning with high hopes that this would be the day that the Victorian Nationals showed some gumption and did the right thing by the people that they claim to represent. Unfortunately they have not had the intestinal fortitude to do so, which is incredibly disappointing.

It is a jam-packed government business program, as I said. The member for Brighton wants to have a laugh. Whilst those opposite want to talk down Victoria every single step of the way, we will get on with the reforms that help all Victorians. As I said, that food safety bill is incredibly important for Victorian business, particularly primary producers. Those opposite want to talk down Victoria. They want to say that Victoria is a bad place to do business in, but the stats just do not show that. The most recently released data from the ABS shows that private investment into Victoria in the year leading up to December 2025 was the second highest anywhere in the country, second only to South Australia. We know that it is that private investment that is fuelling Victoria's economic growth, which is also the highest anywhere in the country.

We have also got the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026, which makes a suite of changes to help refine and modernise Victoria's regulatory systems. I will not go into them all, but I am on the bill, so you can listen to me in about an hour. I commend the government business program to the house.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (12:38): I rise to oppose the government business program, as we have already noted in the house, and to correct the record from those opposite. I know they do not like the truth to get in the way of a good story on that side of the house; it is very true. But to twist the words of the members that are here fighting for their communities is abhorrent. It is not factual. We are here to talk about the fact that the government are wasting our time. The government are also wasting the Parliament's time, and they are also wasting taxpayers money. We know that; that is for sure. The reason that we are opposing the government business program today is because of this lack of legislative agenda. It is not for what is in the program this week, but it is for what is not in it. There is an abundance of things that are not in the government business program that we ought to be talking about today that are so imperative and that are also so important to Victorians, and that they care about.

The government is here time after time and week after week talking about how they want to sledge the opposition and they want to use time in the Parliament to sledge the opposition. They think that is a good use of time, they think that is a good use of taxpayers money, they think it is a good use of the Parliament's time, and that to us is a joke. It is a joke that week after week for the entire parliamentary sitting year they have, again and again, moved motion after sledge motion against the opposition when we are here to legislate, when we are here to fight for our communities and when we are here to stand up for Victorians – here we are – and this is why we are opposing the government business program; it is so very lacking.

Not to mention that but, as the Manager of Opposition Business said, the next thing on the agenda, as noted today, is a motion to commend themselves. The next thing on the agenda is the Allan Labor government dislocating their arm to pat themselves on the back – well done and good job to themselves – when the truth of the matter with housing is that they are failing again and again. We are here with the number of new homes built last year at the lowest level since 2014. That is ridiculous. And they are missing their targets year upon year upon year. They are well behind on their targets and not doing anything. In fact research is now showing that 62 per cent of Victorians – an overwhelming majority – do not trust the government to make the right policy moves to improve housing affordability. That is the truth of what is going on.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member on her feet will have ample opportunity to make these points in the appropriate debate, but right now I ask you to bring her back

to the government business program. I note that, with more than half of her time expired, she has not yet mentioned either of the bills on the program.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Warrandyte will come back to the government business program.

**Nicole WERNER:** Again, we are opposing the government business program, as we said, not for what is in it but for what is not in the government business program. The Leader of the House has been sitting here this whole time. We have made this point very articulately, speaker after speaker, to say that the legislative agenda is lacking, that we are here to fight for Victorians and that we are here to legislate in this house, not to sledge each another time and time again. This is why we are here, so that is why we are opposing the government business program. It is clear for all to see. There is an abundance of things that should be in the government business program but that it is lacking. We could be talking about the Commonwealth Games that were meant to have started today. We could be talking about the breaking news that the Premier had been warned and knew about CFMEU corruption. There is an abundance –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, again, the member on her feet will have an opportunity in the house, apparently in motions that she opposes, to debate some of the issues she is raising.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the House, what is your point of order?

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Relevance.

**The SPEAKER:** Come back to the government program.

**Nicole WERNER:** Those opposite want to run down the clock so they gag me from speaking. Here I am. We oppose the government business program.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (50):* Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements*

*New Girl in School*

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:49): It was a pleasure yesterday to be part of a book launch for Rebecca Seidner and her book *New Girl in School*. Rebecca grew up with cerebral palsy in the 1980s and was, as her mother has described, one of the most disabled children to go to a mainstream school. She has now written this book about her experiences. I encourage all libraries to share it, and I am actually going to ask the library here in the Parliament to also share that very important book. Thank you, Rebecca, for writing that.

### **In One Voice**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:50): In One Voice is a fantastic festival, and I wanted to give a big shout-out particularly to those who are part of it. I know the Minister for Health is at the table today. It is all things Jewish, particularly at a time of difficulty for many suffering the antisemitism in the last period. I want to particularly thank the Jewish Arts Quarter, which is hopefully where we want to be able to have an ongoing facility. The Australian Jewish Genealogical Society were present, with Habonim Dror, Netzer Australia, the United Jewish Education Board Victoria, the Diller Teen Fellows, Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Jewish Care, Jewish Professional Women's Network, J-AIR and so many other different stands. It was great to visit all of them.

### **Community food relief**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:50): In a cost-of-living crisis I think it is important to point out those that are really struggling, and particularly the likes of Dani Markovic, who runs CISVic Glen Eira, which provides valuable support and meals for people. While I am on the topic of meals, C Care, Shlomo Nathanson, has got his launch of his new facility and a pantry for people. And FoodFilled's Rob Miller is launching his new program as well. Thank you to all of you.

### **Ciara Allen**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (12:51): I rise to congratulate Ciara Allen from Victoria University Secondary College in St Albans, who received the Hansen Scholarship from the University of Melbourne. I am really proud of the achievements of our young people in St Albans. That is why we are investing in education in the west, upgrading local schools, bringing back our school breakfast club programs and so much more. We know that when we support kids early, they are able to reach their potential. We are ensuring our kids get the best start in life.

### **Cairnlea Park Primary School**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (12:51): On another matter, it was great to see the new CCTV system installed at Cairnlea Park Primary School. We have funded over \$60,000 to ensure this project was delivered.

### **St Albans electorate small business support**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (12:51): On another matter, I am delighted to have announced funding of almost \$400,000 for the St Albans business precinct, a very special place where culture and business come together. With over 18,000 small businesses in Brimbank, they truly are the backbone of our local communities, supporting local jobs and supporting local families. That is what the businesses do in our community.

### **Commonwealth Games**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:52): Today should have been a good day for regional Victoria. We should have been opening the first ever regionally based Commonwealth Games, showcasing our beautiful regions to the world. But instead Victorians and regional Victorians in particular were duped, misled by the Labor government before the 2022 election and let down by a broken Labor promise after the election. A parliamentary inquiry, the Auditor-General and multiple other groups and agencies have called out the duplicity, the incompetence and the mismanagement of the Labor government over the botched games process and still no-one has taken responsibility. No-one has apologised for the \$600 million cost to taxpayers and how \$200 million of Victorian taxpayers money is now going to pay Glasgow to host the games on the other side of the world. Not only that but remember the promises made to regional Victoria when the games were cancelled, with housing in the

Latrobe Valley, Geelong and Ballarat and a sports facility for Miners Rest still not delivered. Regional Victoria was duded by Labor and today this government should be hanging their heads in shame.

#### **Stony Creek Racing Club**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:53): It is party season in South Gippsland and a great day was had by all at the Stony Creek Cup last weekend, with a great crowd watching Station One claim the cup. It was good to see the numbers there for the club after heatwave conditions for the past two years and two meetings washed out last season. Well done to president John Shuijers, CEO Jason Benbow and all those involved for a great season. We have also recently had fantastic turnouts to the Foster and Korumburra shows and the South Gippsland Garlic Festival. It is all happening in Gippsland South electorate this autumn.

#### **Hastings electorate tennis clubs**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (12:53): The lights are on in my electorate for the tennis clubs, and I am very excited to say so thanks to the Allan Labor government and the Minister for Community Sport. The Somerville Tennis Club lights were turned on before Christmas so they can train again. Two weeks ago we went to the Tyabb Tennis Club and turned the lights on there so they can now start training at night and grow their membership base, which is very exciting. Hastings Tennis Club lights were turned on last year, but this year we have courts 5 and 6 which are being repaired. They have not been played on for 10 years, so they are looking forward to getting the courts up and running prior to Christmas.

#### **Ehlers–Danlos syndrome**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (12:54): On another matter, I did a post on my Facebook page on 18 February about connective tissue disorder and hypermobile Ehlers–Danlos syndrome. I want to thank sincerely the women that actually got on and made comments. Over 360 people made comment on that post. They told me about their journey of having connective tissue disorder – the pain and the suffering that they go through and the despair they feel. I want to thank members in this chamber that actually got on and read those comments, and I would urge everyone that has not done so to please do – and those on the other side. Connective tissue disorder is far more prevalent than we think and the more we read these stories, the more we understand the pain and we can help these people get through it.

#### **Police resources**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (12:55): Again I am back in here talking about crime and crime out in Clyde North. We have seen yet again – it was on the news last week – where families have had to run around and chase people with machetes in the street. I know the Minister for Health thinks it is a joke, but the reality is that families are being terrorised by machetes in Clyde North, in the Orana estate. When they are trying to call the police, their challenge is that they have got a brand new police station with no police officers. But what is even more scary – I am sure the member for Cranbourne will be interested in this – is now the government are looking at a way that they can cover this up and not put police in Clyde North but literally just move one van from Cranbourne across to Clyde North, reducing the response in Cranbourne. Now the government are going into a position they are willing to put the community of Cranbourne at risk to cover a problem that they have got in Clyde North, but if the police are needed in Cranbourne, they have to go back to Cranbourne and leave Clyde North without police again. It is starting to get a bit confusing. There is an answer, though. It is quite simple. If the government go through the process of ensuring they can get the people who are on the waiting list to become police officers here in Victoria, we can fill the seats in the vans and we can keep the communities safe. It is about time Jacinta Allan and the Labor government understand the impact of crime on each and every Victorian across this state.

### **Melton electorate transport infrastructure**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (12:56): The Allan Labor government has been removing Victoria's level crossings for more than 10 years now. Those opposite never thought we would be able to do the mountain of work right across the state. From metro lines to V/Line lines we have removed 88 level crossings and counting, and soon the Melton line will add four more to that growing number of level crossings removed. The Melton level crossing removals and brand new station builds are moving ahead of schedule. All will be officially open and operational this year. Over the summer break we saw a 14-day construction blitz to upgrade the rail infrastructure along the Tarneit and Melton lines, and just two weeks ago I visited the Ferris Road bridge and stood right along the top and looked at the realignment of the road. It has been a fantastic effort by all the construction workers and the Level Crossing Removal Project.

Just last week the member for Sunbury and I visited the new Melton station and witnessed a six-lift shaft installed to form an essential part of the new Melton station – all-accessible platforms. These lifts will provide direct access to all four platforms, and they are each big enough to fit mobility scooters, wheelchairs and prams. Alongside the lifts, there will be stairs that will also provide access to all four platforms. These four platforms have been designed to allow for greater capacity trains along the Melton line. We will see huge nine-carriage VLocity trains running on the Melton line in 2027, one year ahead of schedule. This also allows for futureproofing for electrification. The best view of the works happening around the clock on the Melton line is from the train line itself. When you are next on your train to or from home, have a look out the window to see the Melton station and level crossings transform before your eyes. I am looking forward to heading back out there.

### **Community safety**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (12:58): The spike in machete and knife crime across Victoria is distressing: multiple machete attacks every week. In Mooroolbark just last week a 64-year-old Croydon man was slashed by a gang of teenagers; 22-year-old Aidan Becker, a hero stepping in to help a teenage boy from being robbed in Mernda, was hunted down and brutally murdered by a gang of youth thugs, killed with a machete – he had his whole life ahead of him, and I extend my deepest sympathies to his family and friends. My sympathies to all victims of crime. This is not the Victoria that I love, that I grew up in, but a Victoria under this government where there is more protection for the youth offender than for victims.

Victoria is gripped with a crime crisis due to a failure of leadership after the Allan Labor government weakened bail laws, cut police funding and is closing police stations. Labor has delayed bail laws to deal with violent youth offenders. Labor's machete bins stunt did stuff-all – a total disgrace and a waste. I am angry. People in my community are angry; they are scared. Violent crimes are happening on our streets and in our homes, a shameful legacy of Premier Allan and Labor. Her words are hollow, because she is failing to keep our communities safe, to keep Victorians safe. It is time to change and to introduce Jack's law, which would give police powers to seize knives and machetes from gangs before they commit crimes – and if you break bail, you face jail. Let us change Victoria and put community safety first.

### **Waverley RSL**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (12:59): I rise today with sadness to acknowledge the devastating fire that destroyed the Waverley RSL. The Waverley RSL celebrated its 75th anniversary last year. It has been a place for remembrance, for community and of care for the men and women who have served our country. Generations of veterans, families and local residents have gathered there to honour sacrifice, share stories and support one another. To see such an important community institution lost to fire has been deeply distressing across our community, but if there is one thing we know about the Waverley RSL, it is resilient. I know our community will rally behind the Waverley RSL as it rebuilds and continues its vital work supporting veterans and keeping the spirit of remembrance alive.

### St Patrick's Day

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (13:00): Là Fhèile Pàdraig sona duit. On another matter, I want to recognise the important milestone this year of 80 years of diplomatic relations between Australia and Ireland. The ties between our two nations run deep, shaped by generations of Irish migrants who helped build modern Victoria and who continue to enrich our cultural, social and political life. Céad míle fáilte to Ireland's first female ambassador to Australia, Her Excellency Fiona Flood – possibly a relative of mine – and newly appointed Ireland's Consul-General for Victoria and Tasmania Ms Marie-Claire Hughes, who has hit the ground running, opening a consulate right here in the heart of Melbourne. I thank Irish Australian Chamber of Commerce president Jeff Doyle and his team for bringing together Victoria's large Irish diaspora to celebrate the contributions Irish Australian businesses make to our state. I also congratulate Celtic Club president Professor Ronan McDonald and his team for the important role they play in bringing the Victorian Irish community together.

### Black Dog Ride

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (13:01): I want to thank all those who joined me in support of the Wangaratta Black Dog Ride on Sunday. Supporting men's mental health, depression and suicide is something we all need to do. Reaching out to a mate who you have not heard from for a while can be a phone call or a text that saves a life. The bikes included Harleys, ag-bikes, club bikes, Jap bikes, Indians and everything else in between. It was a sight to see. The only downside was when a rider came off on the dangerous Kiewa Valley Highway. The road is an absolute disgrace, and the Victorian government should hang its head in shame for allowing such an appalling failure of basic road maintenance. We do not need tunnels in regional Victoria and we do not need the pity; we just want our roads fixed. Thankfully the rider survived the crash with non-life-threatening injuries. Labor need to do the right thing, and if they cannot manage regional roads, find someone who can.

### Ovens Valley electorate housing

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (13:02): I met with some young people from North East Support and Action for Youth Wangaratta last week to discuss the shortage of available rental homes. The stories about the lack of safe housing options can be quite confronting. The Victorian Labor government needs to pause the tunnels for a while and build public housing so people in regional Victoria have a chance to rent a house. We are currently told a five-year wait is on offer from Beyond Housing for accommodation in Wangaratta. This is a failure of the Allan Labor government's leadership.

### Commonwealth Games

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (13:02): Today is the day Victoria should have been showcasing the Commonwealth Games. Instead we have a \$600 million bill and no new infrastructure in regional cities. This really was a con, and all Victorians are paying the price. The Allan Labor government has mismanaged your money, and we keep paying the bill for Labor's failure to manage money.

### Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (13:02): Last week I attended the celebration of the completion of major construction works on the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre. It is a landmark addition to our beautiful city and it looks incredible, with views to our north-facing bay. It has been impressive to see these buildings taking shape over the last couple of years. Geelong is very excited to see the precinct open later this year.

Nyaal Banyul includes a 1000-seat theatre, exhibition spaces, meeting rooms, conference facilities, flexible event spaces, food and beverage areas and the public Gheringhap Plaza. Next door the Crowne Plaza Hotel, delivered by the Plenary Group, is already open, providing the perfect location for visitors to Geelong and soon those attending events at Nyaal Banyul. The design recognises and celebrates the Wadawurrung people, traditional owners who collaborated on this project from the outset and selected

its name, Nyaal Banyul, meaning ‘open your eyes to the hills’. Nyaal Banyul is the first convention centre in Australia designed from inception with traditional owners. I acknowledge the tireless work and commitment of Wadawurrung woman Corrina Eccles. Her sharing of culture is demonstrated throughout the building for all to learn from.

During the major construction works the project created more than 1400 jobs – that is 1400 people who have directly benefited from the project. It has given unbeatable on-the-job experience to 250 apprentices in trades. Importantly, 40 aspiring tradespeople – *(Time expired)*

#### **St Patrick’s Day**

**Michael O’BRIEN** (Malvern) (13:04): Today is St Patrick’s Day, the national day of Ireland, honouring the patron saint of Ireland. As a proud Dubliner I am reminded of the extraordinary contribution that the Irish nation has made to our state and to our country: politics, the law, medicine, education, the arts, business and sport have all been enhanced by Irish immigrants to this land. As co-chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Ireland, I was pleased to join the Celtic Club with a number of parliamentary colleagues for a very well-attended St Patrick’s breakfast at Federation Square on Friday. Congratulations to Celtic Club president Ronan McDonald for a great event and a thoughtful address on the history of the club and its contribution to our city since 1887.

I was delighted to then join the Irish Australian Chamber of Commerce for the annual St Patrick’s lunch at Crown, arranged by the chamber’s new CEO Alan Glover, who took over from my fellow Celtic supporter Barry Corr. A packed-out Palladium was in the sure hands of the great Dermott Brereton as MC, while guests heard from the chamber’s outstanding president Jeff Doyle and the impressive new Irish consul general to Melbourne Ms Marie-Claire Hughes. St Patrick’s Day is a day to celebrate Ireland and the Irish, so on my final St Patrick’s Day as a member of this place, may I wish you all slán agus beannacht – goodbye and blessing.

#### **Malvern Cricket Club**

**Michael O’BRIEN** (Malvern) (13:05): I would also like to congratulate the Malvern Cricket Club first XI for their win in the final against Elsternwick last weekend and wish them well in their next final against Prahran this weekend. As we say in the Malvern Cricket Club, up the mighty red rooster.

#### **Anne-Marie Mason and Natalie Roberts**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham) (13:05): I rise to celebrate two extraordinary women in the north-west who have contributed so much to local community sport.

Firstly, Anne-Marie Mason has for the past 15 years taken on various leadership roles at the Hillside Sharks Football Club: team photographer, team manager and team treasurer. In 2017 she organised the first ladies round and produced the first ladies-themed jumper to support the Breast Cancer Network Australia and raise awareness of violence against women. She also led the first Indigenous round in 2022 and the first Pride round in 2023. She has made remarkable change to the club. She was also awarded life membership in 2024. She has mentored so many young men and women at the club, and I know that they will really miss her as she steps away from her roles. I want to say a huge thankyou for the many, many hours that she has put into the club.

The other woman I want to celebrate is Natalie Roberts, who has been a coach of gymnastics for 40 years – what a remarkable and outstanding achievement. In that time she has coached state teams and national champions and she has travelled overseas and interstate with her teams. She has even coached her own daughter and no doubt will coach her own granddaughter soon. Congrats, Nat, on an incredible 40 years. So proud to call you my friend. Best of luck at Niddrie Gymnastics.

#### **Armstrong Creek Sports Centre**

**Darren CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (13:07): The South Barwon community is one of the fastest growing anywhere across Australia, particularly of course the suburbs of Charlemont,

Armstrong Creek and Mount Duneed. It has been pleasing to see over the last three years all three levels of government come together to fund new basketball and netball facilities for this fast-growing community. The Armstrong Creek, Mount Duneed and Charlemont communities love their sport, and this will be a fantastic and welcome addition to that community. I look forward to seeing those facilities completed through the course of the rest of this year, and I very much look forward to hearing stories of how families utilise this facility into the future. It is very pleasing to see all three levels of government work together with the local community to deliver these much-needed additional sporting facilities for my community.

#### **Malcolm McCann**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (13:08): Congratulations to Malcolm McCann of the Sebastopol and District Lions Club, who has been recognised by the international president of Lions Club International with the milestone Chevron award, celebrating his remarkable 40 years of dedicated service. Malcolm's passion for Lions stems from opportunities to make a meaningful difference, from emergency relief to medical and cancer research, drug awareness programs and supporting children with disability. Malcolm and the volunteering he does at the Sebastopol Lions club is making a real impact. Malcolm is the definition of 'service'. He acts locally, thinks globally and gives generously. His commitment of over 40 years is an inspiration to all of us. Well done, Milky.

#### **ResearchED Ballarat**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (13:09): Congratulations to Dr Greg Ashman, principal Jen Bourke and the Clarendon team for hosting the exceptional researchED conference at Ballarat Clarendon College on the weekend, which brought together more than 700 educators from across Australia and New Zealand. ResearchED continues to set the benchmark for evidence-informed professional learning. It was a day full of practical, research-driven insights for teachers who are committed to strengthening their practice and improving learning outcomes for their students. A particular highlight for me was hearing from UK educator and writer David Didau, whose presentation explored the importance of assessing student attention, sampling every student in every lesson and understanding that errors are valuable information. I am proud that Ballarat is becoming a national beacon for evidence-based research education.

#### **Hawthorn electorate student leaders**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (13:10): Last Friday I had the pleasure of hosting two of my annual Hawthorn student leadership forums, bringing together students from across our outstanding local schools. In the morning I welcomed primary school leaders from Auburn Primary, Bialik primary, Camberwell Primary, Hawthorn West Primary and St Joseph's primary. It was a joy to hear from Sophia, Joaquin, Poppy and Conor; Emily, Minnie, Onn Jax and Adam; Alex, Elsa, Annelies, Amelie, Grace, Oscar, Ella and Harvey; as well as Lucy, Tion, Fleur, Mila and Pippa. Together we spoke about the qualities that make a great leader: listening, including to others, and having the courage to learn from mistakes. One comment that stayed with me was 'There is always tomorrow' – a reminder to students that even after the toughest of days we can always look forward to new beginnings with hope.

Later in the day I hosted my high school leadership forum with Saasha, Egbert and Niels from Auburn High; Louis and Halle from Bialik; Sena, Ellen and Will from Camberwell High School; Charlie and William from Scotch College; and Stella and Isla from Strathcona Girls Grammar. I hold these forums to give student leaders the chance to connect with peers from other schools, exchange ideas and reflect on the positive role they can play in shaping school culture and beyond. To these students I say this: your insights, hopes and ideals reveal you to be mature beyond your years and an inspiration to all of us who are witnessing your evolution into the leaders our community, state and country will need in the years and decades ahead.

### **Avalon Airport bus services**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (13:11): The brand new bus from the Lara train station to Avalon Airport has commenced. This is the first ever public transport connection to Avalon Airport. It is a major step forward for workers, travellers and our region's growing economy. Avalon Airport plays a vital role in Victoria's economy, boosting tourism, trade and business across the region. The new route will benefit the thousands of people who travel there, recognising the significance of Avalon as Victoria's second international airport. And what a great time for the new bus to start, with flights from Avalon to Bali starting next Monday. The new bus will run seven days a week. Buses will arrive at the terminal before most scheduled flight times and depart roughly 30 minutes after flight arrivals, making it easier to get away on holidays. Importantly, the new timetable aligns with staff shift times for those working in the Greater Avalon employment precinct. With over 2000 people now working at Avalon, reliable and affordable public transport is more important than ever.

A big shout-out to the local Lara community, who were instrumental in advocating with me for the introduction of this new service. Hundreds of people signed my petition calling for this bus, and I want to thank them for their support. This was a real local campaign that has resulted in a great win for our community. I am so proud to be part of the state Labor government that recognised the importance of this new bus route for my community and delivered this much needed service.

### **Fuel supply and prices**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (13:13): Supporting families with practical cost-of-living relief is so important to me. Last week I welcomed the Premier and the Minister for Consumer Affairs to Mambourin to meet with local business owner Rashi to talk about how Labor is helping locals with their fuel bills. According to the last census, 51 per cent of journeys in Wyndham are made by private vehicle, so recent fuel shocks have hit my electorate particularly hard. I welcome the Allan Labor government's announcement that new daily fuel caps are now in force and increased inspection and enforcement are happening by Consumer Affairs Victoria as well as an emergency controller being in there looking around fuel supply, particularly for our emergency services. For locals like Rashi who rely on their cars, this certainty is so important, and I encourage all residents to hop onto the Servo Saver app and plan their next fuel stop. It is particularly important because service stations are legally mandated to update the app and keep the fuel prices up to date for the community.

### **Ramadan**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (13:14): I would like to thank the Victorian Bangladeshi Community Foundation for their invitation to join them to break their fast last week. I am proud to stand side by side with our Muslim community, who contribute so much to what makes Werribee fantastic.

A special shout-out to two young leaders from Wyndham who joined me for the Premier's iftar dinner: Ekram and Abbas. I look forward to seeing the amazing things they will achieve in our community more broadly.

### **Donnybrook Road upgrade**

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (13:14): I have really enjoyed the hundreds of conversations I have had with Donnybrook residents over the last few weeks. Everybody there, including me, is looking forward to stage 1 of the Donnybrook Road upgrade kicking off. It is in preconstruction at the moment with site investigations, planning approvals and the like, and we are looking forward to seeing that move ahead. I cannot help but reflect, as we are in here, that we hear about the Liberal housing policy of rushing development in the outer suburbs. Donnybrook came into existence through a stroke of the pen of those opposite, with zero dollars of funding for infrastructure, and now they want it to go even faster. Our government has taken the sensible approach of spacing out the new estates in the outer suburbs and making it so that developers need to make sure that that supporting infrastructure is there before more lots are opened up for housing, because we have listened to what people want in the outer suburbs. Those opposite have made it very clear: they do not care. They do not care about us in the

outer suburbs. Rush, rush, push the housing, no money for infrastructure, and it is back to the beginning with the Liberals. We have seen this from them before, and we are at risk of seeing it again if they come back into government.

#### **Kala Primary School**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (13:15): I was honoured to recently attend the official opening of Kala Primary School, which is in Cranbourne North in my electorate of Narre Warren South. I was there with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, as well as member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region in the other place Mr Tarlamis. It was a fantastic day, and it was such a proud moment to see that what were recently construction zones are now finished buildings just filled up with very joyful and keen-to-learn students. It was great to see their teachers and their parents there as well for the opening. All together they really are forming a terrific new school community. We were toured around the grounds by the inaugural school captains Logan and Saza and other student representatives as well. They too were really impressed with their new digs and were very keen to show us around. The facilities are truly outstanding. The state-of-the-art classrooms, library, playgrounds and gymnasium provide outstanding spaces for students to learn and grow while supporting our hardworking teachers and staff. The school takes pressure off other local primary schools as our community grows, while also providing an excellent public education close to home. I thank principal Tracy Knight as well as assistant principal Kirrilee Cruise. They are really creating something special there.

#### **St Mary's Tennis Club, Greensborough**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (13:17): I rise today to acknowledge and celebrate St Mary's Tennis Club, a much-loved local community institution that this year will mark 70 years of service to our community. Founded at St Mary's Church courts in Greensborough, where it still proudly operates, the club expanded to Kalparrin Gardens in the early 1980s and now offers seven courts across two locations. Today around 150 local members spanning generations and abilities take part in competitive and social tennis throughout the week. The club's coaching program, led by Craig Haslam, continues to go from strength to strength, with a strong presence in local schools and a clear commitment to developing the next generation of players. One recent highlight was the annual Proud Mary event, which provides a welcoming and inclusive tennis environment for the LGBTQI community. The event reflects the club's values of inclusion and belonging and was implemented and led by club member Peter Bannan. St Mary's Tennis Club is also supported by a dedicated committee and a clear strategic vision for the future. I particularly acknowledge Peter Marcato, who is completing his 16th and final year as president, and Helen Pendry, who for more than 40 years has been the backbone of the club. In recognition of her extraordinary contribution a refurbished court was named in her honour in 2020. After 70 years this club continues to serve, welcome and strengthen its community, and I wish it every success for the next 70 years and beyond.

#### **Holi Festival of Colours**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (13:18): Happy Holi. I would like to thank Usha and her team at the Shri Shiva Vishnu Temple and the Hindu Society of Victoria for a joyful celebration recently. My community are celebrating Holi as an opportunity for love, laughter and bright colour and the triumph of good over evil. I would really like to say how grateful I was to be welcomed and to be able to have the opportunity to celebrate.

#### **Ramadan**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (13:19): I would like to thank the Tawhid social association for an iftar meal that was full of the representation of all of the great pillars of Islam. I am so grateful to have such a strong community.

*Bills***Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (13:20): I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. Regulatory reform? Absolute spin. This Labor government loves to put spin in the title of each and every one of its pieces of legislation, and this one is no different. Members in this place and people right across Victoria should not be fooled by the title of this bill. This bill has nothing to do with regulatory reform. The government, quite frankly, would not know regulatory reform if it fell over it. This bill is just another example of this Labor government's addiction to spin and rhetoric and its desperate hope to make it look like it is doing something meaningful when in reality it is only making the lives of Victorians harder. This bill is nothing more than a standard statute law revision bill, changing 13 acts across various ministerial portfolios as part of a legislative sweep to fix irregularities and make various consequential changes.

**Sitting suspended 1:21 pm until 1:41 pm.**

**Bridget VALLENCE:** Who would have thought a so-called regulatory reform bill speech would cause a fire alarm and an evacuation, but here we are. With the exception of the proposed amendments concerning the spent convictions regime that have resulted from a review of the Spent Convictions Act 2021, this bill has not been informed by any regulatory reform inquiry or recommendations. The changes in this bill do not represent structural reforms that the Victorian economy so desperately needs. The spin started in the minister's second-reading speech. The minister said:

Regulatory reform contributes to increased economic productivity, makes it easier to do business in Victoria, and protects consumers, community health and safety, and the environment.

There is nothing about consumer protections, community health or safety in this bill – nothing. There is nothing that contributes to economic productivity in this bill – nothing. In fact the Department of Treasury and Finance officials admitted to this during the bill briefing. When I asked the DTF officials if they could provide me with any modelling on how this so-called regulatory reform bill would result in increased economic productivity or how it would make it easier to do business in Victoria, the officials confirmed that no benefit analysis or modelling had been undertaken for this bill in relation to economic productivity and no savings had been quantified. The measures contained in this bill will do nothing to contribute to increased economic productivity and do not represent regulatory reform. In fact some of the government's proposed changes in this bill are not only not likely to result in efficiency or productivity improvements but more likely to result in ambiguity, uncertainty and delay. While no doubt government members will have their preprepared speaking notes from the minister's office about some of the supposed reforms contained in this bill, the reality is there is nothing in this bill that will make the lives of Victorians better.

I will discuss some of the changes contained in this bill which require further scrutiny. Yet again we have another bill seeking to amend the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. The circular economy act must hold the record for being the most amended piece of legislation in recent years. By my count, this bill will mark the 13th time the circular economy act has been amended in four years. That equates to being amended on average three times every year, and quite frankly this Labor government still cannot get it right. The act is supposed to focus on reducing our carbon footprint and encouraging more recycling, but this government has shown a propensity for wasting paper and ink when it comes to consistently changing this piece of legislation.

One of the measures that the department officials were keen to say was reform is at clause 4 of the bill, which allows the EPA to have a longer period of time to determine exemption applications.

Department officials confirmed these applications could involve someone seeking an exemption from paying landfill fees. Currently these exemption applications need to be determined by the EPA within 28 days. Both in the minister's speech and in the briefing this change was referred to as a 'stop the clock' measure. Officials have asserted that the EPA does not always have sufficient material to determine whether an exemption should be granted within the current prescribed 28-day timeframe. It was argued by the departmental officials that the amendment would provide a benefit for businesses because the additional time would allow businesses to provide additional material without needing to lodge a new application.

I stopped counting how many times the DTF officials talked about stopping the clock in the briefing, but if you actually read the bill it does not actually include the words 'stop the clock'. There is nothing in clause 4 that actually pauses the 28-day time period. All clause 4 of the bill does is allow the EPA a longer period for time to assess these applications, and there is no ability to restart the clock. Once the EPA have been provided with any additional information they require, the effect of this measure is to remove the obligation for these applications to be determined by the EPA in a set period of time, and instead the EPA can now assess these matters at their leisure. The government and its hopeless EPA want to move from a definitive timeframe of 28 days for these applications to be assessed to a position where they will now have unfettered discretion as to how long the EPA will take to process these applications, with no deadline imposed. Unless there is a definitive timeline by which these applications are to be assessed, they are likely to lead to longer delays in assessment, which will only result in greater inefficiency and more uncertainty for business. This amendment does nothing to enhance regulatory reform or increase economic productivity. On the contrary, it completely undermines it. Allowing these applications to be assessed at the EPA's leisure will not improve productivity or lead to better decisions, it will just result in government bureaucracy gaining more power and control and having less accountability.

Further, the proposed changes in this bill to this act will give the EPA the ability to amend Victorian recycling infrastructure plans. Without consultation that is not reform, it is just less transparency and more control. It should be noted that these proposed amendments in this bill cannot proceed unless the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025 is passed, in which the government wants to abolish Recycling Victoria. I note that we stand here today and the entities bill still has not passed the upper house, the Legislative Council, leaving these changes in this bill that we are debating in the Assembly under a cloud.

The bill also proposes to make changes to the Conservation, Forests and Land Act 1987. I refer to part 4 of the bill, specifically clause 20, which seeks to remove the current requirement imposed on the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) to ensure a notice is displayed in a conspicuous place on land which is subject to a land management cooperative agreement as soon as possible after the agreement has been made. In the minister's second-reading speech he said the requirement to display notices on land about these agreements caused landowners stress, safety and wellbeing issues. When I asked the Department of Treasury and Finance officials if they could provide any example of where landowners had complained about such issues, I was provided with just one example. The example related to a property under which the landowner had entered into an agreement with the government, and in exchange for monetary compensation the landowner had agreed to allow the government to use their land as a native vegetation offset for the purpose of the construction of a wind farm in close proximity to the property, which had been the subject of much community concern and opposition. According to the department, local community members were able to deduce from the notice displayed on the property that the landowner had entered into this financial arrangement for a government project. No evidence was provided of any stress, safety or wellbeing issues being suffered or how they were balanced with the stress, safety and wellbeing concerns of many more people across the local community. Rather, it appears both the landowner and the government were angry and embarrassed. The local community members were able to uncover the methods the government engaged in to get this wind farm built in the face of community opposition. If anything, this example demonstrates why it is so important this obligation

remains in the act as a public benefit. Local communities deserve to know how land is being used in their community, especially if it involves the construction of major infrastructure projects that will impact the amenity and liveability of local properties.

This amendment is nothing more than a measure to reduce transparency with Victorians and make it harder to hold the government to account for their backroom deals. Victorians are entitled to and deserve to know this information, especially if it involves a financial pay-off to private landowners so that government projects can proceed.

The government argues that people will still have access to this information because the secretary will be required to publish a notice in the gazette and in news publications that circulate throughout Victoria. But I am willing to wager that about 99.9 per cent of Victorians would have no idea that the *Government Gazette* exists, let alone where to find it or even be able to find what edition the notice was published in, and publishing it in online news publications that are probably behind paywalls is not satisfactory either.

The government says it will also publish a copy of the agreement on its website. But while that might seem useful, what is the point of publishing it on a website if people do not know about it in the first place? If this government is expecting people to search the website daily to find out if any new agreements have been made in their local community, that is just not acceptable.

Interestingly, when I asked to be provided with a copy of the land management cooperative agreement that the government referred to in its one example, do you have any idea the hoops through which I had to go to have a viewing of this? Despite having the right to see the agreement under section 80(4) of the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act, I had to chase multiple times. I was first told I could see a copy if I travelled to DEECA's office to view it there. The minister's office refused to provide me a copy, and then in the interests of time, when I said I would be happy to attend DEECA's office, they did a 180, and I was subsequently told that DEECA would not allow me to view the agreement despite the act requiring it to be made available to the public. DEECA said I could not look at the agreement because it might link the agreement to a specific project, which could exacerbate the negative community sentiment, despite this being something that should be provided to the public under the act – an extraordinary statement. We now have a government department telling a member of Parliament that it will not perform its statutory duty under the act to allow me to view the agreement. This is the kind of secrecy we have in Victoria under the Allan Labor government. A government department will not even allow the shadow minister, as part of the bill briefing, to view a copy of the agreement they themselves referred to as part of justifying why this change to the act was necessary. I mean, it is not North Korea.

In the public interest I pursued this again – and I do thank Claudia in the minister's office, who I sensed also was exasperated by DEECA's stance. Thankfully they agreed for me to view the document but only if attended by the department secretary and the minister's representative. What are they hiding? And it was only just moments before Parliament commenced proceedings for today, and as such I had a representative do this for me because I needed to be here in Parliament – a pretty disgraceful episode, and in many respects DEECA's conduct was quite unbecoming and disreputable.

Given what has transpired in the last couple of days, I am now convinced more than ever that this government amendment is not in the public interest, because it deliberately removes the transparency and limits disclosure of information to local communities about how land in their area is being used and managed. Whether it is a wind farm or transmission lines or a new industrial development metres from homes – as is happening right now in my community in Lilydale, without consultation with the community – local communities have every right to know what agreements and financial rewards this government is making with individual landowners when it is seeking to push projects on communities. As such, the Victorian Liberals and Nationals will move an amendment in the Legislative Council to retain the requirement that a notice must be displayed on the land for which an agreement is made with the government. Communities deserve more transparency, not less.

Now to the government's proposed changes to the Environment Protection Act 2017 in part 5 of the bill. Clause 23 of the bill introduces a new immunity provision from littering offences contained in the EP act. Under the new clause a train, tram, bus, ferry, passenger vessel – even a plane – or other public transport vehicle will not be subject to any littering offences if a passenger of the vehicle did the littering and the vehicle was being used for a public purpose. I am not sure how many times people would litter from a plane, but there we are. Taxis and Ubers will also receive the same immunity. Despite asking many questions of the department officials in the briefing about these new immunity provisions, they have still failed to provide an adequate explanation or rationale for the changes.

A couple of points are to be made. First, the clause introduces a new term, 'public transport vehicle'. However, there is nowhere in the EP act or the Transport Integration Act 2010 that provides a definition for this term, creating ambiguity. The department stated that the term would be interpreted as plain language or a dictionary definition. If we have learned anything from the past 12 years of this Labor regime, it is that they are absolutely incapable of speaking in plain language. It is all spin – just look at the title of this bill. We were told earlier this week by the Minister for Transport Infrastructure that it was fiscally responsible to pay \$125 million to the thousands of businesses that Labor shut down as part of the hotel quarantine fiasco, on which this government has wasted at least a further \$40 million in legal fees trying to fight these small businesses. Talk about spin. Labor does not speak in plain language.

The Oxford, Macquarie and Cambridge dictionaries do not provide definitions for the term 'public transport vehicle', and I fail to see any regulatory reform in this proposed amendment to the act, especially as it excludes hundreds of vehicles that are used for a public purpose. This clause creates a huge gap in the vehicles used for a public purpose that will receive the immunity and those that will not. While those that operate planes and ferries will be protected if a passenger litters from their vehicles, cars, SUVs, trucks and other light commercial vehicles completely miss out on immunity. I also note that helicopters miss out, should any Labor Chief Commissioner of Police be listening.

As members of this place would be aware, the government have hundreds of cars, SUVs, light trucks, utilities, medium and heavy trucks in their fleet that are used every day for public purposes. Cars, SUVs, light commercial utes, vans, medium and heavy trucks are used by Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, FRV, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Ambulance Victoria and Smile Squad vans. They have all been excluded or forgotten in this bill. The department that operates these vehicles will not receive the same immunity from a passenger littering from them, but that is something that is being given to taxis and Ubers or Qantas planes. It just appears to be another example of where the government has all its priorities wrong, and will only create more confusion under this change, rather than being regulatory reform or creating economic growth.

There are also a number of changes to the Local Government Act 2020 in part 8 of the bill. Clause 34 of the bill removes the obligation on arbiters to refer matters involving serious misconduct to the chief municipal inspector. No rationale has been provided by the government for this change, and you would have thought, in normal circumstances, that you would want cases involving serious misconduct investigated by the CMI. However, it appears this government does not. And I would have thought that if the government was serious about improving productivity and increasing economic growth, it would do everything possible to ensure allegations of corruption and serious misconduct were adequately investigated and reviewed. But then we all know, with the \$15 billion going to corruption and criminal bkie gangs on Labor's rotten Big Build infrastructure projects, that cleaning up corruption and reporting issues of serious misconduct is not a priority of this Labor government. On this, too, we will seek to move an amendment in the Legislative Council to retain the mandatory obligation on arbiters to refer instances of serious misconduct to the chief municipal inspector.

At the end of his second-reading speech, the minister said that the common thread that ran through all of these amendments was a commitment by the government to bettering the lives of Victorians. The government has proposed changes in this bill that will do nothing to better the lives of Victorians and, as I said, Department of Treasury and Finance officials themselves were unable to provide any

evidence or analysis as to how any of these measures will result in increased economic gains or productivity improvements for Victorians. This bill is just a massive, missed opportunity when it comes to regulatory reform. If this government was really serious about improving the lives of Victorians, it would support measures that restored integrity and honesty to our government institutions. By way of example, if the Labor government was serious about regulatory reform, serious about integrity measures, about pulling out corruption by its roots on the rotten Big Build government worksites, it would support the Liberals and Nationals measure to give IBAC follow-the-money powers to trace where the \$15 billion of Victorian taxpayers money had been rorted and siphoned off to corrupt criminal bikie gangs. If this government truly cared about bettering the lives of Victorians, it would support measures to establish a construction enforcement watchdog with real powers to investigate and prosecute militant union thugs and bikies on rotten Big Build projects who engage in violence, standover tactics, intimidation and demanding of women to perform sexual favours just to keep their jobs. If this Labor government was truly committed to regulatory reform that delivers transparency and accountability, it would establish a royal commission to immediately investigate the corrupt practices that were allowed to flourish and take root on the rotten Big Build while the now-Premier was the minister who was responsible and had complete control over the Big Build as transport infrastructure minister. Yet these measures are not in this regulatory reform bill. The government has voted against these measures time and time again, demonstrating it has absolutely no interest or commitment to bettering the lives of Victorians, and it does not care that \$15 billion of taxpayers money was siphoned off to corruption on Labor's Big Build.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Members*

**Minister for Emergency Services**

*Absence*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:01): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Energy and Resources will answer questions for the portfolios of emergency services and natural disaster recovery and the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events will answer questions for the equality portfolio.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Construction industry**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. When did the director-general of the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority Kevin Devlin first warn the Premier of corruption or misconduct on the Big Build?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): As I have said on previous occasions, we have zero tolerance for criminal behaviour, and we have taken action when allegations of illegal and criminal behaviour have been raised.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be direct. The Premier is not being direct and is being evasive in her response.

**The SPEAKER**: I do not uphold the point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: We have done this because criminal activity and allegations of criminal activity and unlawful behaviour on worksites are a serious issue. It must face the full force of the law, which is why, as I have said previously, when matters had been raised with me, they were referred to the relevant agencies for action. Further to that –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, this question specifically asked when, and the Premier has not, on relevance, dealt with that question.

**The SPEAKER:** I am aware of the question, member for Brighton. It is in front of me. The Premier has an opportunity to come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Further to that, we have taken further action to give police and the Labour Hire Authority additional powers, and they are taking action through using those powers. People are being charged and licences are being cancelled.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is now defying your ruling.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier still has 2 minutes to answer the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Again, I have gone to these matters specifically in regard to the matter.

**Jess Wilson** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** With all due respect to the Leader of the Opposition, in July of 2024 I went into some detail publicly that demonstrates that matters raised with me, particularly matters that were raised with me in June of 2023, were referred to Victoria Police, when I wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): How many times did Kevin Devlin warn the Premier about corruption or misconduct on the Big Build?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): I have addressed these matters throughout. I have addressed these matters repeatedly. When matters were raised with me, they were referred to those relevant agencies for action.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is becoming a farce. The Premier is refusing to deal with the substance of the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has concluded her answer.

#### **Ministers statements: fuel supply and prices**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): We know that fuel price rises are hitting Victorian families hard and that every time the price of fuel at the pump jumps it means more out of the weekly budget for Victorian families and households. At a time when so many of these families are already stretched, it means there is not a lot of room left in the household budget, so the last thing that families should be concerned about is also being ripped off at the service station. That is why our government is taking strong action now to stop price gouging. Indeed just last Tuesday our new laws came into effect – new laws that require fuel retailers to report their prices, giving Victorians tools, quite literally in the palm of their hand, with the information that they need to be able to find the lowest price in their local area. This is not only saving Victorians time, it is also saving Victorians money.

I do note, just for completeness, that this was an initiative opposed by those opposite. But it is not opposed by Victorians, because we have seen just in the last week over 119,000 Victorians use the Servo Saver app. They have gone to find the cheapest price, knowing that those prices will not change, because we have required those prices to be locked in for a 24-hour period and they are being enforced by Consumer Affairs Victoria. That is why today we announced that we are going even further. With concern about the ongoing conflict in Iran and the impact that is having on fuel prices around the globe, we are strengthening the work of our investigators and inspectors and legal enforcement to go in and ensure that these important laws are enforced, to continue to have that focus on Victorian families and households.

#### **Construction industry**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): My question is to the Premier. According to reports in the *Age*, the Premier received a ministerial briefing from Kevin Devlin warning of the impact of CFMEU corruption on project costs. When did the Premier receive this briefing?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): Again, as I have said on previous occasions, where matters were raised with me, they were referred to the relevant agencies for their action.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): Will the Premier release this ministerial briefing?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): As I am no longer the responsible minister, the answer is no.

#### Ministers statements: energy policy

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:08): I am delighted to inform the house that the draft Victorian power price released last week, the Victorian default offer, is down 3 per cent on average from 1 July this year. That would mean \$46 per year less on the average bill for around 510,000 Victorian households, including those in apartments, caravan parks and retirement villages. Small businesses would see an average decrease of \$172 on their bills, or 5 per cent less. The final price will be released in May and is subject to change. Certainly we understand that globally there are some strong problems around the Middle East with fuel supply and the like, but this VDO is a very, very good sign.

This does not happen by accident; it is due to improvements, this time around in energy efficiency led by our Victorian energy upgrades program. We have insisted on less profits for retailers and certainly more savings for households. Our government introduced the VDO – we led the country in this – which cut standing offer prices by 24 per cent in its first year and which still has them 12 per cent below what the VDO replaced in 2019, so the VDO is still lower than the standing offer it replaced in 2019. Victorian households’ power bills are consistently the lowest in the country, and the VDO is not the only way we are helping households with their energy bills. The VEU has provided energy-efficiency upgrades to more than 2.4 million households right across this state, and in the last four years alone Victorians have saved \$3.8 billion in avoided costs to our energy system thanks to the VEU. Even if Victorians do not participate in the VEU, they still benefit from lower wholesale electricity prices. Only the Allan Labor government will back Victorian households when it comes to their energy bills.

#### Construction industry

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:10): My question is to the Premier. Roads Australia has confirmed earlier estimates that costs have blown out on the Big Build by at least \$15 billion due to corruption and lawlessness. Why is the Premier seeking to cover up by refusing to investigate \$15 billion of waste and corruption on the Big Build?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): Criminal activity and allegations of criminal activity in any workplace or on any worksite – these are serious allegations, and they are serious matters that deserve immediate attention and action. And that is exactly what we have done through the work of Victoria Police, who have laid 70 charges, and the work of the Labour Hire Authority, with the additional powers that they have been given. They have cancelled construction licences and blocked many others. The claims that are contained in the member for Brighton’s question are claims that at this stage are without evidence – do not have any basis of fact.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, it is not relevant or appropriate for the Premier to be sledging Roads Australia. Their estimate is clear, and it is inappropriate to sledge Roads Australia.

**The SPEAKER**: There is no point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: Given that allegations of this nature are serious, I would expect that if anyone has evidence to support these sorts of claims that evidence should be and would be immediately

handed to Victoria Police, who, as demonstrated by the actions they have taken through the work of Operation Hawk, are arresting people, have laid charges.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Polwarth is warned.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** If there is any evidence to support the claims made by the member for Brighton in his question, purportedly reporting other people's claims, those claims should be made to Victoria Police.

**James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:13):** Roads Australia also detailed how 'criminal elements have been allowed access like never before' to Big Build sites. Isn't it the case the Premier will not call a royal commission into corruption on the Big Build because she enabled it?

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13):** The answer is no. And again this question exposes the Liberal Party for being the anti-worker outfit that they are. There was a royal commission in this country, set up by a former Liberal government, that went after the union movement and achieved nothing. The seriousness of these matters –

**Danny O'Brien:** A point of order on the question of relevance, Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has already addressed the answer to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The seriousness of these matters demands urgent and immediate action, which is what is happening right now. I say to those workers out there on worksites that, yes, they deserve the best of representation. The worksites that they work on are difficult and dangerous, and they are delivering the road and rail and hospitals that our growing state needs. We thank them for their work. They deserve to have fair pay and conditions. They do not deserve this anti-worker attack from this Liberal outfit.

#### **Ministers statements: Get Active Kids voucher program**

**Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:14):** I rise to update the house on our investment to provide cost-of-living support to families by making community sport more accessible for Victorian families. The Allan Labor government's Get Active Kids voucher program provides eligible families with up to \$200 to cover the cost of uniforms, equipment and registration fees. We are providing more vouchers for more children, with \$23 million invested to extend the Get Active voucher program to 2027. Round 10 of the program opened just two weeks ago today, and we have already received more than 40,000 applications from Victorian families. We know from data collected from the previous round of the program that more than 60 per cent of these kids would not be able to participate in their chosen sport without this program.

We know the benefits of community sport, especially to children. Sport teaches resilience and teamwork and provides health benefits that extend far beyond the time spent playing. The most popular sport in the previous round was swimming, which means that kids are accessing the life-saving swimming skills that can help keep themselves and others safe around water. Clubs benefit from this investment too, because more vouchers means more kids taking up sports they might not ever have been otherwise able to try. There are more than 2300 registered voucher providers covering well over 70 sports. Whether you are swimming with the Peninsula Flyers in Frankston, playing netball at the Wyndham netball club in Werribee or kicking the round ball at Casey Comets football club in Cranbourne, the Allan Labor government has you covered all year round, making sure that cost is not a barrier to participation in sport and getting more kids active in the sports that they love.

**Public transport**

**Darren CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (14:16): My question is to the Premier. Victorians have watched in horror as the war has taken place in the Persian Gulf. There are profound consequences for the cost of living for all Victorians, for our farmers and for our logistics industry. Premier, will you make public transport free to help with the cost of living and to help protect our important farming communities and our important logistics industries?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:17): Acknowledging the member for South Barwon’s question, he has rightly identified the seriousness of the global conflict that is occurring in Iran and how it is having impacts globally, including here in Victoria. There are global inflationary pressures that are being faced around the world, and it is understandable that families and households here in Victoria are looking with great concern and worry both about what the escalation’s impact is going to be not just on fuel prices but, as we know, the potential knock-on impacts it is going to have across a whole range of essential goods and services that working people and families rely on. Further to that, we are all waiting to see in about 10 or 11 minutes time what the Reserve Bank will be deciding in terms of the potential of an interest rate rise.

The last thing that families need right now is additional pressure placed on their household budgets, so I can understand – and any member of this place who is focused on understanding where Victorian families and households are focused right now understands – that cost-of-living pressures are the number one issue. We on this side of the house certainly understand that, which is why there have been a range of cost-of-living measures, like a power saving bonus that is available right now, like free public transport for kids under the age of 18, like breakfast programs that are available to kids in our schools and of course like the Servo Saver that I referred to earlier.

But we know that we need to take further action, which is why this morning I chaired the security and emergency management committee of cabinet following extensive work that the minister for energy has been leading over the last couple of weeks to put our state in a state of readiness, asking departments and agencies to enact continuity plans, because should the Iran crisis and conflict worsen and should it put pressure on our fuel supply then we do need to be ready with further measures and actions, which is why the actions I outlined in my earlier ministers statement about providing further support to our anti-fuel-price-gouging program is a way of supporting families and households.

In regard to making public transport free, we have already got an extensive range of support for kids under the age of 18, for seniors on weekends and for early birds as well. We will continue to consider from the starting point that it is our Labor government that understands the pressures that are on families and household budgets, and we will continue to look at ways to act and support households.

**Darren CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (14:20): Thank you, Premier. My further question is: will the Premier please look to bring forward urgent additional bus services, particularly for our regions and our outer suburbs, to help provide transport options for Victorians who are experiencing this cost-of-living crisis?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:20): I have no announcements to make today about consideration of additional bus services and public transport services more broadly. We have already, if I can just note, at the start of this year with the introduction of the 1200 additional timetabled services as a result of the Metro Tunnel, which also included some additional train services for regional Victoria, increased substantially the public transport services in this state. Some, like the Leader of the Opposition, called our investment in the Metro Tunnel a waste on the day that it opened. We see investment in public transport as an investment in Victorians, which is why for kids we have made it free, which is why we have upgraded every regional rail line in the state and which is why we built the Metro Tunnel and we have removed level crossings. I thank those workers who have delivered those services. We will continue to look at ways to invest in our good, strong public transport system.

**Ministers statements: cost of living**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:21): We know that families are facing cost-of-living challenges and pressures. That is why Labor is supporting families to ease cost-of-living pressures through initiatives like our free school breakfast program and our more affordable uniform policy. Do you know how many free school breakfasts have been delivered under the Labor government? 65 million school breakfasts. That is not just 65 million meals; that is 65 million breakfasts for kids to get the food, the calmness and the full tummy at school that they need and deserve. But also it means for those 65 million breakfasts those parents do not have to pay for or prepare the breakfast for their child going to school. It is a really important Labor initiative. On average our school breakfast program is saving families some \$250 a year. When I recently joined the hardworking member for Ashwood out at Mount Waverley Secondary College we heard firsthand from families and students what the school breakfast program means. Young student Zahan said it best: ‘You can’t learn with an empty stomach.’

We are not stopping there. With our school uniform policy we have made sure, through our changes to the dress code policy, that parents can purchase a school uniform at their local shop and do not have to travel to an expensive uniform shop. Our leadership on school uniform policy has seen us take away school logos on shorts, socks – anything under the waist that does not need a logo should not have a logo. It is a direct measure that is going to the heart of cost-of-living pressures. That is why we are happy to see that more than \$160 for a family with two kids through our policy changes on school uniforms is going directly into the back pocket of families. That is why Victorian families need a Labor government, because only Labor is doing the hard work right here in Victoria to make sure we deliver continued new cost-of-living relief for families right here in the Education State.

**Fuel supply and prices**

**Danny O’BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. The Premier’s media release this morning stated, ‘Right now, there is enough fuel for normal demand.’ Why then did Robinvale run out of fuel on the weekend, while farmers, trucking companies and families across regional Victoria are being subject to restrictions and rationing?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:24): I have said a couple of times in the house today already that it is understandable that Victorians and indeed people around the nation and around the world are looking at the ongoing conflict in Iran and are both concerned and anxious about what it means in terms of the pressures it is putting on their household budgets and also understandably concerned about the potential impact it has on supply. I say to the Leader of the National Party that the last thing that should be happening right now is alarmist claims that put further pressure on families and households, and I say it in this context –

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Jade Benham** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Make that an hour and a half.

**Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.**

**Danny O’Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. Robinvale ran out. It is not alarmist; it is a fact.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier is answering the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As I was part way through saying to the Leader of the National Party, it is concern about supply that is driving people to, understandably, go and look at fuelling up or putting in place fuel reserves, but it comes at a time when the very clear advice and message from the federal

government is that Australia has adequate supply of fuel sources for a period of time and that supply continues to come into the country. The issue particularly for Robinvale, as I am advised, is that the service station is not supplied by one of the major fuel retailers. The service station at Robinvale is an independent operator and therefore receives its fuel distribution from what is known as the spot market. There has been, as we have seen also in New South Wales and in Queensland –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order on the question of relevance, Speaker, the question was not just about Robinvale but about all of regional Victoria. This is not one station's problem.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I am advised that Robinvale has been resupplied with fuel. What I was saying is this is something that is also being experienced by small communities in Queensland and New South Wales, and it underscores the point of why we met this morning as a committee of cabinet. It is why the minister for energy has been working and officials have been working to ensure that we provide support to our communities and adequate supply continues to reach those parts of the country that may be seeing fuel supplies under pressure not because of supply but because of a spike in demand that is understandable as a result of people being concerned about the conflict in Iran. It is a responsibility of all of us to both support the community and also be prepared, which is why, as I announced this morning, we are putting in place a state controller to both monitor and enact readiness plans.

**Danny O'Brien (Gippsland South) (14:28):** The Premier mentioned the New South Wales Labor government, which has done a deal with the fuel industry to ensure regional areas are well supplied. Will the Victorian government do likewise to ensure regional areas have the fuel they need?

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:28):** The advice I have from the minister for energy, who I will refer to as the expert source on these matters, is that that claim is not correct – the claim that the Leader of the National Party made in his statement. The Leader of the National Party's question underscores the point I was making earlier. This is a time for everyone with the opportunity to show leadership to demonstrate that and not cause additional alarm. We stand ready. We have enacted the state controller, where we are monitoring and putting in place readiness plans. We are working with the Commonwealth, and the minister and I are holding a round table with industry this afternoon to ensure that we not only are hearing from Victorian industry about their needs but will be responding accordingly and doing so in a context where we will continue to work with the Commonwealth government.

#### **Ministers statements: fuel supply and prices**

**Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:29):** At a time when families are watching every single dollar, the Allan Labor government is making sure Victorians are not being fleeced at the bowser. Our anti-price-gouging laws are now in effect. Victorian motorists can check Servo Saver, plan ahead and fill up with confidence instead of being ambushed by a surprise spike during the course of the day. Under our new laws, fuel retailers are required to set a maximum price for 24 hours. They can only discount down from that price, not jack it up. This is all about making life easier and providing real cost-of-living relief. It is also about transparency so that motorists can find the cheapest possible fuel in their area.

Since Servo Saver launched on the Service Victoria app, more than 370,000 individual Victorians have used it, and in the last week alone 119,000 unique users jumped on to find the cheapest fuel near them. That tells us that Victorians are really looking for this kind of help. And we are backing these new laws with more enforcement. Today we announced \$4.6 million for a new fair fuel taskforce. Consumer Affairs Victoria will be out in the field with inspectors ensuring that every single fuel retailer is complying with our nation-leading laws. Those retailers not complying face severe penalties, and our taskforce will provide real-time information to the ACCC to assist the ACCC with their efforts to stamp out price gouging.

The reactions of two groups to this recently caught my eye. The first was the Victorian Liberals, who called these new laws ‘froth and bubbles’. The other group was the New South Wales Liberals, who called on their government to adopt Victoria’s laws. When their interstate colleagues are copying Labor, is it any wonder that the Liberal–National–One Nation coalition has not got a clue?

*Constituency questions*

**Eildon electorate**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (14:32): (1558) I have a question for the Minister for Education. Students from Chum Creek Primary School have been forced to relocate to Healesville Primary School 10 times in the first few weeks of school as their shelter in place was deemed noncompliant. This is almost twice a week for each week. The issues were identified in October last year. The school community expected they would be sorted over the January holidays, but that did not happen – in fact they have heard very little. Can the minister provide a guarantee that this matter will be resolved, with all necessary works taking place prior to the next bushfire season in November this year? With almost 70 students, the constant relocation has impacted the families juggling their lives and the learnings of the children. The last relocation was on the NAPLAN day. This is just not good enough. Healesville Primary School have done exceptionally well to accommodate Chum Creek, but it is also a big imposition on their end to accommodate the extra students and staff.

**Narre Warren South electorate**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (14:33): (1559) My question is for the Premier and concerns the new violence reduction unit. Premier, how will the violence reduction unit reduce the risk of youth crime in my electorate of Narre Warren South? We know that the best way to prevent a life of crime is to intervene early and address the root causes. Alongside our tough new bail laws, which ensure offenders are held to account for their actions, the VRU youth engagement programs also help kids in schools and open pathways to work. Our government’s investment in this program aims to make sure that community-based programs are coordinated with other services to ultimately reduce youth crime. I have met with many local community organisations trying to prevent young people from starting lives of crime by providing them with other options and supports, including for their families. I thank them for their hard work helping our young people and keeping our communities safe every day. I look forward to sharing the Premier’s response with my community.

**Euroa electorate**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (14:34): (1560) My question is to the Premier. What is the Premier’s plan to ensure regional Victorians can access fuel? And why has Labor been silent as this crisis unfolds? I need confirmation that the Premier understands how serious this is and is acting, which means urgent pressure on the federal Labor government to cut the fuel excise and reduce the road user charge so trucks can keep moving. Right now across my electorate and across regional Victoria communities are dealing with a power outage – as we speak – and they cannot even purchase fuel in basic quantities. They cannot fill a jerry can. We have no power and we have no fuel. This is a crisis. Across regional Victoria people are either unable to access fuel at all or are paying astronomical prices. In the city I understand it is inconvenient, but in our region it stops farms, businesses and essential services doing their job. Charlie Crocker from Violet Town, Donna Jackson from Boho, Andrea Cullen from Molka, Ange Doyle from Gooram and Petrostar distributors Dave and Kirrily are all impacted.

**Pascoe Vale electorate**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:35): (1561) My constituency question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. How can the Victorian Labor government continue supporting local multicultural festival and events, including for our incredible Greek Cypriot community? On 14 March I had the honour to represent the Premier at the sixth annual Halloumi Festival in Brunswick East. Hosted by the Cyprus Community of Melbourne and Victoria, the event celebrates the very best of the

Cyprus community's food – namely halloumi, the national food of Cyprus and a staple in cuisines around the world – its culture, dance, music, faith and community contributions. Victoria is proudly home to 60,000 Victorians with Cypriot heritage, and Merri-bek is home to some of the highest proportions of Greek Cypriot residents outside of Nicosia. The festival attracts over 7000 people from across Victoria over two days on 14 and 15 March. I was honoured to attend alongside the Honourable Theo Theophanous, the president of the Cyprus Community of Victoria; His Excellency Antonis Sammoutis, High Commissioner for Cyprus; Peter Khalil; the member for Northcote; Bill Papastergiadis; and many other distinguished guests. I am proudly married to a woman of Greek-Cypriot heritage. My father-in-law is from Kambos in the Troodos Mountains. I have visited Cyprus on two occasions, in 2016 and 2019, and visited all over the island.

#### **Brighton electorate**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:36): (1562) My constituency question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier commit to a trial of a noise-detecting decibel camera on St Kilda Street in Brighton? Residents along St Kilda Street are increasingly affected by excessive noise from motorbikes and vehicles. While St Kilda Street is a busy thoroughfare, the level of engine revving, racing and amplified exhaust noise has grown beyond what residents should reasonably have to tolerate. This is not just a noise problem; high vehicle speeds in a residential area pose a real safety risk to families, pedestrians, cyclists and everyday road users. Residents deserve to feel safe in their own neighbourhood. The noise and speed issues are disrupting sleep, affecting wellbeing and limiting the quiet enjoyment of their homes. It is time for action. Our community is calling on the state Labor government to invest in practical measures to address this growing concern. The community has requested a trial of a noise-detecting decibel camera in St Kilda Street. These devices discourage excessively loud vehicles and promote more responsible driving behaviour. It is time for action.

#### **Glen Waverley electorate**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (14:37): (1563) My question is to the Minister for Health. Women in Melbourne's east, including in my vibrant community of Glen Waverley district, rely on accessible, affordable and culturally appropriate healthcare services at every stage of life. The Allan Labor government has made significant investments in dedicated women's health services, including specialised clinics and expanded support for conditions that have historically been underdiagnosed and undertreated. In my electorate we have seen the local impacts of these reforms, from the presence of BreastScreen Victoria services in Glen Waverley to the dedicated women's health clinic in Blackburn in the member for Box Hill's electorate and the establishment of the virtual women's health clinic, improving access for those unable to attend in person. The government's rollout of free period products in public settings, packed in our local social enterprise Cape, is also a practical step towards equity and dignity. Minister, how are these initiatives improving access to care, reducing wait times and ensuring women in the Glen Waverley district receive timely, evidence-based health care?

#### **Sandringham electorate**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (14:38): (1564) My constituency question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Late last year a large section of Bay Road was fenced off and lanes closed – on one of the busiest arterial roads in my community – to accommodate Labor's SRL development. Since then the Allan Labor government has forced local residents, families and businesses to endure worsening congestion, with motorists now taking up to 10 minutes or more just to crawl through the short stretch of Bay Road near Sir William Fry Reserve and the Southland shopping centre. To make matters worse, residents are now deeply concerned about the impending loss of even more of the Sir William Fry Reserve, one of the few large and open green spaces available for local families in my community. Despite these concerns, locals have received little to no communication from the government about where this stolen green space will be replaced for a like-for-like replacement. So I ask the minister: where will the equivalent green space taken by the SRL at

Sir William Fry Reserve be replaced with a genuine like-for-like alternative for the residents of both Cheltenham and Highett?

**Laverton electorate**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:39): (1565) My question is for the Deputy Premier as Minister for Education. Earlier this year our government opened 19 new schools across Victoria, making 100 total schools that our government has built over eight years. I am proud to say that at least 20 of these new schools were built in my community in Wyndham. The Liberal-Nationals, last time they were in government, let our schools crumble and decay while slashing \$1 billion from the education budget. But unlike those opposite, we are not in the business of closing and cutting schools. We build and we invest in them, and when you do that you reduce enrolment pressures and create better learning environments for all students. At communities like Truganina, we have built and opened four new schools: Dohertys Creek, Garrang Wilam, Warreen Primary and Bemim Secondary College. So my question is this: how has our government's achievement of building 100 new schools eased enrolment pressures in my community in Melbourne's west?

**Warrandyte electorate**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:40): (1566) My question is for the Minister for Police. Can the minister explain why the hours at Doncaster police station have been cut to 10 am to 6 pm when crime across my electorate is skyrocketing? Recently someone from my community who had been the victim of a crime drove to the police station to seek assistance and refuge, only to find that the station was closed. The fact that hours have been reduced at our local station, when locally in the past two years motor vehicle theft is up 139 per cent, arson has spiked by 180 per cent and now more than half of all crimes in Manningham go unsolved, is incredible. Our local police go above and beyond to serve our community brilliantly, but they are under-resourced and underfunded. This is clearly a failing of the Allan Labor government, who have achieved nothing in fixing the crime crisis. That is simply not good enough, and my community deserves answers. They pay their taxes, they follow the law and they deserve protection when they need it.

**Box Hill electorate**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (14:41): (1567) My question is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Infrastructure Australia recently placed the SRL East project on the highest priority list for our country, identifying it as an immediate priority for additional delivery investment. Infrastructure Australia understands the critical role that the SRL will play in our state. Its own website identifies how the SRL will improve network connectivity, increase productivity, support sustainability and enable housing development to accommodate Victoria's population growth. I was particularly pleased to read that Infrastructure Australia believes that the SRL presents a significant opportunity to directly improve quality of life for residents in the middle and outer suburbs of Melbourne's east. Given Infrastructure Australia has highlighted the need for this city-shaping program, my question to the minister is: what benefits will the SRL project deliver to my constituents in the Box Hill electorate?

**Bridget Vallence:** I have a point of order, Speaker, yet again on a number of questions that are unanswered and now overdue from the Treasurer: questions on notice 2421, 2777, 2854, 2853, 2856, 2857, 2858, 2859, 2860, 2861 and 2862. Overdue from the Minister for Government Services are questions on notice 2763, 2764, 2765 and 2776. A constituency question that is overdue from the Premier – I raised a point of order on this last sitting week – is constituency question 1442. And also a constituency question overdue from the Minister for Police is constituency question number 1488. I would appreciate responses for my constituents, and I will pass the list to the clerks.

*Bills***Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (14:43): I am delivering my Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 speech in three parts today – once interrupted by an evacuation for a fire alarm and then interrupted by question time. But now hopefully I have an opportunity to conclude my remarks in relation to this so-called regulatory reform bill – because, as I said earlier, there is absolutely nothing relating to regulatory reform in this bill.

If the Labor government was serious about regulatory reform and about dealing with some of the most immediate issues and challenges that we are facing, such as – as the government has said and Premier Allan has said many times – pulling out corruption by its roots on rotten Big Build government worksites, why wouldn't they have reforms in this bill to do what the Victorian Liberals and Nationals have proposed, which is to give IBAC follow-the-money powers to establish a construction enforcement watchdog and to establish a royal commission to immediately investigate the corrupt practices that have been allowed to flourish and take root on the Labor government's Big Build construction worksites? Yet these measures are not in the regulatory reform bill.

This government has voted against these measures time and time again, demonstrating it absolutely has no interest in or commitment to bettering the lives of Victorians. It does not care that the \$15 billion of taxpayers money that has gone to corruption and criminal bikie gangs could have been spent on rebuilding hospitals, schools, potholed roads or on more nurses or more police. They have got no interest in finding that money. As has been demonstrated time and time again, the Labor government will put self-interest and the power of office ahead of bettering the lives of Victorians.

Where in this bill are the reforms that will increase economic productivity, which the minister touted in his second-reading speech? They are sorely needed now that Victoria is on the road to financial ruin after 12 years of Labor rule. Victoria has the highest per capita debt and the lowest credit rating of all the states in the country. In November last year the Victorian Auditor-General warned that debt, deficits and Big Build infrastructure cost blowouts pose long-term dangers to the state's financial viability. As was revealed as recently as a few weeks ago in the midyear financial report, net debt has increased to \$160.9 billion. That is an increase of \$10.1 billion in just six months. Net debt as a share of the state economy has risen again and is now nearly a quarter of Victoria's economy. Compared to this time last year the latest financial data shows the Labor government borrowed \$12.7 billion more to fund cost overruns on the rotten, corrupt Big Build infrastructure projects that are embroiled in the \$15 billion corruption scandal. In just the last six months \$3.8 billion was spent on interest repayments alone – an increase of \$522 million when compared to the same period last year. Interest repayments on Victorian Labor government debt are now on track to reach \$1 million per hour. Just think of the dangerous roads, the potholed roads, we could fix and the more police and nurses we could employ with that money. Instead it is just going to pay down debt. That is a devastating number to Victorians, who now see police stations being shut, roads crumbling – all of the challenges that we are experiencing – the asbestos still in the schools in my local community.

What we have also seen in the last six months is that Victorians are being taxed more than ever. Tax revenue increased by \$2.1 billion compared to the same period last year. Where is the tax reform in this bill? For Labor, tax reform means hiking taxes and making Victorians pay more. Labor's horrendous new emergency services volunteer tax has brought in a total revenue of \$1.4 billion in the last six months. That is an increase of \$494 million in comparison to the last year. After stamp duty, the emergency services volunteer tax is now the second-highest stream of tax revenue to have been brought in by the government. It is not being used to help CFA or SES volunteers with modern equipment or to put fuel in their trucks to go out and attend emergencies – car accidents – or fight fires;

it is being used to prop up departmental budgets after recent budget cuts by this Labor government to emergency services budgets and also financial mismanagement. This tax is not bettering the lives of Victorians, as the minister will try to have you believe. Rather, it is taking more money away from Victorians, which is making their lives harder when both petrol prices and electricity prices are soaring out of control.

Despite the increase in tax revenue shown in the latest financial report, it did not keep pace with the rate of Labor's reckless spending. In the last six months the government recorded an operating deficit of \$694 million. There is no reform in this bill to deal with that issue. It does not matter how much this government taxes Victorians, it always manages to spend more. What is the point of this government's so-called fiscal strategy if it results in the government spending more, debt continually increasing and the government spending \$1 million an hour just to pay off the interest?

The government's economic record is a complete failure. Spending on the salaries of government bureaucrats has reached \$23 billion in the last six months, which is already 52 per cent – more than half – of the annual full-year budget. This continues the long-running pattern of where wages growth has remained structurally higher than government forecasts.

It is clear that Victoria is fast becoming a financial basket case. There is nothing in this so-called regulatory reform bill that deals with business investment and helps provide the reforms needed to stimulate business investment. Business investment in Victoria is now in serious decline. According to the most recent data, Victoria currently has a business investment growth rate of negative 0.1 per cent. Let me say that again: Victoria currently has a business investment growth rate of negative 0.1 per cent. Business investment in Victoria is not growing. It does not matter how much this Labor government tries to spin the alternative, it is not growing – it is plummeting through the floor.

Instead of businesses investing in Victoria, jobs will dry up and young Victorians will be forced to leave Victoria to find the jobs they need to get ahead. We already know that teachers, police and other workers are going to Queensland, they are going to New South Wales, they are going to South Australia. Youth unemployment in Victoria continues to be a massive issue. Youth unemployment in Victoria is currently sitting at 10.3 per cent, which is 6 per cent higher than the current adult unemployment rate in Victoria. What is even worse is that in Melbourne's west the youth unemployment rate is currently a staggering 14.2 per cent under the watch of this Allan Labor government.

We have seen in recent times the flow of private capital, which is essential for funding major commercial and industrial projects, being directed to other states – Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia – which have had more stable and competitive tax environments. According to the Property Council of Australia, Victoria has experienced a 53 per cent reduction in global institutional investment since 2022. This data backs up the Business Council of Australia's findings that Victoria is the worst jurisdiction in the country to do business.

Growth in Victoria has almost come to a complete standstill under this government. The gross state product is only growing by 1.1 per cent, which is next to nothing. However, when growth is measured on a per capita basis, Victoria has a negative per capita growth rate. At the moment, according to the data provided by the Parliamentary Budget Office, Victoria's per capita growth rate is currently negative 0.8 per cent. The Victorian economy is not growing under this Labor government; it is shrinking. Yet there is nothing in this regulatory reform bill that deals with the problem created by this Labor government.

This bill is not proper regulatory reform. This bill will do nothing to fix the decade of waste and reckless spending under Labor. Victoria has the highest debt, the highest taxes and the poorest business conditions of any state in the nation. At the same time essential health, housing and community safety services are all suffering. With interest repayments on Labor's record debt soon to hit \$1 million every single hour, is it any wonder that we cannot fix the potholes properly, fund our schools properly,

properly fund our hospitals or keep police stations open? Only a Liberals and Nationals government will end Labor's era of reckless spending and waste, ease cost-of-living pressures and guarantee the essential services that Victorians need and deserve.

Whilst we will not oppose this bill, we will move the two amendments that I have referred to in the Legislative Council. We believe in more transparency, not less, when it comes to informing communities about these matters.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (14:53): I am pleased to have the opportunity on this Tuesday to make a contribution to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 and take the opportunity, if I may, to point out many of the inaccuracies and inconsistencies that were in the previous speaker's very fine 30 minutes. The Minister for Small Business and Employment is at the table, and she was certainly listening to some of those statistics that were rattled off. I am flabbergasted in so many ways to hear this great state talked down and to hear, time and time again, those opposite coming to this chamber and rattling off a whole series of selective facts, a whole series of points, that put down our small businesses. They are not listening to those in the community that are working incredibly hard to do such amazing things within local communities and within their businesses themselves.

The budget – and indeed budgets before it – has pointed to the sustained economic growth that Victoria is experiencing year upon year and has forecast those investments in health, in transport, in education and in so many of the portfolios that go to making our state such an incredible place. Indeed in the period from 2018–19 up until 2024–25 there was a 14 per cent increase in the Victorian economy – more jobs, better jobs, better skills and training and the investment in TAFE, which we are going to discuss at length throughout the journey of tomorrow and beyond. Making sure that this government is investing in all of those industries is something that we remain focused on, and making sure we have got the opportunity to clarify some of those points I think is really important.

But what is more important is to be able to provide the confidence and the support to what is a growing state. We know – members on this side of the house know – that we have sustained population growth. We have got a diversified and changing jobs market. We have got so many people, not just from across the country but from around the world, that want to come to Victoria to learn, to find new skills and to find new opportunities. What we hear from the other side – and I have heard this now for the best part of a decade – is this state being talked down. It is of course confidence not being supported. We on this side of the house know and understand that that is a really dangerous thing to do.

**Natalie Suleyman** interjected.

**Josh BULL:** It is indeed the best city in the world and it is the best state in the nation, and we know that the investments that we are making make for a real difference. I am going to deal with a number of the important reforms that are in this bill, and if you take us back just to last year and you look at the opening of the Metro Tunnel project – five new stations, the direct connection between the Sunbury line and the Cranbourne–Pakenham line and the ability to move hundreds of thousands of people around our city and state every single day – that is a game-changing project for communities. If you look at the opening of the West Gate Tunnel, the new Footscray Hospital, the soon-to-be Melton hospital and community hospitals around the state, the growing economies, the new skills and the investments in TAFE and indeed world-class health care, they are so important.

I do want to get into some of the meatier details of the legislation before us, because this is important regulatory reform. I will also make the point that the previous speaker seemed to just gloss over some of these really important regulatory reforms that are in this bill. That concerns me, because there are amendments to more than 13 acts that are contained within this piece of legislation that go to some of the provisions around efficiency and getting a more effective and streamlined process for the way that we deal with processes within this state. It really concerns me that some – and hopefully not all – of those opposite do not see any of the importance of that, because the work of departments, the work of agencies, the work of government and most importantly the people who do that work should be

supported and should constantly be reviewed to be improved, because that is really what efficiency is. We heard some of the comments previously not just about the state and the economy but most importantly some of the work that is in this legislation, some of the really important changes that go to some of those acts. We know and understand that acts like the Local Government Act 2020 are really important pieces of work. The Spent Convictions Act 2021 is a really important act. The Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013, the Accident Compensation Act 1985, the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 – I could go on – are important pieces of legislation that go to the core business of the state, and making those provisions is indeed something that is really important. So I just want to point some of those things out. I was not going to do that, but I felt obliged to do so.

The bill itself before us goes to, as I mentioned, improving efficiency in our regulatory system, and it is why we have introduced four regulatory omnibus bills over the course of this term – because it goes to, as I mentioned, modernising those acts and indeed making for a better framework across the board. The amendments are many and varied, and I have mentioned the number of acts that are being amended. And I think it is important to note that when it comes to local government, making sure that we have got the most effective system of local government in place and to be able to make for those provisions within the Local Government Act is really important. When we look at the Spent Convictions Act, making amendments to the act of 2021 – that being those important changes and those important provisions which go to those changes – is incredibly important as well.

The bill before us is really difficult to summarise in the 3 minutes that I have got remaining, but broadly recognising that good regulation is good for both business and community, making for a more structured, more streamlined and better approach to some of this regulation, is really important. We know and understand that by reducing some of those burdens we can get better outcomes. Not just this side of the house but all members of the house should be keen to see those regulatory burdens streamlined and see a better approach in place. What we are focused on on this side of the house is getting that balance right, because of course it is important that the framework and the regulations are in place, and why might that be?

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Josh BULL:** Because we need to be, member for Frankston – and I knew you would be tuning in – making sure that we are getting that balance right to make for a safer, better system. Regulation is really important, because so often it is the guardrail that enables the system to operate. Without those guardrails we know that issues can occur. Making for provisions that go to having those guardrails operate as best as they can and indeed making for less regulatory burden is something that is really important. We certainly reserve the position to continue to make improvements. We certainly reserve the position to continue to enhance the system.

But I will finish where I started, and that is to say that the concerns I have raised over the past 10 minutes go to understanding just the importance of how the system works. Making sure we are getting that right in the very best way and making sure we are able to streamline that approach and come along and make amendments to acts when we see fit, listening to the advice of departments, listening to what the experience is on the ground and getting that balance right, getting that balance done in the appropriate way, are things that are very important. That is a very different approach to what we have seen from those opposite. We remain focused on communities, we remain focused on constituents and we remain focused on getting the best possible regulatory reform in place to make for better operations right across the state.

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (15:03): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026, and the first thing I come to on page 2 is talking about waste reduction. Now, waste reduction – I am surprised that the government would put this in a bill, because we are witnessing the biggest wasters Victoria has ever seen. We only have to look at the Commonwealth Games. They were supposed to start today, and \$600 million is just getting

poured down the toilet, and this is just another day in Victoria. They have gone to Scotland, and our regional centres have missed out on the infrastructure they were supposed to get – that they were promised. They do not have the tourists in places like Shepparton, Morwell and many others. The tourists are not there and the visitors are not there because the Commonwealth Games is no longer there.

I wonder what \$600 million would have done to fix our failing roads. I mentioned earlier today in this place that I was on the Black Dog Ride at Wangaratta, and the Kiewa Valley Highway is one of the highways. A bloke came off on that road, and it was a shocking bit of road. I got there just after he had fallen off, and it is amazing more did not. But even on the Great Alpine Road and other roads, I just look at what \$600 million could do to fix that. It would build another 40 schools in this region. Anyway, that is just another \$600 million that is gone. It just gets wiped, and it seems like the government does not care – just turn a page and move on.

The bill also talks about the Grain Handling and Storage Act 1995. We cannot talk about grain and grain handling without talking about the current fuel prices. There will not be a grain season this year if we are not very careful about how we manage the process going forward with the fuel prices. We do not need to go into rationing just yet – I am not suggesting that for a moment – but we do have to prioritise. We have to be very careful about how those who need fuel to get from A to B to run their business. We know trucks run this state. Trucks bring the food, they bring the raw materials and they take the food to the supermarkets. Without trucks on the road, Victorians will pay a very heavy price. The cost per litre is hitting all those businesses hard. We know that if the trucks stop or even slow down, Victoria stops. It is just important that the government takes a closer look at what this fuel situation is. We do know 55 per cent of our fuel comes out of Singapore. Of the fuel that comes into Singapore, a lot is from over in the Middle East, but some comes from other regions as well. I do not think there are concerns about that so much.

But the price of fuel is going to affect our communities, particularly when we are in a cost-of-living crisis like we are. It does not matter what your business is, whether you are a mechanic, a truss centre or a farmer. If you are a mechanic, you rely on ‘just in time’ to get the parts delivered to you. If you get a car in for a service, you need those parts this afternoon. If you are a truss centre, you cannot have thousands of tonnes of timber stacked up, you need to have that coming in and going. All this is trucks, all this is transport, to make sure our ‘just in time’ approach continues. Farmers rely on taking their grain to market in Melbourne and backloading with fertiliser. As we get closer to the autumn break, that is going to come more into play. Instead of talking about the regulatory legislation amendment bill and talking about sledge motions, we should be talking about a genuine debate about fuel and how we can prioritise to the regions. As I will say again, this is not about rationing fuel, this is about prioritising the regions. New South Wales have already confirmed they are going to support getting fuel to emergency services and certainly to essential services, and farming falls into that, as do trucking and other livelihoods. But that is just to keep the wheels turning, to keep the economy ticking over, because we know how important that is.

I heard the member for Werribee talking about fuel and how it will impact his electorate. Yes, it will impact his electorate, but when I looked on the internet I could see the public transport that he has available to him – electric trains into Melbourne, buses all over the place. Places like Wangaratta and Cobram get four services a day. That is it. Not 15, not 20, not 30 – we get four services a day. It is very difficult to get from, for example, a place like Cobram or Yarrawonga to Wangaratta. They come up from Melbourne. We get that. But at the end of the day we do not have the public transport to get our kids to school, get to work or even get to the supermarket. We cannot just jump on a 96 tram or a 601 bus, get to the supermarket and get our groceries, because we cannot afford the fuel or it is not reasonable to use the fuel, because it is not economical. I know the member for Werribee understands his electorate, but that is tenfold when you go to the regions, because it is not just getting around town, going to the supermarket or going to school; it is about making the wheels turn for farming, for agriculture and for the other transport businesses that do daily deliveries into Melbourne and from Melbourne to bring services back to our region.

As I was saying, for the roof truss guy or the mechanic who needs things out of Melbourne on a daily basis, we need to keep those wheels turning or we shut down very quickly. We cannot just jump on an electric train or a tram to do that. With the cost-of-living crisis, it is really tough out there, and people are hurting. I know the Premier was talking about it in question time, nearly making a joke about it. We were alarmist about Robinvale because they were out of fuel on the weekend. Robinvale needs pickers to get to work. They need almond harvesters to keep going. My understanding is that that Ampol in Robinvale that was out of fuel on the weekend is back out of fuel again now. It is really important to understand this is ongoing. This is going to hurt those communities at a critical time when harvest is on. We all know if we have got a veggie patch in our backyard, if we do not harvest our tomatoes soon, the birds or somebody else will get it. Nothing is different in agriculture in regional Victoria. You must harvest when it is ready to go, and that is a very small window. You need to have that fuel on board and ready to go, and that is hurting some of our communities now and will into the future. I urge the Premier to make sure that she takes the lead from New South Wales and says, 'How can we prioritise regional areas, essential services and emergency services?' to make sure those wheels keep turning.

Clauses 22 to 26 in this bill deal with exceptions to liability for littering offences by owners of certain vehicles. I understand that. People littering out of trains, trams, ferries, planes – I do not know how you litter out of a plane, but anyway. Making sure that that does not happen – I support that particular part of the legislation. It does not matter whether you are on public transport or in a private vehicle, I certainly do not support anybody littering at any time. That is a part of the bill that is worth going into.

Clause 32 is about serious misconduct in local government. It is quite amazing that this government, who is up to their armpits in corruption – we have seen that with the CFMEU; we have seen that with the Big Build – now want to clamp down on local government about serious misconduct. The local government is not responsible for the \$15 billion that was stolen. The CFMEU, the strippers, the Ford Raptors, the ghost shifts, the dodgy deals – local governments were not responsible for that. The government needs to be prepared to look in their own backyard before they get too concerned about serious misconduct in local government. They need to check out their own logbook first, because things are not really going to plan.

This legislation is not going to change the world for anybody. I know the member for Evelyn said this is not going to change anyone's lives. We should be debating the rorts, the stolen money, the corruption or the fuel, as I mentioned before. But this government continues to avoid that debate and refuses to talk about the billions of dollars that have been wasted. Sadly, those dollars have been wasted, but if they do not want to go looking for them, if they do not want to go searching for them, that is the frightening thing – a government that just wants to turn its back and say, 'Nothing to see here. Let's move on.' We could also be talking about following the money and keeping the trucks moving, like I spoke to before.

Coming back to fuel again, you cannot fill up jerry cans at most service stations, and that just makes life difficult. It does not matter whether you are trying to mow your lawns or fill up a motorbike or something else back at home, it really is quite inconvenient. In the city it is inconvenient, but in the regions it is essential that we have that fuel to keep those wheels turning. Having said that, I think I have covered off all the areas I would like to talk about. As I said, the fuel and the grain handling act parts of this are the most important parts of this bill at this point in time, because we are in a fuel crisis at the moment.

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (15:13): This is one of what will be only a few remaining occasions left, by this point in the cycle, for me to make a contribution on a bill in this place. Of course it is a great pleasure to rise on what is a very important piece of legislation, which, as a number of members have detailed, has quite a number of facets to it. It is a bill that is targeted at making it easier for businesses to do that exactly – business – and that aims to make regulation easier and more concise.

There will be lots of opinions, as there always are in this place, on the impacts and effects of those outcomes that we see from the legislation, which I wish a speedy passage through both houses. I am very proud to be part of the Allan Labor government, which continues to reform and continues to improve and look at ways we can make life easier for Victorians and for local business owners across the swathe of portfolios that are impacted here. I would like to thank in particular the Minister for Finance. I know that this bill also touches on local government, environment, the Attorney-General, WorkSafe, the TAC, energy and resources, and the Treasurer as well as industrial relations, so it is really a wideranging omnibus regulation reform.

We heard some speakers previously. We heard from the member for Sunbury, talking about how important it is to talk up this state, to talk up Victoria, and to talk about the great successes we are having, not forgetting to acknowledge, of course, there are always challenges and there are things we can always do better. That is what governments should strive to do: celebrate the wins and celebrate the successes but also acknowledge those areas for improvement, whether that be in the form of legislation or whether that be out there talking to stakeholders, talking to businesses and making sure we continue this work of improvement, this legislative program to do just exactly that. We have also heard from members opposite, some of it relevant and some of it not so relevant to the legislation, but again, this is just the place for it, so fair play.

Members opposite have spoken a little bit about cost of living. We know that the ongoing conflict at the moment is having significant and profound consequences for the price of fuel, and we have seen that the RBA have put up interest rates another 25 basis points. Make no mistake, that is going to hurt families, that is going to hurt working people, it is going to hurt businesses and it is of course going to hurt the end consumer, because the prices are always going to be passed on. It is important that we continue to look at cost of living, and it is an important part of any debate at the moment when we look at not just the Victorian context but also the Australian and global contexts.

Also on that note, when it comes to cost of living it is important to acknowledge that each level of government does have a role to play. I know the Minister for Consumer Affairs was detailing earlier in his ministers statement some of the work that he is doing with the servo fuel app – a fantastic idea. It was great to see the New South Wales Liberals are asking the wonderful Premier up there Chris Minns to look at adopting that fine work. Imitation is the greatest form of flattery. There are also some fantastic reforms we are doing in the real estate space, whether it be with the property reports or whether it be with the reserve price at auctions, making it easier for people to get into homes, levelling the playing field, whether it be this government's work around free TAFE, around free kinder or work from home. It seems every time I post about work from home a bunch of people from Queensland and regional New South Wales jump onto my post. I say keep going; it only smashes the algorithm – every single time I have mentioned work from home, I kid you not. I had a reel that was *Indiana Jones*; it was a 6-second thing and it had 80,000 views in 24 hours. There was another one that had Matthew McConaughey in *Interstellar*, and that was 100,000. So I say bring it on, although, sadly, I think there are probably only three or four people watching this, so I am not going to get quite the engagement that I am hoping for. To those three or four people, I am sorry. I apologise. This is not the most exciting contribution. I was not sure which camera it is. Maybe it is that one, actually – g'day.

I am very proud of this government's record when it comes to cost of living. Victorian energy upgrades got a shout-out today in question time, a fantastic program that the Minister for Energy and Resources has been rolling out that has been accessed by tens of thousands of Victorians. This is absolutely a government that is live to and aware of the fact that cost of living is a real issue for every Victorian. I am not sure there would be anyone who is not touched by the cost-of-living crisis that we have at the moment. I am grateful to hear the debate in this place today. It is important to acknowledge the challenges but also to acknowledge that this government has cost of living front and centre when it comes to our policies, and of course this legislation will in part address that through important reform when it comes to regulation.

This bill will make simple and uncontroversial amendments to various acts to support efficient and effective regulation. It will promote consistency with other legislation and existing policies, reduce the administrative burden of regulation, address technical errors and make minor updates. Some of the details of the proposal, which members have gone through – and I am sure other members in the time they have will also detail in great length depending on which one they find more interesting to their own benefit and cause – include the Local Government Act 2020, reintroducing the two-year restriction against former councillors becoming chief executive officer of the council after leaving office. There is some detail about giving arbiters the discretion to refer serious misconduct by councillors to the chief municipal inspector and some detail around the circular economy. There are some changes in terms of the Environment Protection Act 2017 and a whole raft of other changes that this bill seeks to address.

As I detailed before, I am very proud to be part of this government because it is a government that is committed to continuously improving the regulatory system and framework in which we each operate and in which our businesses operate. That is of course why we have, not just with this legislation, introduced four regulatory omnibus bills over the course of this term, because we absolutely believe in the importance of modernising our regulatory system to meet the needs of business and the broader community. The amendments in this bill, as detailed just previously, promote the integrity of local government by ensuring that detail around former councillors not being appointed as CEOs within two years of finishing their term in office. The Minister for Consumer Affairs knows full well, being a former councillor, the importance of this change and the positive impact it will have.

It is at this point in time I would like to give a shout-out to the local government sector, which the minister has a great deal of interactions with. I recently met the mayor, councillors, CEOs and relevant directors and managers at Knox City Council with a number of other colleagues, including the member for Monbulk and members in the other place, to discuss a range of advocacy matters that Knox City Council have, whether they be in the road space, public transport, food security, police and emergency services. In particular, coming back to that theme of cost of living, it is very easy to have a whack at local government, to have a whack at a local council, and we are probably all guilty of that at times. And sometimes they deserve it. We cop a whack; sometimes we deserve it. Others might agree we deserve a whack more often than not, but that is not for me to decide. But my point is that local government do a lot of things right, and it is great to see in this bill legislation strengthening the local government sector.

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** It is good to see the member for Hawthorn joining in for my contribution, watching with interest. I will await the request from *Hansard*. I will get the notification. The member for Hawthorn is looking for tips. He is down there; he is asking for the video. We will get the cut-ups on the reels. I am looking forward to it.

But our local government sector do great work. It is more than just the roads and rates and rubbish. I want to thank the councillors and the mayors for their work, and I want to thank the Minister for Local Government for his passion in the sector. Minister, it has been wonderful – through you, Acting Speaker – to see your passion for the sector. They actually say you are doing a great job. They like you, which is positive. It is more than can be said for any politician at any particular time. And of course we know there are productivity benefits to the reforms in this bill, ensuring the Victorian laws reflect the latest Intergovernmental Agreement on National Competition Policy, which aims to lift economic performance and improve our living standards. These amendments recognise that regulations touch every aspect of our community, from business to local governments to individuals, and our role as legislators is to ensure we are striving for no –

**Daniela De Martino** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** Excuse me, I am having a go here, member for Monbulk. She is interjecting while not in her chair, Acting Speaker – outrageous. I think I will leave my remarks there for the most part, after being rudely interrupted by the member for Monbulk. This is going to go down in history as a contribution I have –

**Daniela De Martino** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** It is on *Hansard*; it is true. I commend the bill to the house and I thank everyone for their time.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (15:23): I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026, and I acknowledge the comments of the opposition's lead speaker on this bill. She traversed its details quite eloquently, so I echo those. Of course we will not be opposing the bill, although we will have some amendments that the shadow minister foreshadowed for the upper house.

Like a lot of bills that come through this chamber, and certainly in the last 12 to 24 months, it is not so much what is in the bill but what it misses. Regulatory reform and the business environment that exists in Victoria is one of the most urgent policy priorities our state faces, so it is not what is in this bill that is so concerning, it is what it fails to enact. What we have been calling for and what we wanted to see in a regulatory bill that spruiks a commitment to reform – there is nothing by way of reform in here apart from, it must be said, a few matters, such as the spent convictions changes that are in the bill and which we of course support.

It is interesting because for the last two years one of Australia's premier employer bodies has delivered its report *Regulation Rumble*. Its most recent report, in 2025 – it is usually published at the end of the year – confirmed that Victoria is the worst jurisdiction to invest in when it comes to regulation, licensing and the requirements of starting and operating a business. Victoria comes in last when it comes to payroll tax and second last when it comes to other taxes.

We have got a report from the Business Council of Australia which is buttressed by other reports. The CommSec report and the NAB survey for the last few years have both highlighted the deficiencies in Victoria's business environment and pointed out, as many of us have, that we have a government in Victoria that is not friendly to investment and jobs. Ultimately that is what we are trying to do: we are competing domestically and internationally for jobs and investment. Even the government's *Economic Growth Statement*, which it rushed out in the second half of 2024, makes a commitment, among a number of very ambitious commitments, that by 2030 the government would halve the number of business regulators. We are nowhere near that; in fact we are going the other way. Nary a week goes by when we are not seeing new bureaucracy and new public sector offices being established, so rather than simplifying the system and rationalising the number of business regulators, which the government promised to do in its *Economic Growth Statement*, the government is failing its own test to make Victoria a more attractive place to invest. Its Silver review is something that the government is struggling with. It has almost got a split identity. It knows, having commissioned the report, that there was a reason for it, and yet it does not want to follow through on what Helen Silver has recommended, because it is not really committed to making Victoria the most attractive place for new jobs and business investment that will benefit all of us.

That brings me to a key point about the government's disingenuous approach to regulation. As I said, we have been calling for years now for a simplified set of regulations, reductions in red tape and an open door and welcome mat for businesses around the country and around the world. The government has failed to respond to that. I have already spoken about that today, but there is a disturbing trend that I do want to talk about because it is relevant to the backdrop of this bill.

The government wants to take regulation in areas that it is most interested in and push it behind closed doors, so regulation in some pressing policy areas is now being exercised and all of the powers and the decision-making that surround regulation in a number of key areas are no longer transparent, no longer visible. Let me give you a few examples of what I mean. At this point in time, on the estimates

I have been able to garner, around about 8000 dwellings have been approved by the Minister for Planning under the development facilitation program. The development facilitation program accelerates development proposals but in a manner which shields the decisions that the minister and her colleagues might make on those planning decisions from public scrutiny, transparency and oversight. We do not know what negotiations are held between the minister and a project proponent when those discussions are behind closed doors.

It is clear why the government is doing that: it wants to bump its approvals up and it does not want to expose its decisions to fair and proper scrutiny, so it runs them through. I raise that to ask: is that benchmark regulation? Is that decision-making which makes Victoria an attractive place to invest? When it comes to energy transmission and generation, the government – the same minister – is making decisions that ride roughshod over local communities. It is not to say whether a particular project should or should not proceed; that is not the point I am trying to make. Every project should be considered on its merits. But why is the government using this mechanism to make important decisions, which, unlike other decisions that are made in the regulatory space, are subject to review?

I say this because I am very concerned about the Minister for Government Services, who has been out in the media quite regularly talking about data centres. Now, I am not opposed to data centres. I think data centres are an important part of our future. But we had the NEXTDC proposal, a billion-dollar proposal, which was approved within 75 days for Port Melbourne. Again, it may or may not be a good project; that is not my point. My point is that these decisions are being made in respect of billion-dollar projects, and they are being made behind closed doors. So when it comes to data centres and you have a minister who is talking with all the excitement of a young child in a candy store, who does not seem to be talking about all of the other considerations that you must weigh in the balance when you are approving these things – demands on water, demands on energy, demands on space, land use planning and all of these important decisions – if you are making these decisions behind closed doors, that is not telling the world and that is not telling the country that we have a regulatory regime that you can trust, that you can see and that you can appreciate for its consistency and for its ability to attract all of those investments that we all want. We know that Victoria's jobless rate is the highest in the country. We are under pressure. We have businesses that can so easily redeploy their staff and their capital to other jurisdictions nationally or even internationally. We are living in such a competitive environment, so a government that understands that regulation must be as simple as possible, must be consistent and must be transparent is the true pathway to regulatory reform.

This bill is not controversial. For the most part, we do not have too many issues with it, as the lead speaker Mr McCurdy pointed out. But it is what the bill is missing. It is interesting, because the government seems to have a mixed appetite for regulation. On some things it wants to overregulate – as I said, the government has repeatedly brought into this place legislation that establishes new public sector offices and new layers of bureaucracy. But when it comes to construction, it should not be forgotten, particularly as we approach November, that one of this government's first acts was to abolish the building and construction code and the implementation guidelines in 2015, which provided very sound pathways for, for example, the reporting of illegal and intimidatory conduct on taxpayer-funded worksites. The government did not want to do that. When it comes to tobacco licensing, why did it take so long for the government to bring in not only a licensing regime but, belatedly, the enforcement powers that need to accompany such a regime? This government does not really have any genuine commitment to regulatory reform, and it certainly has an aversion, a disturbing aversion, to transparency and oversight of how important decisions in planning, energy and construction are taking place.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (15:33): It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to make a contribution on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. It is always a great pleasure to follow the learned member for Hawthorn, who carried on the great Liberal tradition, at least in this term, of talking down Victoria; he spoke at length about what Victoria is last on. I think he may have mentioned payroll tax et cetera. But do you know what Victoria is not last on? It is not

last on private business investment. In fact in the last calendar year up to December 2025, Victoria was second in the country only to South Australia for private business capital coming into the state. It grew by 12.9 per cent last year – 12.9 per cent – and that private capital is what is fuelling our incredibly strong economic growth. I think our economy grew by 2.6 per cent in the last year, which is not huge in historical terms, but in terms of how Australia's economy is growing at the moment, that puts us as one of the fastest growing economies in the nation.

The member for Hawthorn's contribution followed the member for Evelyn's contribution, and she did the same thing: talk down Victoria to the rest of the world. Honestly, if business leaders outside of Victoria were just to watch and listen to this place, and listen to the Victorian Liberal Party and how they talk about Victoria, they would never invest here ever. They talk this state down so much it bewilders me that they want to govern it, to be frank. As I said, private investment into Victoria is one of the strongest of any state in the nation, and that is because we are a state that is open for business. We always have been and we always will be under an Allan Labor government.

This is a bill that covers several different key areas, a couple of which I will go into as part of this contribution. The first that I want to touch on was the spent convictions element of this bill. Everybody in this place, and indeed everybody around Victoria, now knows that this government has had to pull a couple of different levers in a legislative respect to keep this community safe – to keep Victorians safe. That includes legislating so the judiciary can hand down punishments to young offenders that fit the crime that they have committed. But what we also have to be conscious of is young people that may perhaps have made a mistake in their life, and this spent convictions element of this bill – somebody that has made a mistake in their life that is not a violent or a serious or a major crime has a conviction hanging over their head. For a 20-something-year-old that may have committed a minor offence in their teen years who has a conviction hanging over their head, that can be detrimental to that person's ability to gain employment in many areas of the Victorian economy and to do many other things as well. I note that the opposition supports this change as well, because I think it fundamentally is a positive change when we are talking about people rehabilitating, getting on with their lives and becoming fruitful members of our state. I just wanted to touch on that component of this bill at the outset.

We have spoken at length about the changes to local government, which I will not go into, but another incredibly important component of this bill is the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. We as a Victorian government, since we came to power in 2014, decided that we were going to be one of the most ambitious anywhere in the country when it came to protecting our environment and when it came to the generation of renewable energy as well. This regulatory reform bill goes right to that with these circular economy changes.

I am obviously the member for Tarneit, and residents in Tarneit take impacts to Victoria's environment incredibly seriously. They do so because it is a very large South Asian and Pacific Islander community, and they come from places – from countries – that feel the effects of climate change in a disproportionate way. So when this government talks about environmental change and environmental policy, the people in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing absolutely love it, and they do not just talk the talk, they walk the walk. When we go to Victoria's solar rebate program, Tarneit residents are some of the largest uptakers anywhere in Victoria. Over 13,000 families have taken advantage of that rebate and put solar panels on their homes. That is not just good for the environment, it is also good for the hip pocket. It means that during peak times, during the day when the sun is out, the energy generation that they are getting off their solar panels is going to drive down their power bills, but it is also going to drive down Victoria's emissions, which is incredibly important.

A further 70,000 rebates for the VEU have been taken advantage of in Tarneit as well. For those that are not aware of this rebate through the VEU, for instance, if you have got an old gas hot water service that has come to the end of its life, you can take advantage as long as you qualify. As long as you meet the means test, you can take advantage of Victoria's VEU program – Victorian energy upgrade program – and you can swap out that old gas hot water service for a new electric heat pump for about

the same price as it would cost just to replace the gas hot water service or even a little bit lower. What that will do is make your home more energy efficient. It will drive down emissions, but it will also drive down your power costs each month, because we know that gas at the moment is the most expensive form of power. That is because we have diminishing gas reserves in both the Gippsland Basin and the Otway Basin, although there has been a good discovery in the Otway Basin in recent times. That is an incredibly important component of this bill, to make sure that we are driving our way towards that ambitious renewable energy target of 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035. Obviously offshore wind and other really large projects are going to be the major drivers of that, but we all need to do our bit, and the Tarneit community is absolutely doing that.

I contest the notion that Victoria has a complicated regulatory framework. I contest the notion that that is stopping businesses from investing in this state. As I said at the outset of this contribution, the numbers do not lie. I am not sure where the member for Evelyn got her numbers from, but the most recent ABS data is absolutely clear: an increase of 12.9 per cent in private business investment into Victoria in the last calendar year. That is driving economic growth, which is some of the fastest anywhere in Australia, right here in this state. And this bill, whilst it does not go to economic reform, makes the regulatory framework amongst a whole bunch of settings in our economy – whether that be local government, whether that be the circular economy or whether that be in the justice system – a lot easier, because those parts of the Victorian economy need a simpler regulatory framework. As I said at the outset of this contribution, I have never been a day in this place this term when those opposite have not talked down Victoria. Those on this side of the house will continue to support Victorians, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (15:43): I also rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. Going through the detail, there is not a great deal of reform. We have heard it is very much a tidy-up bill. It contains technical adjustments, but it seems to be avoiding some of those big issues – the 13th amendment to the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021, as an example, in the last four years. If only we could get it right the first time, we would not be spending quite so much time.

There are a few areas of the legislation that I want to talk about, because as the member for Tarneit was speaking and making these allegations that we are factually incorrect on our side, I thought it prudent to direct him to some of the voices of Victorians. Earlier the member for Bayswater was really excited about his social media engagement – good on him. But there are a few videos that have been put up in the last couple of days on the fuel situation in regional Victoria and the inability to fill jerry cans or fill tanks or get some fuel to our farms that have had hundreds of thousands of views. The comments on those posts are really interesting, and I urge everyone that has got up to speak today to read some of those comments, because they are not glowing of the situation in Victoria – because their lives are being impacted by the consequence of shocking policy by this government.

I am first going to quickly speak about the Grain Handling and Storage Act 1995, which goes directly to the crisis that we have unfolding right now in regional Victoria. Earlier today the Premier was talking about convening a meeting to discuss the fuel crisis in regional Victoria. Last weekend – not the one that just passed, the one before – the CFA issued communications to all of our brigades saying ‘Fill up your tanks.’ So the notice was there – the understanding that we are facing a fuel crisis – over a week ago, and yet it has taken this amount of time for this government to step in and actually do something about it. Today my community is faced with power outages. I cannot tell you how many messages I have received and emails and calls there have been to our office saying, ‘We have no power, and we have no fuel to fuel our generators to give us power.’ And these are not people wanting to turn on the heater or the aircon, these are people needing to run their homes, their livelihoods and their businesses to fuel regional Victoria. They cannot access their power.

I have been speaking over the last few days to Dave and Kirrily of Petrostar. They are an independent fuel retailer in our region. Independents, as we heard earlier today in question time, have been criticised for working the spot market. They need to, because the major fuel distributors no longer deliver to

farms. I worry that the reality check for this government – the warning signals are there right now – will come when the prices on our shelves in the supermarkets spike and are exploding, when we see the cost of our meat and our vegetables, grown in Victoria, spike because it is not affordable to get our produce to market. We cannot get our produce to market. I had a text message today from CJ Ogston, who runs a machinery business. He cannot run his business. Ange Doyle is running our Gooram recovery committee in a fire-affected community. All of those communities that are trying to recover from the Longwood bushfire cannot even put fuel in their chainsaws right now. So it is not just people wanting to get around and drive their cars to and from school or do drop-offs or go to the supermarket. While that is all very critical, this is about fuelling the state. Please stop ignoring it. It is a crisis. These allegations that we are scaremongering are absolutely outrageous.

During question time I received a message from Warren about price gouging. We have evidence of people promoting a cost of diesel in cents per litre that is not reflective of the current prices in our community. I put up a video yesterday, and the prices have gone up nearly 60 cents in 24 hours. This is astronomical and requires a government that is willing to listen to Victorians and not gaslight them and say, 'There is no issue here. Move on.' I guarantee you, if the government's response is to provide free public transport, there is going to be outrage in regional Victoria. We do not have public transport that connects our communities. I can hear the minister at the table, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, trying to criticise and belittle this contribution, and I want to say that if you expect our communities –

**Mathew Hilakari:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on her feet is misleading the house, and I would bring her back to relevance.

**Bridget Vallence:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I heard exactly what the minister was saying. He was denigrating the speaker in relation to what she was talking about – the concerns in her community about the lack of fuel and all that goes with it.

**Nick Staikos:** On this ridiculous point of order, Acting Speaker, I was having a conversation with my colleague here at the table about what the Victorian Farmers Federation said today. That was it. I think she should continue with her fantastic contribution.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** I did not hear the minister at the table, but please speak through the Acting Speaker.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** It looks like I have struck a nerve. I think it is about time the government does understand the fuel crisis that is unfolding. Let us have a reality check. Let us listen to Victorians. Let us understand and let us not ignore or gaslight. Let us actually say, 'What is wrong and how can we help?' Imagine a government that says, 'How can we help and improve your lives?' and does not constantly put pressure and taxes on individuals and households during the cost-of-living crisis.

I just wanted to quickly talk about the Environment Protection Act 2017 too. This is the first time in a decade that we have had a crisis, a natural disaster, in our communities where the government has not instated a universal clean-up. Right now there are individuals who are insured that cannot lean on the government clean-up program because they are purely supporting those that are uninsured. This is causing a two-tiered haves and have-nots when it comes to recovering from our bushfire. We are being short-changed; this is penny pinching. At the same time, we are seeing more than \$15 billion wasted on Big Build sites by this government turning a blind eye to extraordinary corruption. The impact that has on people's lives is things like not having a universal clean-up program, not allowing our communities to get back on their feet after such a significant disaster.

I will also quickly speak about the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987. I understand the bill removes the requirement to display a notice on land subject to a land management cooperative agreement. At first glance that may not be a high-risk amendment. However, with what we have seen recently with the VicGrid bill, allowing these authorities to charge onto private properties without consent and the division that is causing in regional Victoria, we have enormous concerns about this division. We need transparency. It is a right for our community to understand what is going on. If we

have learned anything from this government, it is that they lack transparency and that secrecy is something they enable. We want to make sure that there is transparency in land use, because it is fundamental in regional communities. When land is used for conservation offsets or agreements tied to developments, people expect to know what is going on.

There is a lot of clean-up in this legislation, but we do have concerns that once again this is chip, chip, chipping away at regional communities' rights and on the transparency of communicating what this government is doing behind their backs. Regional Victorians want transparency, and we cannot make that clear enough. We have a right to understand what is going on in our neighbour's property and as a community. But one thing we all see on this side is that this bill actually avoids the true challenges that we are facing in regional Victoria. We need to really address the economic and governance challenges facing Victorians. We need a government that is for once finally transparent and cares about regional Victorians and does not gaslight them every single day.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (15:53): I also rise to make a contribution to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. It is a bill that includes quite a number of changes, a few of which I want to concentrate on, being particularly the changes to the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 and also the Local Government Act 2020. Before I do so I do want to I guess reflect on a number of the regulatory changes that this government has made. I was lucky to be in the Treasurer's office as the Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Growth when the *Economic Growth Statement* was put together. It did put a big emphasis on reducing regulatory burden, and I know there was a previous speaker who was complaining that this had not happened quickly enough, to his liking.

I do see that we have passed a number of bills and we have made a number of changes to agencies and to regulations that will streamline this process. Sometimes members of those organisations are not necessarily happy with the decisions of the government, but we see that it is important in the broader structure of the economy to be looking at where we can improve this productivity and improve this efficiency.

There are a number of changes, as I said, in relation to the circular economy act which will boost the tools available to the regulator to make better decisions and to help regulated entities understand and comply with their obligations. Thinking about the changes to the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act made me think of this morning. Before I came to Parliament I had the opportunity to unearth a time capsule in Blackburn that had been buried at a Centenary of Federation event 25 years ago – a pretty short time capsule – and fortunately enough we had someone who was actually present at the initial burial, who was the youth representative on the day, who came down to Blackburn again this morning to help with the unearthing. When it was revealed, it included a whole lot of posters that had been done by the local primary school, the kids at Blackburn Primary School, so a big shout-out to all those kids at Blackie primary. I am not sure if that had been intended or that was the message that had been requested by the teacher at the time, but many of them took an environmental slant. Many of them were using a slogan that we know very well, which is to reduce, recycle and reuse. When we think about it, the fact that this was 25 years ago and we were pushing this slogan and this was embedded in the kids' minds at primary school 25 years ago, it is still just as relevant today as it was 25 years ago. It is pleasing to see that we have come further in our journey. We are now using more technology to try and deal with similar problems and the same problems. Obviously since those 25 years have passed the amount of waste that we create, with the amount of people that we have, has increased and therefore our solutions have to be smarter. I heard a news article on the radio today about some breakthrough at a university in Scotland where they were able to transform plastic waste into a drug that treats Parkinson's. I am sure that is still at a very early level of testing, but it just is representative of what we need to do when we think about reusing, recycling and reducing our waste.

There are some other important amendments in relation to the Local Government Act which I want to reflect on. One is in relation to the definition of 'serious misconduct' and particularly a clause which inserts new section 5A(1)(h), which concerns the intentional or reckless disclosure by a councillor of information that the councillor knows or should reasonably know is confidential information. This one

struck me in particular because I do recall an example in the not-too-distant past where a councillor had actually provided me with information that should have been confidential, which had been provided to them by a government agency in confidence, and that councillor was just freely discussing that matter in a public setting.

I was actually really surprised that the councillor would go there and go to that position given that the information had been clearly passed on in a confidential matter. Now, you can see where this problem could escalate – if there were a clear discussion of confidential information outside the bounds of the council chambers. Councillors obviously have the opportunity to discuss matters in camera and have briefings in camera where the confidential information is passed on, and as with all elected officials there is the expectation that if you receive confidential information that information does remain confidential and it is not passed on, whether that be to members of the public or even other elected officials, because that is betraying the confidence in which the information has been received. So I think this just places it neatly on record in terms of how that use of confidential information is considered.

There are also some changes in relation to the local government act in relation to the election of councillors if they have served as council staff and vice versa – if they have been councillors and they go on to serve as council staff and there needing to be a break between those periods of time. I think this is really important, because I was actually having this discussion the other day with some members of the community about the distinct role of the councillors versus the role of council officers, including the CEO. The CEO of a council and many of the senior officers there – many of them have been there for many years; they have gone through many cycles, different election cycles. Sometimes they will change council, but that is their profession. That is their job. But the councillor has a very different role, and councillors are the ones that ultimately are accountable to the people every four years at the council elections. And the reason that we were having this discussion was in the context of some people in the community feeling that councillors were delegating too many of their decisions to council officers and to, say, council CEOs and directors, for decisions that were seen as critical to the council and to the community. They would want to see that the councillors, as the elected officials, be ultimately accountable to the people in this respect. I think that that really goes to the nub of why we need this separation between a councillor and an appointment as CEO or an appointment as staff, because they are two very distinct roles in terms of their responsibilities, and they should not be seen as being mixed. So I think there are some good reforms in this bill, and I commend it to the house.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (16:03): I also rise to address the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. In contributing to this bill I would like to wish those who celebrate and those who do not a very happy St Patrick's Day. I am sure in relation to bill relevance there is somewhere within the 13 acts across nine different portfolio areas where that might be relevant. I would challenge any member in the chamber today to raise a point of order and wish the clerks all the very best in assisting you in ruling upon it.

This is an opportunity, I believe, to draw attention to a number of issues. Firstly, I thank the member for Evelyn, the shadow minister responsible for this bill, whose contribution on behalf of the opposition was an outstanding one and a detailed one, for her work to really pull together such a comprehensive bill report on behalf of the coalition – which, as I said, seeks to amend some 13 different acts across nine various portfolio areas – and the member for Evelyn's determined and purposeful engagement with some of her shadow ministerial colleagues in that vein.

I do note that some of the acts that this bill seeks to amend include the Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Act 1995; the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987; the Environment Protection Act 2017; the Gas Industry Act 2001; the Grain Handling and Storage Act 1995; the Local Government Act 2020; the Spent Convictions Act 2021; the Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972; the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013; the Accident Compensation Act 1985; the Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Act 2025; and the Restricting Non-disclosure Agreements (Sexual Harassment at Work) Act 2025.

I would like to focus, if I may, on just one or two of those particular acts that this bill seeks to amend, specifically the Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Act 2025. As you may be aware, in Victoria at the moment there is a circumstance where corruption seems to be the topic du jour. It seems to be a business-as-usual approach in this state and under this government, something which we on this side of the house, the members of the opposition, the coalition, both Liberals and Nationals, vehemently oppose. And we do not just oppose it; we are seeking to do something about it. What I cannot understand for the life of me is why the government would not do the same and take the circumstance of corruption and disrespect for Victorian taxpayers money in the same serious way that members of the opposition, the alternative government, are taking it.

You may recall that during the last sitting week, during question time I asked the Premier a question. The question was in relation to the activities of M1 Security Services and in relation to their labour hire licence. I did note in my question to the Premier that a gentleman named Stephen Kyriacou was in fact the nominated officer for M1 Security Services. I further noted in my question to the Premier that in 2022 Mr Kyriacou was banned from managing a licensed premises after a woman was found dead in the basement of Dreams Gentlemen's Club. Her cause of death was multiple drug toxicity. I asked the Premier at the time: why did the Premier consider Mr Kyriacou to be a fit and proper person to hold a labour hire licence? I did that because it is quite clear that Mr Kyriacou has not been determined to be a fit and proper person to hold the licence to operate a venue, and yet under the government's labour hire legislation, which is referenced and being amended in this Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 today, for some reason, under the fit and proper person test that was established with that bill and then amended in 2025, when the government, through media reporting and further pressure, determined to refresh that fit and proper person test, through that lens Mr Kyriacou has apparently been deemed to be a fit and proper person to be the nominated officer for M1 Security Services labour hire firm. The question that I ask is: is Mr Kyriacou in fact a fit and proper person to hold such a position as a nominated officer for M1 Security Services, given his history and given another state agency has determined that he is in fact not a fit and proper person to hold a licence of a venue – in this case Dreams Gentlemen's Club – following the death of a woman on the premises? Why, in that case, does the Labour Hire Authority consider Mr Kyriacou to be a fit and proper person to be the nominated officer for M1 Security Services?

Could it be that the person who has a link to M1 Security Services is a gentleman by the name of Mick Gatto? Could that be the case? Could that be the reason why in this circumstance Mr Kyriacou, under the arrangements relating to the Labour Hire Authority, and whether he is a fit and proper person has not been called into question? I think it is a legitimate question. It is something which I have not just asked the Premier about in this place. Needless to say, the Premier's response was less than adequate. In my view – perhaps not in the view of the standing orders, but certainly in my view – the Premier did not directly respond to the question which I asked, so much so that on 5 March this year, at the end of the last sitting week, I wrote to the commissioner of the Labour Hire Authority Mr Steve Dargavel specifically in relation to this matter.

I asked Mr Dargavel a series of questions. When did the Labour Hire Authority, for example, first become aware of concerns regarding M1 Traffic & Labour? What complaints, intelligence or referrals has the Labour Hire Authority received in relation to that entity? What investigative or compliance steps were undertaken by the Labour Hire Authority prior to questions posed by the Queensland commission of inquiry and the Victorian opposition in Parliament? On what basis does the Labour Hire Authority consider Mr Kyriacou, the nominated officer for M1 Security Services, to be a fit and proper person given that in 2022 he was banned from managing a licensed premises after a woman was found dead in the basement of Dreams Gentlemen's Club?

I asked why the Labour Hire Authority had determined 4 March to be an appropriate day to announce that it had issued a notice to M1 Traffic & Labour advising it that it intended to cancel its licence and why enforcement action was not taken earlier if the Labour Hire Authority had been aware of these matters. They are all, in my view, very worthy, relevant questions given that we on this side actually

give a stuff about how Victorian taxpayers money is treated. We want to stamp out corruption in this state. From the inaction of the government, Acting Speaker, I put it to you that those sitting on the government benches give less of a stuff about doing just that.

I am sad to report to the house that to date Mr Dargavel has not responded to the series of questions which I posed to him. I further note that Mr Dargavel is a former union boss and a former Labor member of the federal Parliament. If you want to know what sort of person Mr Dargavel is, just ask former New South Wales senator and union boss Doug Cameron for a character assessment on Mr Dargavel, which calls into question, I believe, Mr Dargavel's suitability for fulfilling his what should be an independent role –

**Natalie Hutchins:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I fail to see the relevance to the bill in regard to the opposition's arguments.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage):** The member's time has expired.

**Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (16:13):** I am delighted to rise today to make a contribution to the debate on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. I do so because this is another important bill, one that will make simple but uncontroversial amendments to a host of acts to support efficient and effective regulations, to promote consistency with other regulations and existing policy, to reduce the administrative burden of regulation and to address technical errors and make minor updates. As mentioned, there are a number of acts being amended by this bill, the first of those being the Local Government Act 2020.

Before I go to that, I note the Minister for Local Government is at the table. I welcomed the minister to my electorate to visit the Clarinda Library. It is on the opposite side – the divider of the electorate is Centre Road – of where the minister had very fond memories from a younger age. We could also visit Westall Secondary.

**Nick Staikos** interjected.

**Meng Heang TAK:** We could have a great time over there. We know that the minister knows it very well in terms of the area, the locality and the demographic of the electorate. So thank you, Minister, once again for making that trip.

To come back to the bill, it will see change in the Local Government Act 2020 to support effective and efficient regulations by reintroducing a two-year restriction against former councillors becoming council chief executive officers, CEOs, after leaving office, as well as giving arbiters the discretion to refer serious misconduct by councils to the chief municipal inspector.

The Clarinda district covers part of two local government areas. One is the City of Kingston – and I will come back to the City of Kingston just a little bit later – and the City of Greater Dandenong, two fantastic local government areas. I have a really productive relationship with councillors and officers of both. At the City of Greater Dandenong it is great to see Cr Sophie Tan as the city mayor once again, a really fantastic achievement – the first Cambodian Australian woman to be elected as mayor. Congratulations once again; it is really well deserved and she is doing a great job in that role. We hosted a mobile office together in Springvale South a couple of weeks back, together with the local ward councillor Cr Loi Truong, another fantastic, hardworking councillor there. It was great to catch up and chat with local residents about things that matter to them across all different levels of government, and I look forward to doing so once again.

In terms of the City of Kingston, we have a really strong working relationship and we have been working through several tough issues together recently. The former Kingswood golf course redevelopment is one such issue that is really important to many of our shared community, particularly in Dingley Village. Dingley is really a special place. I can call Dingley home, an amazing community and a passionate community, and one that I am really lucky to represent. The golf course redevelopment goes back many years, indeed almost 10 years, and it is something that I have had

much engagement with the Kingston council on, trying to ensure that there is a net community benefit for our community around the development. That has been a long and challenging process that I am sure has been strongly felt by many in the community. We have had a lot of community engagement recently around roads, supporting infrastructure, green space, environmental outcomes and neighbourhood character. We continue to advocate strongly for infrastructure and other commitments. Whilst there are some road improvements which have been included for Centre Dandenong Road and some outcomes on landscaping and tree retention, we really want to see more to make sure that this represents a net benefit for the community in Dingley. I will continue with the engagement with Kingston and to advocate strongly with the Minister for Planning leading to the planning permit stage, which represents another opportunity for improvements.

But it is great to have a relationship with both our local councils. We can see some changes here to the Local Government Act 2020, which sees change to support effective and efficient regulations by reintroducing two-year restrictions against former councillors becoming council chief executive officers after leaving office, as well as giving arbiters the discretion to refer serious misconduct by councillors to the chief municipal inspector. And it was great once again to welcome the minister at the table, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, on a visit to the Clarinda Library the other day – it was fantastic – accompanied by the mayor and councillors from the neighbouring council, which is the City of Monash. Thank you once again, Minister. These are important changes and ones that will help to ensure and maintain effective and efficient regulations.

There are also changes here to the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021, which is to enable the Environment Protection Authority Victoria to stop the clock when it is not reasonably practicable to determine an application for exemption from any provisions or a service standard within a 28-day period. For example, this will enable the Environment Protection Authority to request further information on an application, rather than needing to restart the process or make decisions without adequate information. This will expressly allow the EPA to incorporate documents in certain regulatory instruments. This will ensure the EPA can apply and adopt or incorporate other documents, codes and standards when preparing the following regulatory instruments, for example, including exemptions, services standards, circular economy risks, consequence and contingency plans and guidelines issued in relation to risk, consequence and planning.

We also have further changes to the Environment Protection Act 2017. This is to ensure a registered owner can nominate another person for littering from a vehicle, so the registered owner of a vehicle is not unduly held accountable for an offence which they did not commit; and to provide for more specific requirements for a written statement when nominating another person responsible for a littering offence, instead of demonstrating reasonable belief. These are all important changes to our community. Littering and dumping are also a problem in our local community. I was very happy to also have the opportunity with the Minister for Environment last year to make an announcement on a crackdown on illegal dumping across Victoria, cleaning up our parks and reserves and holding illegal dumpers accountable for the mess they leave behind. That was a \$21.5 million boost to the Illegal Dumping Taskforce, delivering extra financial support for councils and for public land managers to clean up illegally dumped waste. We heard from Kingston and Dandenong land managers, who are facing an increase in dumping. That is why we are delivering that \$8.5 million to help ease the burden of clean-up costs for illegally dumped and toxic waste in our public spaces.

These are very important changes. As my time runs out, I am sure that my colleagues will also be touching on many other changes, as well as the amendments of the technical errors and minor updates across several other acts. Once again, I am happy to support this bill and its many amendments. It is another important one and one that will make simple, uncontroversial amendments to a host of acts that will help to support efficient and effective regulation in Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (16:23): I rise to make a contribution to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. The bill that we are debating today seeks to make over 40 different amendments across 13 different acts of Parliament and nine ministerial portfolios. The bill seeks to

make a number of inconsequential amendments to various pieces of legislation to update outdated references. On this side of the house we support genuine reform. We support reducing red tape, improving efficiency and ensuring that regulation is fit for purpose in a modern economy. But reform must be meaningful. It must deliver real outcomes, not just administrative reshuffling dressed up as progress, because right now Victoria is not in a position where we can afford hollow reform. We are a state facing significant economic challenges. We are carrying record levels of debt, and we are seeing cost-of-living pressures biting hard into families, businesses and regional communities more than ever before. Yet the minister stands in this place and claims that this bill will deliver economic benefit but cannot clearly articulate what that benefit is. Victorians deserve more than vague assurances. They deserve clarity, transparency and confidence that legislation brought before this Parliament will actually make a difference. The government says this bill is about reform, about streamlining regulatory frameworks and improving efficiency, but where is the detail? Where is the measurable economic benefit? Where is the bill addressing the state's record debt? The state, as I have said, is drowning in debt.

Where is the clear explanation of how this will reduce costs for businesses or ease pressures on households? Right now businesses are not crying out for flimsy reform, they are crying out for relief and support. If this is a reform bill aimed at delivering economic benefit, then it should be laser focused on reducing the cost of doing business. It should be about cutting unnecessary regulation, not shifting it. It should be about simplifying compliance, not complicating it. And it should be about giving businesses certainty, not adding to uncertainty. If this bill is truly about reform, then it must do more than shift administrative arrangements. Businesses are dealing with rising energy costs, rising insurance costs, rising wage pressures and, critically, rising taxes and charges. Right now regional communities are carrying a heavy load. They are dealing with rising fuel costs and in some cases no fuel at all, they are dealing with workforce challenges and they are dealing with a cost-of-living crisis that is hitting harder than ever. They are dealing with increasing crime, housing shortages and escalating rental costs. As you can imagine, the current fuel uncertainty is hitting our farmers hard, and they are crying out for assistance. When farming slows down, the whole economy slows down. Fuel uncertainty has a ripple effect on transport, machinery operators, small businesses and the increased cost of fuel, impacting on cost of living at a time when households are already on their knees.

We hear that people should be taking public transport and saving on fuel. It is times like this that the lack of public transport services is highlighted in my region. We have been crying out for more bus services, as has the council and as has the community. The Labor government continually turn their back on regional communities, who cannot get to where they need to go. They cannot depend on public transport services under a Labor government. Do you know we have some towns with no or very limited bus services – no public transport services? There is no choice to reduce car travel if you do not have a car. The government does not understand regional communities.

Today we would have had the start of the Commonwealth Games in Shepparton. Shepparton was where the regional Commonwealth Games was born. I was on the taskforce in the early days, and you can imagine the excitement when it was announced that we would be having regional Commonwealth Games – something that, as I said, we played a very big role in. I was mayor at the time and I was in Ballarat at the announcement. I was not allowed down on the oval, which was interesting, where the announcement was happening, but that is another story. It was something that we were incredibly proud of. It had been years in the making. When we talk about the \$600 million that has been lost, that does not consider what the local governments had actually invested in the regional Commonwealth Games prior to all of this. The cancellation of the games has been a heavy blow for my region and all of the regional communities that were to host the games. The games were not just a sporting event; they were a once-in-a-generation opportunity for regional communities to have a significant economic boost that injected hope into our local businesses and excitement into our region. Local businesses in the Shepparton district were preparing for an influx of visitors, with expectations of increased trade for our hospitality, retail and accommodation sectors. Hotels, cafes, restaurants and local transport providers had made significant investments anticipating the economic boost the games would bring.

Cancelling the event has meant lost revenue, lost jobs and lost opportunities, and the loss of \$600 million is just astounding on top of the recent \$15 billion lost in rorts on Big Build sites.

Out on the ground, people are angry, and they are being continually hit with more or increased taxes. They are angry that their hard-earned taxes are going up in smoke on criminal activity. They are angry that the roads are crumbling and full of potholes. They do not feel safe in their homes. Police stations are closed or on reduced hours, and people are struggling to put food on the table or roofs over their heads. Small and medium enterprises are the backbone of Victoria's economy. They create jobs, foster innovation and support regional communities. When they leave, we all feel the impact: fewer jobs, weaker regional economies and less investment in our state. Already we see businesses citing Victoria's high costs and regulatory complexity as reasons to relocate to New South Wales, Queensland or South Australia. This trend cannot continue. It is this government that is responsible for making it so expensive and hard to do business in this state.

One part of the bill that I am very interested in also speaking to is around local government. The bill seeks to clarify that VCAT is to hear disputes regarding an election result in its original jurisdiction, preventing disputes and ensuring that the integrity of local government in Victoria is maintained.

It is hoped that this amendment will reduce delays to substantive consideration of the matter and reduce the uncertainty experienced by communities about their council representatives. The bill does call for a consistency in the enforcement of restrictions on the conduct of councillors. As you are aware, and as I have mentioned, I was in local government prior to being in this place. During that time I had four years as mayor. I will say it can be really challenging managing fellow councillors, and the councillor code of conduct often does not go far enough. We are seeing to this day that there are still councils having issues. When councillors engage in misconduct the consequences can be significant. Misconduct can take many forms, such as bullying, harassment, misuse of council resources, failing to declare conflicts of interest, breaching confidentiality or behaving in ways that bring the council into disrepute. The impact of this behaviour extends far beyond the individual councillor; it damages the reputation of the entire council and erodes public trust in local government institutions. Community confidence can take years to rebuild once it is lost.

Back in March 2023 Moira shire councillors were all sacked. There is no doubt that there were very serious issues that had to be dealt with and severe consequences, which I am not disputing. My concern is the length of time that the community were left without councillor representatives and that they will not have an election until 2028. This has had an enormous impact on the community, having no councillors on the ground to represent them. Whilst I acknowledge that Matt, the CEO, and the administrators are doing their best, having no councillors is a huge gap, and I know firsthand the important role that the mayor and councillors play in their communities. Local government is the level of government closest to the community. There is a reason why we have elected representatives voted in by the people, and I feel that that democratic right has been taken away from the people of Moira shire for too long. It will be almost six years without councillors by the time the next election comes around, which is far too long in my mind and for many of the constituents who are constantly reaching out to me with local government matters. We have to work out where things can be done better to avoid this from happening in any other electorate.

Currently the Local Government Act 2020 enables a councillor conduct panel to hear an application that alleges serious misconduct by a councillor. The definition of 'serious misconduct' includes disclosure of confidential information by a councillor. There is also an offence provision under the same act for disclosure of confidential information by councillors. These two enforcement mechanisms frame the prohibition of disclosure of confidential information differently, which leads to uncertainty and delays when allegations are made and thereby heard by the conduct panel.

Another objective is to make several minor updates and corrections to existing legislation. As such, the bill corrects the reference to incorrect substitutes of the Local Government Act under the definition of 'election material'. Currently the definition itself refers to a subsection in which it describes the

meaning of 'election' instead of 'electoral matter'. Another one is around correcting the omission of provisions from the previous Local Government Act 1989 in the current act today due to an oversight.

As we know, whilst a current councillor cannot be a member of council staff and a person who was a councillor in the previous two years cannot be employed by the CEO as a member of council staff, a person who was a councillor in the previous two years is not currently prevented from being appointed by council to the CEO. I think it is really important that this information is made clear. I know in my time in local government some of the council staff were interested in looking at career opportunities which also encouraged councillors. But it has to be very clear what position they are entitled to, and I think it is very important that this is clear in this bill. In my final few seconds, I do think there needs to be a lot more work done when it comes to reforms.

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (16:33): As a former English teacher I am very used to having to try and find the interesting, pertinent things in what can usually be very wordy, very heavy texts, and this is no exception. I would like to first thank the minister's office for all the information that they have provided to me and my colleagues to help navigate what is a really important part of government, but a part of government that is not usually at the forefront of the news, and that is regulation. I know that our regulatory environment is quite important when it comes to our business community. I have met on many occasions with the Committee for Wyndham and their members, and the second thing they talked to me about, after traffic, was the issue of red tape and regulation in our government bureaucracies around trying to get things done. While those opposite always talk down Victoria, I want to talk up the City of Wyndham when it comes to business and business growth and generation.

In Wyndham there are 34,407 small businesses registered through the ATO; 97 per cent of all businesses in Wyndham are small businesses. The majority of those are in transport and warehousing – 32 per cent of that figure – in the construction industry are 21 per cent of the small businesses and professional industries are around 8 per cent of that 34,000 figure. When I meet with these businesses one of the things they always say is that they want assistance to make sure that they can navigate these systems, to make sure it is easy to navigate and to make sure that what the government wants them to do makes sense and is something they can comply with.

In this bill we deal with a few things that go to the business environment but also more to the operation of government. Regulation is an important tool that we use to enact legislation, operationalise it and make it work on the ground, so it is particularly important. This is part of a series of omnibus bills over the years to help improve the regulatory environment through things like Better Regulation Victoria and work done in the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) to try and identify particular areas that we can improve when it comes to our regulation.

In this particular bill we are looking at changes to improve integrity of local government, which I know many people have spoken about on this side as well; looking at protections for property owners around land management and land management cooperative agreements; and looking at the court application processes for spent convictions. This is something that is particularly important that has been raised with me recently in the context of youth offending and how we assist people who have done their time to access jobs and become good parts of the community. Part of that comes through that spent convictions scheme. Another very important thing, particularly for this side, is our workers compensation scheme. Looking at the payment methods, I could not believe that in some of these cases cheques are still involved. I would not even know where to get a cheque, and I am probably one of the few members of this house that has never had a chequebook. Sorry to make the house feel so old. I also would like to note that we are looking at modernising our regulatory environment to make sure that we remove gender pronouns, because we have moved on, it is 2026 and we do not need to refer to 'he' or 'his' in our regulation as well as our legislation, and we are slowly picking up on a lot of that as we go along.

This bill is part of the broader regulatory reform program that we have. Again, the champions of the free market opposite often talk about trying to remove red tape. We are getting on with that through

things like Better Regulation Victoria and the work that we are doing through these bills but also through the Business Acceleration Fund, with \$40 million in funding. This incentivises state and local government regulators – so not just our agencies but also councils – to reform those different processes, get rid of red tape and make it as easy as possible for businesses and Victorians to engage with government. Quite often we hear those opposite decry regulation and legislation, but then on the other hand they say, ‘But we need this to happen.’ Well, regulation is where this happens. We need to have a balance between making sure that people are held to account and that community expectations are reinforced through regulation and making it as easy as possible to navigate that.

When I speak to those businesses, like with the Committee for Wyndham, quite often I find myself in the position of translator. They will say, ‘Why do I have to do this?’ for example, when it comes to business licensing rules around food, which I know we will be dealing with in another matter this week as well. When it comes to the idea of the business requirements around food, why do they have to do this? It is so that we can trace and track if something goes wrong; it is so that we can make sure that people are preparing food that is safe to consume. We have seen in the past that not having a regulatory environment in this space has led to horrific public health problems. Now 150,000 businesses and 200,000 workers will save over 500,000 days collectively in applying and waiting for relevant permissions with the reforms we have been doing through the Business Acceleration Fund.

But like I said, it is not just about what we do for small business and economics; it is also about how people engage with government. I think of particular importance to that are the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 and Accident Compensation Act 1985 changes that are proposed in this bill.

It removes a legislative requirement to pay by cheque. I find it absurd that we are still even contemplating paying for things by cheque. There is some poor person in DTF that has to go down and draw cheques all the time, I am sure, just to meet really, really old pieces of legislation and regulatory requirements. We are part of a federal government push to transition away from cheques. The deadline is mid-2028, and with this we are on our way to making sure that there will be no need in the way the government does its business for cheques. At the moment it is very difficult to cash a cheque, and I can only imagine how difficult it is when you are in a position of needing workplace injury and rehabilitation assistance to have to work out a way to bank a cheque when it comes to a payment that you have received. We have got EFT instead of cheques, but we have got to make sure that the legislation and the regulatory environment around it reinforces what WorkSafe is doing.

There is a little bit of an interesting fact here, which I did not know: Finland was one of the first to eliminate cheques, in 1993, which coincidentally was when I was born. Since then – in my lifetime – Finland has not had cheques. This is an important part of making sure that government continues to be modern and contemporary rather than remain stuck in the past.

**Steve McGhie** interjected.

**John LISTER:** I am sorry, member for Melton; I have got to be careful what I say here. There is one particular part of this bill that I want to touch on, which goes to some of the frustrations that I hear when it comes to the justice system – the system with police and our broader justice ecosystem – and the need to serve things in person. There are very, very necessary times when serving some kind of order or document in person is absolutely necessary, but there are times when it is not. We want to make sure that our public servants, including our police, those in the Magistrates’ Court and those people who work in our justice system, do not necessarily need to physically drop off copies of important documents, when it comes to spent convictions, to the people that need to know about them. We also want to make sure that court orders are transmitted not only to the Chief Commissioner of Police but also to the Attorney-General, to make sure that there is that overview by the Attorney-General of what spent convictions are being granted through that process in the Magistrates’ Court. It is particularly important in this environment, as we talk about trying to help people reform their lives, to make sure that we make it as easy as possible to have that information shared to the relevant people

and make sure it can be operationalised. This is just another way that this government is modernising our system, making sure that it is fit for 2026 – and not for 1993 – and making sure that we have a regulatory environment that is good for business and the community. I commend the bill to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (16:43): I also rise today to talk on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026, as others have done in the chamber. Obviously as we work through this bill we pick out different aspects of what is in the bill, but overall the bill seeks to amend 13 different acts across nine different portfolios. One is the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. I think it is paramount in every electorate from where we were 10 years ago with rules and regulations about recycling to make sure that we keep up with the demand. There are bits and pieces throughout this bill, this regulatory legislation, that we need to talk about to make sure that we do get it right to make our jobs easier.

As the member for Werribee just alluded to before, small businesses are the backbone of a lot of electorates right around the state. For us to bring in reform to make that easier, make the red tape go away so they can just concentrate on their businesses and get ahead and make sure that they are doing the right thing, not only for themselves, but for the community, we need to make adjustments as this bill has come through.

I notice that one of the amendments that has come through is the disclosure of information to the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Obviously being a resident of the Latrobe Valley, the energy and environment component that we do get to talk about is at the forefront of the major business down in the Latrobe Valley with our coal-fired power station, and also on the flip side, with the environment and climate action, with the rehabilitation. Especially at the moment with Hazelwood underway, making sure that is rehabilitated, because over the lifetime of the Latrobe Valley we have got some rather large coalmines down there that do need to be filled. Our first one in Hazelwood is going through that process now of making sure that it is being rehabilitated properly. We need to make sure that we have all the checks and balances in place as we do rehabilitate it, because it is going to be the people of the Latrobe Valley that are going to be left with this infrastructure, as in the hole in the ground. So how are we going to make that look good and how are we going to be able to use that moving forward?

We have the Labor government bringing back the home of the SEC and, I must say, there is a shiny new building in Morwell, the home of the SEC, with some workers that are now in there. The minister, every time she gets up – it has gone from 59,000 new jobs and, forgive me if I do get the number wrong, I think she is now saying that there are 67,000 jobs going to be involved with the SEC. I speak to a lot of people on the ground around the Latrobe Valley, where there is a workforce down there of around 3000 people that actually work in the industry, maybe a little more, maybe a little less, but around 3000 people. They are the ones that have their jobs on the line – 3000 jobs to go, with Yallourn closing in a couple of years time, and then followed in 2035 with Loy Yang going. So every opportunity I do get to stand in the chamber here and talk about those individuals – not only the 3000 jobs that are in there, but also for each person that works in the industry, there are probably another three jobs around them, businesses that rely on that particular person, whether it be someone needing to have their overalls and so forth cleaned or their cars maintained, or the food from the local shop that these people will go on to eat. So in losing those 3000 jobs it does not take long and you can extrapolate it out to be 9000 people that will be affected in their region. So we need to make sure that we do get it right. And I do harp and I do ask the Minister for the State Electricity Commission, ‘What is coming forward?’ We see some renewables coming online with solar farms and batteries and so forth. But where is the crux of these 67,000 new jobs coming into the Latrobe Valley? As I said, the clock is ticking and we are getting closer and closer to especially Yallourn shutting down, but we do not see those renewables coming online. We hear about transmission lines that need to be built so these renewables can come in and be connected, but we are not seeing that flow of work coming through so people can have the confidence that these jobs are going to be there. So I just wanted to touch on that one.

Another one, and it does involve the Minister for Energy and Resources, there are some little bits and pieces in here on gas. So from my time, when I have walked in with a background in the plumbing industry and dealing with gas all the time – the government went down the track at the start of ‘Gas was evil, gas was no good at all.’ But now it is in their mix moving forward for generating power for the people of Victoria, because we need to have that baseload power coming through, and we need to be able to ramp up and ramp down as we do need to. So it is a massive backflip.

**Tim Bull** interjected.

**Martin CAMERON:** And it may even be, member for Gippsland East. The Commonwealth Games were meant to be starting today, so I think we are probably seeing more backflips in the energy sector from this government than we will see from the Australian gymnastics team overseas when they come online as they do that.

But it was interesting the other day: there was a post from the minister about a small business, a new pizza shop opening up in her electorate, I think it was, and there was a big, big fanfare. What we did find was that the pizza oven behind them looked like it was wholly and solely run off gas. The minister was saying how wonderful it was that a small business, a new shop, was opening up, and a local guy who is a plumber from Traralgon – and it was not me that put the post up but a genuine person, Nippa from Traralgon – actually called out the minister. He runs his own business, Nippa, and he was saying that they are opening up businesses and promoting them, which is great, and saying they are supporting local business, but on the flip side they are creating issues for plumbers, because plumbers now, if they are installing gas appliances, can actually be fined and charged; it can become a criminal activity. So we need to know: what is it? Are we jumping into bed so we can use gas? Are we criminalising plumbers that come in and change a hot water service over or change a gas appliance such as a hotplate, which there are a lot of throughout country and regional Victoria and also in the city? Are we making that a criminal activity for the poor plumber and gasfitter, making them say to a person, ‘Well, I can’t actually fix it or change it, even though they’re still selling them in the plumbing supply stores, because it’s going to be illegal and I may be charged.’

So Nippa actually called the minister out. It was interesting to see, because Nippa came and saw me, and that post he put up was hidden. There was nothing untoward; it was not saying anything disingenuous towards the minister. It was just the home truth of, on one hand, you are standing up there promoting a small business, promoting how you are backing small business, but on the flip side you are actually blurring the lines of where we are, because right behind you is a gas-fired pizza oven. Most pizza ovens are gas-fired around the state, unless they are burning firewood, but that is getting harder and harder to get as well. We need to make sure that when we are doing these regulatory legislation amendments we are actually looking a little bit closer at what other legislation we have brought in, because it is a little bit of ‘Are we in or are we out?’ The bad things which were terrible, and gas is evil, we now backflip on it, and gas is going to be the saviour, maybe, as we head through for renewables. We need to know what is going on in energy in our state.

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (16:53): I also rise to make a contribution on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Morwell. I did not quite connect the pizza oven issue with the clauses, but I look forward to reading the bill more closely to make that connection. I recognise it has been a wideranging debate. I will pick up on some comments by some other opposition speakers, and particularly their lead speaker the member for Evelyn. She stood up and said, ‘There is nothing in this bill that will change anyone’s lives in any way.’ I do want to debate that, as other government speakers have, and particularly from the perspective of communities in Preston and Reservoir.

I want to talk about the changes to the way the EPA operates. The EPA is a very important organisation, and it certainly affects people’s lives in Preston and Reservoir, and I intend to set out a number of local examples of where that has been the case and where the further reforms in this bill are very welcome. As you might be aware, part 4 of the Environment Protection Act 2017 sets out a

system of tiered permissions for organisations that are engaging in activities that are a risk to our environment. We, as I say, are very grateful for that in our part of the world because we do live in a part of the world where we have manufacturing very close to housing and very close to waterways and other water infrastructure, so it is very important that those manufacturing facilities are careful in the way that they address environmental risk. I will come to some very specific examples, but I have spoken generally about that point before. I do just want to begin by acknowledging the work of Minister D'Ambrosio, who significantly reformed that part of the act, and also the further work of the current minister, Minister Dimopoulos, for bringing the reforms that we have in front of us here in the bill today.

One of those local issues relates to Clements Reserve, which I have spoken about previously. Asbestos was discovered at Clements Reserve just next to the children's playground back in mid-2020 by Serena O'Mealey, who is a local activist. The investigations into that asbestos found that there was lead there as a result of that site being a rifle club, the Northcote rifle club, at the start of the 20th century. Obviously it is not good to have lead and asbestos near a children's playground. The area has been fenced off, but now in 2026 we are finally seeing some action taken that will hopefully remediate that site. The issue was complicated by the fact that council were at the time of that discovery purchasing that land from the Department of Transport and Planning. I believe it was actually an old reservation for the F6 freeway. Council were trying to purchase it, so there was some debate about who would pay for the remediation.

But coming to the key element of the work of the EPA in our part of the world, they issued the notices that effectively forced the parties to conduct a detailed site investigation and then they issued further notices requiring the parties to come up with a remediation plan. I understand that will go to Darebin council next week, and we are very hopeful that we will see the implementation of that plan this year, and that will mean that concerns about the playground and concerns about that lead and asbestos potentially leaking into Darebin Creek will be addressed. Just to stress, the EPA clearly are working in a way that is affecting lives in Preston and Reservoir.

On a more positive note with respect to local water infrastructure and environmental protection, I would like to thank Melbourne Water and Darebin council for releasing just yesterday their draft plan for a trail and some plantings along the Regent linear reserve. This reserve sits above two water mains. It runs diagonally from the Preston reservoirs down to the south-west over Spring Street, past the Rona Street playground, past the JS Grey Reserve, past the Dunstan Street reserve, across Elizabeth Street and ultimately through to Merri Creek. Local residents have been long frustrated that this particular reserve does not have a path on it. It does not have any plantings on it, aside from a few river red gums near George Street. It is mostly just unmown introduced grasses. Not only does it not have a path or any significant plantings on it but it is fenced and gated off at various places, which makes it difficult for local residents to get around their suburb. I know, having spoken to people in the Benambra Street area, that there are some for whom those gates mean that if they have a pram or if they are in a wheelchair, it is adding 500 metres to their trip to Newlands Primary School or the Coburg Hill shops.

It is very pleasing that we have finally seen a feasibility study that will look at opening up that reserve, putting a path on it and, as I said, putting some plantings on it as well. There are some issues to work through that the team have identified. There are certainly some potential vehicle restrictions on Butters Street, Powell Street, Frankston Street and Sheffield Street that may restrict vehicle access to homes. There would need to be some new signalised crossings at Spring Street, Gilbert Road and Murray Road and some raised crossings at Regent Street and Elizabeth Street. I am not sure if those latter two would also need to be signalised, but this is the kind of work that the consultation process will work through. Then some new plantings – this is the very exciting bit for us – would take place between Cameron Street and Jacka Street along the reserve. I am not quite sure at this point why those plantings of trees and shrubs and ground cover cannot occur across the entire length of the reserve, but that is something that no doubt will also come out through the consultation process.

Before I return to some other local Melbourne Water and EPA matters, I just want to encourage any residents who live near that linear reserve to make submissions to that consultation process. I also want to thank the Minister for Water in the other place for her support of that particular project. She is a great minister. She was previously a Reservoir local, I understand, so she certainly knows that reserve very well. We look forward to working with her team as well as Dr Nerina Di Lorenzo, Vix Penko and Dan Green from Melbourne Water and also mayor Emily Dimitriadis and everyone from Darebin council on that particular project.

Coming back to a somewhat less positive example of where part 4 of the EPA act was important in our part of the world, we have a large paper recycling plant, a busy plant, up on Radford Road. Of course it is very important to recycle paper. We support the plant being there and the jobs that it provides, and it has been there for decades. For about the last five years or so there were some very noxious odours that came from that plant and that were affecting nearby residents. I remember doorknocking all of the houses within about 500 metres or so of the plant, and it was clear that even at 500 metres from the plant there were people who were being affected. The issue arose from bacteria in their recycled water system. Again, recycling water is fine and good, but there was certainly a sense in the community that Visy were underinvesting in exhaust systems, in sealing and in other processes that get rid of those sulphides and volatile fatty acids that were causing the smell. Fortunately, because Minister D'Ambrosio made those amendments to part 4, we now have a licence system, and Visy have a licence to operate, which they are required to have under the act. In fact there are conditions; you can enforce conditions through that licence, which made sure that they fixed up some of those issues relating to strong smells. I am not sure it is perfectly fixed. It is certainly a lot better than it used to be, but we will be taking the opportunity this year to go back and do some more doorknocking there and see if that issue has been fully resolved or not.

Finally, I might just touch briefly on an issue that we had, again which emphasises the importance of the EPA in our part of the world, with a company called Odessa Oils. They store cooking oils, decant them and redistribute them. They were responsible – it is a public fact – for the leaking of those cooking oils into a drain that then ran into Edwardes Lake, and that caused a huge problem back in August 2024. Then we had some residual oil coming right through until about the same time in 2025. Again, I just thank the EPA for the work they did there to issue notices to that company and to get them to fix up what had happened and ultimately make sure that we no longer have that oil leaking in.

In the time I have had I have just taken the chance to run through a few examples of local issues where the EPA and the way it operates have been really important. I could, if I had more time, speak to some other ways in which we could further reform the way that the EPA acted on those local issues. I just make those points in order to emphasise that today's bill – unlike what the opposition have been saying, that this bill does not affect anyone's lives – and actually making an organisation like the EPA work better affects many people's lives in Preston and Reservoir. As we know – it is subject to a debate in the other place – the Silver review has recommended that Recycling Victoria now become part of the EPA. Parts of the bill in front of us touch upon that. If that change does take place, pending those debates happening in the other place, then that organisation will be all the more important to us locally, where recycling and the circular economy is very important. I commend this bill to the house.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (17:03): I rise to contribute on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. In starting off, listening to some of the debate today – I worry that I was listening to it some of the time, but I will have a good look in the mirror and wonder why – the member for Tarneit made some comments contesting the fact that Victoria has a complicated regulatory environment. I would say that nearly every small business in my electorate, without exception, would disagree with the member for Tarneit: we actually have a lot stronger regulatory environment than we need in this state. I am just contesting the member for Tarneit's statement where he contested that there was a complicated regulatory environment in Victoria. There is most definitely a complicated regulatory environment in Victoria. As I said, every small business owner in my electorate would agree with that – I constantly hear about that issue. The member for Werribee said

this legislation is about getting rid of red tape – I am not aware of any red tape that has been got rid of in this particular piece of legislation – and that it is about making it easier to engage with government. Again, I cannot see anything in this bill that makes it easier to engage with government. If anything, over time, engaging with government has got more complicated in this state.

I use the example of the power saver bonus. Yes, it is simple: just go online and apply. In my office, if not weekly at least every fortnight we get another person coming in saying, ‘I can’t do this; I haven’t got a computer. I go to the library, I try to do it but I still can’t make it happen.’ I see a few people on the other side of the house nodding. If it is easy to engage with government, why is it so hard to fill in the power saving bonus form? It is not easy at all. For those that do not sit in an office and use a computer all the time, it is not easy.

I got an email the other day to say my shooters licence was due for renewal. It said, ‘You’ve qualified to do the fast-track online renewal of your shooting licence.’ It is not fast-track; it is very, very slow. I went through all the process where you have got to scan documents and upload them, which is fine if you have got a parliamentarian’s office with a good photocopier that can scan and do all that. If you are at home, you cannot necessarily scan documents and put them into an email all that easily unless you have got the right technology. But then as I got through the whole process, after I had done all this work, it said, ‘If you’ve changed your address, you can’t actually do this online; you’ve got to do a paper copy.’ Why couldn’t it have told you that at the start? Whoever was the bright spark that designed the fast-track shooting licence renewal? If up-front they said, ‘If you’ve changed your address since the last bit of paper, you can’t do this’ – but no, you fill it all in, get there, and all of a sudden it does not happen over that particular time. There is nothing easy about interacting with government at all.

*Members interjecting.*

**Peter WALSH:** Everyone on the other side can laugh; that is fine. If it is easy, why can’t people do it? And the fact that people are agreeing is interesting.

The Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs in his second-reading speech said that this bill would contribute to increased economic productivity, make it easier to do business in Victoria and protect consumers. What a load of codswallop. That is just absolutely ridiculous when you look at this particular piece of legislation. When the government officials were actually asked in the bill briefing about these statements and whether the government could actually identify any savings with these measures and what effect they would have on the budget, the answer was ‘Savings have not been quantified’ and ‘No benefit analysis has been undertaken in relation to economic productivity.’ So why would the minister say it? Why would the cheat sheets for the member for Werribee and the member for Tarneit actually say these things are going to happen when they actually have not been quantified at all into the bill? At one point one of the departmental officials said that the bill had not gone through the DTF rigour. Again, false claims: the Department of Treasury and Finance have not actually identified what savings are made in this particular piece of legislation. The bill does nothing to contribute to increased economic productivity or represent regulatory reform in reality. It is just a tidy-up of a whole heap of pieces of legislation.

In the few clauses that interested me as I read through the bill there was this issue around councillor conduct and the arbiter and the chief municipal inspector. I do not see why the arbiter should have a right to choose whether he sends this further on. If there has been serious misconduct, it should be dealt with. It should not be covered up at the arbiter level.

There are some comments in here about the grain handling authority. Grain handling in Victoria is so important. We see it at the moment with fuel prices, the shortage of fuel and the issue about our freight and logistics sector. We actually need to have an efficient grain handling train system here in Victoria. We do not, and there are a couple of things that are important about that.

The most recent proposal, about which I have had letters from a number of councils, is actually taking out the switchover points at the Sunshine station as part of the upgrade to the suburban rail and a potential rail to the airport. I say 'potential' because it is a bit like a mirage; it is further and further away all the time. But if those switch points are taken away, rail freight trains to the Port of Melbourne will be even more inefficient. They will have to go around via Werribee and could have an hour and a half, 2 hours, 3 hours extra travel time. That will put a huge cost on the system. If we are talking about efficiency of our rail system, this government is actually going to make it harder rather than better. That will mean more trucks on the road, more issues – before we have the whole issue around fuel and the shortage of fuel – more damage to our roads and more cost to fix our roads up rather than having it on rail.

If you talk about the whole issue of competition on rail and the government's mismanagement of major projects here in Victoria, one of the first projects the then minister, the now Premier, had was Murray Basin rail. We have not talked about Murray Basin rail in this house for quite a while, but I would like to give it a run in the couple of minutes I have got left. The minister for that particular project, the now Premier, had \$400 million to upgrade and standardise the north-west freight lines. That money was spent – and another \$200 million from the then federal minister Michael McCormack – to do a very poor job of upgrading the Mildura to Maryborough line and none of the other lines. So we have now got a system where the Mildura line is standardised to Maryborough, the trains go across to Ararat and they wander around the Western District to get to the port. It is a slower trip for the trains from Mildura after we have spent \$600 million than it was before we spent \$600 million in this state. So yes, the current Premier has got a lot to answer for with the corruption in the Big Build projects in Melbourne, the \$15 billion that has gone missing out of those particular projects, which could have done so much for all of Victoria but particularly for regional Victoria. If we could have just had the crumbs off the table, our roads would be a lot better and issues with our schools could have been solved. But that particular Murray Basin rail project was the first major disaster that the minister oversaw at that particular time, a very poor outcome for a substantial amount of money at the time.

And what was the minister's, the now Premier's, excuse at the end of that particular project? It was, 'I've done my bit; this is an issue for a future government to resolve' – that one day a future government would have to resolve the fact that the rail freight system of north-west Victoria is as bad or worse than when she first started with that particular project, because we have now got mixed gauges and we have got issues around rolling stock. Victoria is the only state that has much broad-gauge rail now in Australia, so there is an issue around having dedicated rolling stock for that particular project and the costs of that, which comes back to the whole issue around more trucks on roads. So as the rail system is more inefficient, more costly to run, there are more trucks on the road, and we see the issues around that.

I will just finish off. If you really want serious economic reform in Victoria, give IBAC the chase-the-money powers so you can actually root out corruption in this state and end it once and for all. I notice everyone on the other side, those few that are here, have gone very quiet. Once we talk about corruption in this state –

**Gary Maas** interjected.

**Peter WALSH:** If you are going to speak up, how about doing something about it? \$15 billion – all those zeros – of corruption in this state is a huge amount of money, and it is not a laughing matter.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (17:13): It is great to rise and speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026. There have been some great contributions from members on our side. This bill is an important example of the ongoing work of government to ensure that our regulatory system remains, obviously, modern, effective and responsive to the needs of Victorians, notwithstanding some of the comments from the opposition. Of course reform does not often grab headlines, but it is essential to the everyday functioning of our economy and our democracy and for

the functioning of our communities. The purpose of the bill is clear – it seeks to support efficient and effective regulation, streamline some of the processes and reduce administrative burdens. It also promotes clarity and consistency in legislation and makes a range of technical updates that ensure our laws keep pace with modern expectations.

The bill is about making sure the systems work better for businesses, for workers, for local government and for the broader community. When we talk about regulation, it should not be framed as a choice between regulation and no regulation. It is a serious conversation about how government works in an effective democracy, and the real question is always about good regulation. Good regulation protects our consumers, it protects the environment and it supports our fair markets and fair competition. Good regulation ensures that the rules of our society work for the community as a whole, not just those with the loudest voices and the ones with the most resources. The bill reflects that philosophy.

One of the important but could be easily overlooked aspects of legislation reform is ensuring that the language of our laws reflects our modern standards. This bill makes sensible updates to gendered language in our legislation to ensure our laws reflect the inclusive language used across our community today. I suspect there will be some who will be tempted to turn even this modest and sensible reform into some kind of culture war – and we have seen that before – but the reality is far less dramatic. We have already had a perfect example in this very chamber in regard to gendered language. For many years, members in this place were accustomed to saying ‘Mr Speaker’. When the current Speaker took on the role, some members began using ‘Madam Speaker’. But full credit is due to the current Speaker. She made it clear that the title simply only needs to be Speaker. That is short, clear and to the point – no gendered title, just Speaker. Do you know what happened? Civilisation did not collapse because the Speaker decided on that, and of course the earth is still spinning and Parliament keeps functioning. It turns out it is not that difficult to adjust language in a way that makes our institutions more inclusive and equitable. The reforms in this bill reflect that same principle. It modernises the language so that our legislation reflects the society it governs.

The bill also supports productivity and economic growth by ensuring that Victoria's regulatory framework remains clear, consistent and efficient. The amendments simply bring our legislation into line with the latest national competition policy arrangements and help ensure that our regulatory system continues to support a strong economy and a better living standard for Victorians. Currently the Victorian unemployment rate sits at around 4.2 per cent. When those in opposition were last in government, the unemployment rate was 6.7 per cent. I shared that comparison online recently, and I must admit it seemed to strike a bit of a nerve in some quarters. The member for Ovens Valley seemed interested. I am honoured that he follows so closely the great progress being delivered in Melton. I am very honoured that he actually made a comment on my Facebook post. It is really great to see that he is taking an interest in Melton and my Facebook page, so I commend him for that.

Time and time again it is Labor governments that invest in our people, support jobs and strengthen the economy, as we are doing at the moment. Part of that success comes from getting the balance right, supporting business growth while ensuring that the regulatory framework protects workers, consumers and communities. Melton has had the highest growth of business in the last five years of anywhere in the country. Wyndham comes in second. The west is leading the way, because the west is the best of course. I am pleased that the member for Morwell said that small business is the backbone of electorates. I have to agree with him, which is a first; I do agree with him on that statement. As I say, and I will repeat it, Melton has had the highest growth in business in the last five years of anywhere else in the country. Wyndham are coming a close second. I will repeat: the west is the best and leading the way. It is great to see that small business is coming into Melton, and the diversity of small business is amazing. I commend those business owners for having a go and delivering that. It is great to see that diversity and that growth in Melton. Going forward, with the growth in population and people coming and buying into Melton and living in Melton, we will just see that grow even further.

This bill is about reducing red tape. It is not about abandoning standards or weakening protections, it is about making processes simpler, faster and more efficient so the system works the way it should.

For our builders and for Victorians trying to enter into the housing market, particularly first home buyers, these kinds of improvements can make a real difference. When approvals are unnecessarily slow and processes become overly complicated the costs do not disappear, and they are passed on to the people trying to build or buy a home. That is why we have made many reforms like the matters in this bill. It helps remove those unnecessary delays and allows builders to get on with the job of delivering more homes for Victorian families. We have been very clear about the need to increase housing supply. It is so important right across Victoria in different ways, increasing that housing supply, whether that be in the outer areas like my electorate or inner-city areas or even that middle ring of suburbs, and the differences that we want to deliver in regard to housing are so important. The more housing that we can build, the more competitive it can be and the better the prices will be. The whip is looking at me, and I am not sure whether I have got to finish my contribution. This bill is a really important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (17:21): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (17:22): I rise to address the motion put by the minister at the table, the former Speaker, to adjourn debate. Another sitting week, another act of trickery by this Labor government, who simply want to do everything to distract from the issues that are actually important to Victorians. They have brought a bill to this place.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Brad ROWSWELL**: They have brought the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026, which the manager of government business, although she is being disorderly, points out that I have spoken on, and I have. I thought my contribution was a very good contribution, calling out the inadequacies of Labor's Labour Hire Authority and the inadequacy of leadership and speaking about the different matters relating to that. This is a bill that the government themselves have brought to the Parliament for consideration. They have taken this bill through the cabinet process. They have taken this bill through the caucus process. They have brought it here because obviously they think that it has some relevance to Victorians – and we do not disagree. It must have some relevance to Victorians. They have got one other bill that they want to discuss this week in this chamber, which again, has gone through all their internal processes – cabinet and other such processes – and they want to bring it here. And then – crickets.

We are not short in this state of issues that are facing Victorians. We are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. We have got towns in regional communities which are running out of fuel. We have got a CFMEU and a construction industry which think they have got the green light from this government to do, frankly, whatever they like, funnelling money here and funnelling money there. Corruption is rife in this state, all at the hands of this government. None of these issues are being addressed by this government. None of these issues are being addressed in the bills that this government is bringing forward, and yet this government now seeks to adjourn the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 to bring on a sledge motion. Again, this is the third week running that the government has –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Brad ROWSWELL**: Fourth. Third or fourth – I will go to the third umpire – but it is at least the third week that this government has done this, disrespecting what I believe is the opportunity of this house to do good for the Victorian people, who desperately need their political leaders to do better at this time and who desperately need their political leaders to stand up and to take leadership on issues that are impacting Victorians right now.

We need to give teachers certainty. The government has obviously put forward – well, at least in the union's eyes – a measly pay offer which they rejected quite swiftly out of hand. The government

clearly does not recognise or value the importance of the teaching profession, does not value and respect the contribution that teachers make, so much so that as soon as the offer was received it was rejected. This is an issue facing Victorians that should be considered in this place. Matters of integrity, matters of the proper and correct use of taxpayers funds in a way that considers the integrity and respect and other matters should be considered, but they are not being considered. Instead this government want to adjourn debate on a bill that they have brought forward, which they think is so important that they themselves have brought it forward, in order to – for at least the third, possibly fourth week in a row – introduce a sledge motion. We say no. We say that this is an improper use, in our view, of the Parliament’s time. We do not think that the Parliament should be used as a plaything by a desperate Labor government that is simply ignoring the issues that are facing Victorians that are being discussed around the kitchen table amongst Victorian families that are impacting the lives of Victorians at the minute.

This government has no plan to address the increasing cost-of-living crisis impacting Victorians, legitimate concerns around security and safety in our community, legitimate concerns around the ineffective health system – not the health workers; we love them. We think they are doing an incredible job, but it is the structure of the health system that is left wanting that is the responsibility of this government. There are so many things we could be talking about, but no, all this government wants to do is sledge.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (17:27): The opposition is broken. Get a new one. Where do you get a new opposition? You can imagine the whip, the member for Mornington, having to wake people up right now saying, ‘You might have to come into the chamber.’ ‘And speak on what?’ There is no-one on that side of the chamber of calibre that can speak on this. They are broken or they have gone home. There is no shame in quitting. There is no shame in admitting you are not up to it. I respect that. I have seen people that are more powerful, tougher people than those opposite, give up. There is no shame in that, but just admit it: it is time to move and it is pragmatic to move to notice of motion 2 on the notice paper and –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: If you do not know what it is, that is going to be hard to talk about, isn’t it? You have said it is a sledge motion. I do not think talking about TAFE is a sledge motion at all; it is talking about opportunity. I will allow other people to speak on this. I know there are plenty of other people that want to speak on this motion –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio)**: Manager of Opposition Business!

**Paul EDBROOKE**: Thank you for your protection, Acting Speaker. I very much appreciate it. Of course I support this motion.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (17:28): That was the shortest contribution – less than a minute of the 5-minute time. What a false start. What a short contribution on what could have been an opportunity for the member for Frankston to set out his concerns and reasoning to adjourn debate.

What we talked about this morning on the government business program debate was the fact that for four weeks in a row the government has misused this Parliament’s time. It has misused this Parliament’s time by moving to sledge motions instead of debating matters of legislation. For example, I suspect that the Council tomorrow will be considering a private members bill to strengthen IBAC laws, and I would hope that when that bill comes back to this chamber the government will afford it a significant amount of time to talk about that legislation. I will be surprised if it does, but let us live in hope. That is the type of thing this Parliament should be doing. Now, I am in no way saying that at no time should the Parliament be dealing with a motion. There are meritorious motions that the Parliament

considers often: condolence motions, for example, or moments of national or state importance where the Parliament comes together and speaks on those motions.

But what the government is doing week after week now, because they have run out of a legislative program, is simply trying to deflect from their own problems by moving to political motions. That is why I phrased and coined these motions ‘sledge’ motions, because that is what they are – they are sledge motions. The government hop up one by one and attack the opposition and then feel very, very clever about it. Well, they are not clever. They are not clever, and I think –

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** Victorians say so, Leader of the House. So you can see, because they are on a 25 primary, that is how you know what Victorians think. Victorians do not think this stuff is clever. Victorians know that the Parliament’s time should not be used for simple, outrageous sledging.

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** You can hear the sledges coming across the chamber now. Do not worry; you are trying to move the motion to waste the Parliament’s time, government, to move to a sledge motion. If their motion is successful, that is what they will be able to do. But when they try and do it, what they have not thought through, because this is now the third week where this has happened – the government has not realised that you have to go through procedural motions to get to your sledge motion. You do not just simply get to debate your sledge motion. You do not simply get to move a motion in the house and move to that sledge motion immediately and allow the Parliament to use its time in that way. No, you have to move through procedural steps.

What we are doing now is the first of those procedural steps, where the government says ‘That’s the end of this bill.’ Now, the next thing the government is going to do is try and move the bill that they were considering until ‘later this day’. That is another procedural step, which, as the Acting Speaker will know, allows another 30-minute opportunity. In both instances, there will be a vote, and the coalition is going to take every opportunity to call out what this government is doing and require all the members of the government to come in here and hopefully listen to me on a procedural debate – because I know how much the government loves coming in here to hear me on a procedural debate. And every time they do that, we are going to call it out, because the Parliament should be doing better and this government should be doing better.

The government should be using time better. What we know is that in a few weeks time this government is going to publicly say, ‘We can’t do everything we promised this term, Victorians, because we have run out of time to do it.’ So I am putting a bookmark in that, and we are going to come back to this, I can assure you. When the government say they cannot do everything they promised to do because they have run out of time, I am going to remind the government of all this wasted time, when they simply came in here to sledge. That is what the government is going to be doing in a few weeks time, saying time has run out and they cannot do everything they promised. This is just raw, outrageous politics. It is a waste of the Parliament’s time. They need to be called out for it. And we certainly will not be helping them, so we will oppose it.

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (17:33): I am going to speak briefly, because I look forward to hearing and speaking on the notice of motion regarding TAFE, because to this side of the house TAFE is actually important; to Victorians TAFE is actually important. The member for Evelyn, who has been sitting at the table – we remember what happened in Evelyn before the last Liberal government. They locked the gates; they chained the gates. The bellicose member for Brighton – I hear him more on procedural motions than any other member.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mathew HILAKARI:** That is right: it is because he is trying to hide the lack of substance, and not just the lack of substance for him but for the other members of the house, because we had run out of

speakers from the Liberal–National parties; they just were not ready to talk. Despite the bill in front of them having 1370 years of savings in time for our community, they did not have 15 minutes, 10 minutes, 5 minutes or 1 minute to spend on it. So I am spending 1 minute on this because we have got to get back to the job that is important for Victorians.

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, just on relevance, as far as I understand it, the member on his feet should be arguing why debate should be adjourned. I am not sure that what the member is currently saying is keeping strict relevance to that particular circumstance.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I am happy for you to rule and happy to continue to speak for 3 more seconds.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I ask you to come back to the procedural debate.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I support the adjournment.

**Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (17:35):** The member who was just on his feet foreshadowed that he was only going to speak for 3 more seconds when he still had 3 whole minutes on the clock, which just goes to show how disorganised this Labor outfit is. Twelve years of Labor rule and they still cannot even manage the house properly. Of course, if this government wants to move to a motion on TAFE, so be it, that is fine. But I think they are bereft of any policy ideas, because we only just debated a TAFE bill in this place a few days ago. It is absolutely crazy. The reason we are not seeking to adjourn debate is not because we do not want to discuss the merits of TAFE. As I said, we only did that a few days ago with the government’s free TAFE bill. The reason we do not want to adjourn debate is because we want to provide members with more opportunities to talk about regulatory reform in this place. The Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 is before us, and there are members who wish to talk about that very important matter – or, might I say, what is not in the regulatory reform bill. All of the regulatory reform this Labor government should be doing –

*Members interjecting.*

**Bridget VALLENCE:** Victorians have an expectation that their government reforms things. What this government does is spin and rhetoric. They have got this regulatory reform bill. We want to talk much more about some of the contents within that bill and in fact some of the things that are not in that bill but should be in that bill for genuine regulatory reform in the state of Victoria. Some members may want to talk about the contents and changes that are proposed in the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill – for example, things around the environment and the circular economy. Circular economy is particularly important for people right across Victoria. In fact it was the Victorian Liberals and Nationals who led the way when it came to the container deposit scheme, as an example, which is provided for within the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. It was this Labor government who dragged the chain and finally came to the table to introduce a container deposit scheme. They did not want it run by volunteer organisations; they wanted to side with big corporates, actually – big corporates like Visy, who are now no longer providing a good service –

**Colin Brooks:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is now well off the adjournment motion, talking about container deposit schemes. I ask you to bring her back to the adjournment motion before the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I ask the member to come back to the procedural motion, please.

**Bridget VALLENCE:** I would have thought a former Speaker would actually understand these things. The reason I do not want to adjourn debate is because I think members need more opportunity to talk about Labor’s Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill, and they are denying people the opportunity to do that. They want to gag members who want to speak about this in this chamber. Members want to be able to speak about regulatory reform. They want to speak about the proposed changes within that bill. They want to speak about what is not in the regulatory reform bill, and that is

precisely why we are opposing this adjournment debate so that we can get back to the government's proposed government business program, although we all know that it is a pretty slim legislative agenda that this government has. As I say, they are bereft of ideas. They are failing on their legislative program. I do not know, did they even introduce a new piece of legislation today? They introduced one piece of legislation today. There are not many pieces of legislation on the government business program, so you have got to wonder. After 12 years of Labor rule, they are clearly tired, because they cannot think of any new legislation, anything else that needs reform, that needs to be improved and legislated in this state – for example, introducing Construction Enforcement Victoria or introducing a royal commission into the \$15 billion of corruption on the Labor government's worksites.

**Colin Brooks:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I repeat my previous point of order. The member on her feet is straying way off the debate, which is about whether debate should be adjourned on the bill that we were talking about so the house can then consider what we will go on to next.

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

**Assembly divided on Colin Brooks's motion:**

*Ayes (50):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (26):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (17:46): I move:

That debate be adjourned until later this day.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (17:46): Of course we are going to oppose the government's second motion, the second attempt by this government, to move off this bill of the day for a sledge motion. How concerned are we? Very concerned, because we know a normal government would have a legislative agenda that is packed. In the final eight months of the year you would expect a logjam of legislation from a government trying to work through what it can possibly get through in the year, before the election, but instead what do we see? We have seen a motion to adjourn, and now a motion to adjourn to later this day so that the government can waste the Parliament's time. How terrible to think that the government would misuse the Parliament's time in this way. This is – for those who are watching – the fourth week in a row where the government has done this. You would suspect that the government might slip in a sledge motion at some point in the first set of sittings, but they are doing it on at least one day of the three-day week every sitting. What a sad reflection on this government. And this week – I suspect, and it would be very, very fair to say – the government is likely to move to a sledge motion on all three days this week.

What the government do not realise is when they do this they are not only setting a terrible, terrible tone for this Parliament but they are actually sending a terrible signal to their own backbench. They have not worked that one out yet. They have not worked out what message this sends to the caucus.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** Well, Leader of the House, I would not be talking about getting along with our leader if I were you. In all seriousness, we are very concerned that the government would be misusing the Parliament's time, and that is why on every occasion we will be standing up and saying, 'No, of course we will not allow the Parliament to have its time wasted on sledge motions,' which descend, frankly, into government members getting up and really speaking in a way that you would not traditionally see other than through the grievance debate. It is really lowbrow debate. But that is what the government wants to do each day this week. And what signal does that give to Victorians – Victorians who are worried about corruption, Victorians who are worried about the cost of living? They have seen an interest rate rise, and they are hurting.

We are concerned not only, as we just spoke about, about the motion that was just moved to adjourn debate but about moving it to later this day with no clear understanding from the government of when that will be. When will they go back to a bill? There was no clear guidance from the government on when they will do that. Could we stay on sledge motions for the rest of the week? It is possible. We have had no understanding from the government otherwise. They are getting the Parliament together to frankly try and politicise, in a very lowbrow way, this chamber, when this chamber should be doing better. So we will be calling it out. We will take every opportunity to frustrate their doing that. And what the government keeps making the mistake of doing is not understanding how to manage a chamber. The joy I get every time the Leader of the House moves a motion which just allows me to debate it and laugh the whole way through in terms of the lack of tactical understanding really gives me a smile, because it happens every week and the Leader of the House keeps doing it, and we are going to keep opposing it.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (17:51): I get joy in listening to the member for Brighton just sort of take his time to get through the 5 minutes there. This government of course values and respects our TAFE, and our TAFE investment has been significant. We of course are debating, as it stands at the moment, the opportunity and indeed the conversation that has been going for some time now around that investment and around what has been needed to make sure that the investments in TAFE are provided for by this government and will continue to be done in each and every way. What of course we have seen from those opposite, and I had the opportunity to be the lead speaker on regulatory reform, is an opportunity to be able to do both. We remain committed to that, and that is exactly what this government will do.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (17:52): I am happy to get up and speak on this. I just heard the Leader of the House come in and say, 'What's this waste of time?' This is coming from the Leader of the House. What time are we? We are not even at 6 o'clock on the first day of sitting during the week and the government has already run out of ideas. We had one piece of legislation introduced today. We have got two bills this week, one of which is very grandly titled, as the member for Evelyn has indicated, a regulatory reform bill but in fact is just a statute law revision bill that we have a couple of every year, and now the government wants to go on and talk about TAFE.

There are so many things that this Parliament could be talking about on this particular day. For those who are going to say, 'Oh, why don't you want to talk about TAFE?', we did last week. You had a bill, do not forget. They had a bill last week. It is in the other place. If you want to go and talk about that, you can go and listen up there again. But here we are on the very day that regional Victoria should have been hosting the Commonwealth Games. They say, 'Oh, forget that whole \$600 million that we wasted, forget that broken promise that we made to all Victorians and particularly to regional Victorians. That's just groan factor. You should just move on, you people.' That is what this Labor government want to do, because they think it is not important, because they burnt another \$600 million on that.

The one thing that was sporting about that was the big handball to Glasgow: ‘Here, take \$200 million. Put on a show for the rest of the world. We don’t want it anymore, because we messed it up.’

**Juliana Addison:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I ask you to consider bringing the speaker back to the procedural motion that we have before us.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I ask you to come back to the procedural motion.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** I am speaking exactly on why we should not be adjourning this until later this day, because –

**Colin Brooks:** That’s not the question.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** It is the question.

**Colin Brooks:** No, the question is ‘later this day’.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** That is what I just said, minister at the table. I just said ‘until later this day’. We know exactly what we are debating now: we are debating whether we should adjourn until later this day. That is what I am arguing – on the things that we could be doing and why this does not need to be debated and why this government is wasting the chamber’s time. I know those opposite will say we are wasting the chamber’s time by having this debate. Like I said, it is not even 6 o’clock on Tuesday and the government has run out of ideas. We have had one piece of legislation. Sorry, I tell a lie –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on his feet is not discussing the motion at hand. The motion at hand is about when the debate should be adjourned to. I ask that you bring him back to that motion. He could express an opinion on that. If he suggests that it is not later this day, what day does he suggest it should be adjourned until?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I ask the Leader of the Nationals to come back to the procedural motion.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** This is one of the things I find amusing with these procedural motions. The Leader of the House does not speak on them and takes a minute of my time on a point of order. But the question is: if we are to debate what is happening in the chamber, how do we debate it without discussing what should or should not happen? That is exactly what we are doing. We are saying here that this should not be adjourned till later this day, because this is a stunt from the government – a government that has run out of things to talk about. It does not want to talk about the Commonwealth Games; that should have started today. It certainly does not want to talk about corruption. It certainly does not want to talk about what is going on with the Big Build and with the Premier, who has now been found to have been warned about this when she was the minister. These are the things the government –

**Colin Brooks:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member has been warned on two occasions now not to stray from the very narrow procedural motion that is before the house. He continues to stray from it. These motions are not an opportunity to stray and to talk about anything you want by saying, ‘We don’t think debate should be adjourned till later this day. We think we should talk about all of these other things, and give us the licence to talk about all of these other things,’ when he needs to bring it right back to the particular motion before the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** The member will come back to the motion. The member’s time has expired.

**Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (17:57):** There is a lot of emotion on that side. I do not know why they are so reluctant to talk about TAFE – I wonder why. There is a lot of emotion. I feel that maybe they just do not want to visit 2010 to 2014 – the era of cuts to TAFE. I know a lot in my community were affected by that. They do not want to hear about it on that side. They just want to bury their heads in the sand. I actually look forward to talking about TAFE, because my community benefit from free

TAFE. Free TAFE benefits the community of Mulgrave, and I look forward to talking about that. I would really love to hear what those on the other side have to say about it too, but their history on TAFE is not very great. But I have got a lot to say, and I am sure many on this side of the chamber also have a lot to celebrate about free TAFE – seven years of it in fact. Let us have a little party; let us celebrate that. I ultimately look forward to talking about that. I am really concerned as to why those opposite do not want to. I look forward to debating it.

**David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (17:58):** It is very, very interesting today. You have got the government saying they want to forget about the very light business program that they have put in front of us, and they want to adjourn things off to, as the member for Mulgrave has just said, have a party and celebrate things that they might have done years and years ago instead of actually doing the hard work leading up to government. For those at home that might want to understand how Parliament actually works, Parliament may work in terms of the government proposing legislation that we debate here; that is what the government's role is. Normally in previous governments we would have four bills or maybe five bills that we would debate within a sitting week. This particular sitting week we have two. The last sitting week we also had two. What is really interesting about all of this is that we are in pretty much the grand final of a parliamentary sitting term – the fourth year, the final year – when you would think the government would be up and about with all of their ideas and that they would be saying, 'This is how we would fix Victoria. This is what we would do.'

**Colin Brooks:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Caulfield is a bit slow out of the blocks. He is way off the motion. I ask you to bring him back to the very narrow motion before the house, about whether this should be delayed until later this day or another time.

**David SOUTHWICK:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the minister is completely way off the planet. Can I suggest that the minister needs to understand that the job of the government is actually to provide legislation before the Parliament so we can debate it. Why we are saying we should not be adjourning this off is because there are other priorities that we need to be talking about.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** What is the point of order?

**David SOUTHWICK:** I would suggest the government are wasting time because the government cannot handle the truth that they are mismanaging the economy and wasting taxpayer dollars.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** This is the first time I have sat in the chair for a procedural debate. It is certainly a very interesting experience. People out ahead of me have much more experience than I do. I ask you to debate the procedural motion.

**David SOUTHWICK:** What I would say, in terms of adjourning something off to later this day, is that we absolutely need to actually understand what this government is doing for Victoria. When there are so many other priorities like the corruption this government is knee-deep in, \$15 billion, and the minister –

**Colin Brooks:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker – yes, I will be very brief – if the member cannot keep to the motion, he should be sat down.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** There is no point of order.

**David SOUTHWICK:** I would say that this government needs to actually focus on the issues that matter to Victorians, like corruption, like the \$600 million that has been wasted for the Commonwealth Games. On this particular day the Commonwealth Games should have been running in Victoria, but instead we are talking about sledge motions because this government has got no agenda to debate in this Parliament. They have run out of ideas. This is a tired government that has run out of ideas and are now just bringing waste-of-time motions because they have not done their homework – and Victorians are paying for this. They are paying for an incompetent government that is corrupt, that is wasting taxpayers money, that has seen time and time again – \$600 million for Commonwealth Games, \$15 billion of corruption.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, again it comes to the fact that this is a narrow procedural debate. The member on his feet is not being relevant. I ask you to ask him to come back to the debate.

**David SOUTHWICK:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, again, this is the Minister for Health that will not get up and speak on these motions but is very quick to try and bring points of order because this minister wants a protection racket. The minister, again – \$15 billion of corruption. She is part of a government that is knee-deep in this corruption, she does not want to talk about corruption, the Minister for Health, but – *(Time expired)*

**Assembly divided on Mary-Anne Thomas's motion:**

*Ayes (49):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.**

*Motions*

**TAFE funding**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (18:09): I move:

That this house commends the Allan Labor government for restoring TAFE in Victoria with more than \$16 billion in investment and legislating free TAFE, which has saved students more than \$777 million in tuition fees.

What a run-up that was to debating this important motion. What we have seen in this place is those on the other side of the chamber literally lose their minds at the thought that we should have a policy debate in this place, because that is in fact what this notice of motion enables us to do. It enables us to debate matters of real concern to the people of Victoria. Again, with no disrespect to any of my colleagues that made a contribution on the bill that was previously being debated in the house, if I was out doorknocking in Romsey and I said, 'Should I be spending my time in the Parliament talking about an omnibus regulatory reform bill or talking about the impact of TAFE on the lives of my constituents?' I know what they would say, and they would say to me that they want to see me in this chamber advocating for investments in TAFE because, let us be frank, TAFE changes lives – there is absolutely no doubt about that. And it is always a great pleasure in my community to talk to and meet with TAFE graduates and for them to share with me their career journey or the opportunities that have opened up to them as a consequence of their TAFE qualification. The only reason they have got a TAFE qualification is because our government was elected in 2014 with a commitment to fix a system that had been absolutely decimated by a previous Liberal–National government.

I recall at the time – and I note there are no National MPs in the chamber, and I would not be here if I were them either; I would be so embarrassed – the former National Party minister for training Peter

Hall, and colleagues might remember this, was charged with letting the TAFE sector that he was in charge of know about the cuts that were being implemented by the Napthine government. In a letter leaked to the *Age*, this is what he had to say. He said he considered ‘throwing in the towel’ over the cuts, and in his letter to TAFE directors, he said he shared their ‘emotions of shock, incredulity, disbelief and anger’. That was from their own team. This is what a former Liberal–National minister for TAFE had to say about the cuts that were imposed when they were last in government. But in keeping with what we have grown to expect from the National Party in this place, did Mr Hall resign? Did he stand on principle? Did he fall on his sword? No, he did not. He did not do the honourable thing; he held onto his job whilst he implemented the cuts.

I note the member for Evelyn is in the chamber, and I anticipate she might be speaking on the bill, because of course it was in her electorate that we saw something that was emblematic of what we came to expect from the Liberals–Nationals, and that was a locked chain on Lilydale TAFE. It was closed under the previous Liberal–National government, chained closed, sending a very strong message to the young people in her community: ‘Forget about pursuing a career or an opportunity getting a skilled career, an apprenticeship or a traineeship. Forget about that, because we are determined to close TAFE.’ In my own community of course there was a small outpost from –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, members are required to be factual, and the fact of the matter is that the Lilydale–Box Hill TAFE was opened in 2014 by the Napthine Liberal government.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke):** That is not a point of order.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I was outlining how in my own electorate of Macedon there was a small TAFE campus that was closed by the Liberal–National parties when they were in government. I will just speak briefly about two visits that I made last week, which were off the back of our government’s record investment in vocational education and training. Whilst not directly linked to TAFE colleges, this is about creating more pathways for students who are pursuing hands-on careers. I had the opportunity last week to visit the trades hub built by our government at Kyneton High School and the trades hub built by our government at Gisborne Secondary College, and I had the opportunity to talk to a variety of students who were going to pursue careers in carpentry, in metalwork, in engineering and in beauty therapy. It was a real pleasure and delight to meet these kids and know that only because of the investments that our government has made they will be able to pursue their chosen careers – careers, I might say, that those on the other side want to talk down all the time. We see in this place their disregard for working people. It is so evident in so many of the contributions that they make every day in this place.

While I am talking about TAFE it would be remiss of me not to talk about the absolute transformation that our government’s investments in TAFE have made to the healthcare workforce in this state. We would not have the world-class healthcare workforce that we have here in Victoria if it were not for the more than \$16 billion that our government has invested in TAFE. When I am out in our health services and I meet nurses who have completed their diploma of nursing, I am so proud of them and what they have achieved. Let me tell you this too: I often meet, again, constituents who have had the opportunity to undertake a diploma of nursing. While I do not want to generalise too much, I will say that many of the people that I have met who have undertaken this diploma are women who left school early, worked in a variety of jobs, got married, had children and then decided that it was time to pursue the career that they had always wanted, and that was in nursing. Their pathway to that is through a diploma of nursing and working as an enrolled nurse. It gives me great joy to meet some of these women later on who love their career so much that they decide to take the next step and head back to university to become a registered nurse. This is about creating opportunities and pathways for people who did not always realise the skills and talents that they had. Our investment is about unlocking the skills and talents that live in so many in our community, in communities who are held in disregard and indeed often contempt by those on the other side.

I also had the opportunity to head to the absolutely outstanding campus of Kangan Batman at Broadmeadows – what an extraordinary investment in Broadmeadows and the people of Melbourne’s north that campus is – and see the students there in the Health and Community Centre of Excellence. This is a purpose-built facility. The students train in simulated hospital wards and care environments that mirror real workplaces, with partnerships providing clear employment pathways. What I saw there, with the quality of the equipment and the passion for the students – it was absolutely one of the best experiences that I have had. What we know is these stories are only made possible because of the Allan Labor government. It is what Labor governments do. When the Liberals were last in power they sacked 2000 TAFE teachers, they shut 22 campuses and they ripped a billion dollars from TAFEs right across Victoria, and that is a complete contrast to our government.

**Bridget Vallence** interjected.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I welcome the interjections from the member for Evelyn because apparently having this debate was a waste of time. But she has got very –

**Bridget Vallence** interjected.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** You were saying it was an absolute waste of time, so I do not know why you would be getting up, given it is a waste of time. I look forward to her engaging in a policy debate on this very critical issue.

Of course I have not yet mentioned our government’s commitment – now legislated – to free TAFE. Only a Labor government would even dream of such an idea. The member for Mornington is in this place, and I will never forget his inaugural speech. He talked about actually introducing HECS for high school students. Can you imagine what their plans are for TAFE? This is why we have to legislate in order to protect free TAFE and ensure that the sons and daughters of working families right around Victoria will always have the opportunities that they deserve to get the careers that they want and to contribute to our great state. I commend this motion to the house.

**Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (18:20):** Well, well, well – if this Labor government was actually serious about the motion that it was putting forward today about its TAFE network, why on earth did their lead speaker, the minister, still have 18 minutes left to speak in her speaking time? Because she did not have much to say – she did not have enough to say. She had 30 minutes to speak but only made it to 10. There was a very long period of time that she had left to speak about the motion that she was so desperate to speak about, but she had so little to say that she sat down only a third of the way through her allocated time. That is just emblematic of this Allan Labor government – this tired Allan Labor government. After 12 years of the rule of this Labor government – 12 long years – they are tired and they cannot even speak for their full allocated time, which demonstrates why the minister just sat down with 18 whole minutes to go. She had that little to say about it.

The government wants to spruik its TAFE system. At the outset I will foreshadow that I am going to move an amendment to the government’s motion. I move:

After ‘fees’, insert the words ‘but notes the Silver review was scathing of the performance of Victoria’s TAFE system under the Allan Labor government and that real recurrent expenditure per annual hour in Victoria is the lowest in the nation’.

I absolutely love TAFE. We only spoke about TAFE a couple of days ago in this chamber, which is kind of funny – that the Labor government, totally bereft of policy ideas and totally bereft of a legislative agenda, has to move to this motion that talks about the Allan Labor government’s TAFE system, because we only just debated the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026 only a few days ago in this chamber. All members have already had the opportunity to talk about the TAFE system in Victoria, yet here we are again, because this government is so tired they have nothing else to talk about. But I love TAFE. Those of you who may or may not have listened to my speech on the bill only a couple of days ago would have heard that vocational education and training is a critical part of Victoria’s economy, and in so many respects vocational

education and training and the TAFE system are essential components of Victoria – certainly if we want to continue to grow our economy and maintain strong living standards. Lest there be any doubt, the Victorian Liberals and Nationals support a strong VET system that includes a TAFE network that delivers for students and for industry.

Not only am I passionate about TAFE and supportive of it, but so many of my family members and friends have attended and got qualified at TAFE and are doing well in their careers and are very happy. My brother completed TAFE, got his TAFE qualification and is doing very well – probably better than most of us. Most of my cousins went to TAFE in a variety of trades from automotive, manufacturing, bricklaying, plumbing, electrical and horticulture. So many of my family members have been involved in the TAFE system, have got qualified and are doing great things with their careers as a result.

I am also proud of the fact that in my electorate of Evelyn we have got the one of the highest proportions of residents with a trade qualification and one of the highest proportions of residents who are employed in a technical or trade occupation. I count many of them as my friends. Some of my good mates are sparkies; some of my good mates are brickies. Even my son is working in a trade at the moment. I absolutely think TAFE is a vital part of the education ecosystem and is something that we should work hard to strengthen. Whether it is the chippies, the sparkies, the brickies, people in health care and aged care, early childhood educators, hospitality staff or emerging farmers, we value these tradies, these skilled workers, but we absolutely need more of them. But on Labor's watch Victoria has plunged into a skills crisis. We have an absolute skills crisis on Labor's watch. For 12 long years this Labor government has been in –

**Steve Dimopoulos** interjected.

**Bridget VALLENCE:** The minister at the table is laughing, but on Labor's watch Victoria has been plunged into a skills crisis. For pretty much every sector you look at, under Labor there are skills shortages. There are skills shortages in early childhood education. The government may say that they want to open new early childhood facilities, but they cannot staff them because there is a shortage of early childhood educators. In nursing we have a shortage of nurses. The government, again, funds young people to enter and get qualified in nursing and then denies them an opportunity to be employed in nursing. It is outrageous. There is an absolute shortage in all of these areas. There is a shortage in construction. There is a shortage in engineering. There are shortages right across the board in every sector, and the Allan Labor government have allowed that to occur on their watch.

It is the Labor government's own Victorian Skills Authority which has indicated that we will need an additional 373,000 new skilled workers to enter the Victorian workforce by 2028 and that we will need 1.5 million new workers by 2035 just to meet current demand, yet, for example, this government wanted to adjourn debate on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 just moments ago and have so far failed to propose legislation with reforms to actually address the skills shortages and to demonstrate how they are going to find and deliver 373,000 more skilled workers in just a few short years time. They have not provided any plan for that. Their own skills authority has been telling them for years that we are hundreds of thousands of workers short, and yet time and time again this Labor government will say, 'We've got free TAFE courses.' That is fine, but it does not work if we are not actually translating that into qualified skilled workers to meet the demand.

The Labor government, we have to say, does rely heavily on Commonwealth funding to deliver its free TAFE initiatives. That is something that they will not tell you about. They say they fund free TAFE, but a significant portion of the funding – the vast majority of the funding – is actually funded by the Commonwealth government. The Labor government relies heavily on the Commonwealth funding to deliver its free TAFE initiatives. The National Skills Agreement entered into with the Commonwealth government in 2024 provides Victoria with a funding allocation of \$3.1 billion over five years. The Labor government has previously indicated that the Commonwealth funding comprises at least a third of all its VET funding. So really the government will talk a big game when it comes to funding its TAFE network but conveniently brushes over the fact that a lot of this funding is coming

from the Commonwealth government. In fact in the bill that they put before the Assembly last week, they spruiked the fact that they were allegedly going to allocate – some sort of great new policy idea – 70 per cent of funding to the TAFE network. What they failed to say was that actually is just an obligation that they must meet in order to continue to receive the Commonwealth funding. It is a hurdle that they must meet in order to receive that Commonwealth funding. There has been no uplift in funding for TAFE or free TAFE under this Labor government at all.

Again, this government will try to spruik that free TAFE has been a game changer. Like I said, I support TAFE. I think we need a strong TAFE system, but the reality is that completion rates under the watch of the Labor government remain stubbornly low. As I said, Victoria is facing a skills crisis. The government might talk about enrolment rates. Some of the speakers may get up today and say, ‘We’ve got X number of Victorians enrolling in TAFE,’ but I dare them to say how many Victorians are completing TAFE and getting those qualifications that we need them to have to be part of our skilled workforce, because in 2024 the Labor government conceded that only 53.7 per cent of free TAFE students had completed their courses since the free TAFE program began in 2019. Let me repeat that for you: since this government introduced free TAFE in 2019 – it talks a big game about its free TAFE program – just over 53 per cent of people have completed the courses. I would love to see far and away more people completing the courses.

I would love to see a vastly higher proportion of Victorians completing their TAFE courses, getting their qualifications, getting into the workforce, getting into industry and being part of Victoria’s economy. That is what I would rather see. I really, truly hope that not a single member on the government benches will say that that is some reason why we would not support TAFE or free TAFE. That would be absolute rubbish. We want to know these completion rate figures precisely because we want to find ways to improve and to support more students to complete their courses and get qualified to be part of our economy. Since the Labor government conceded back in 2024 that only 53.7 per cent of free TAFE students completed their courses, they have been very reluctant to say anything about how many people are completing their courses. This is particularly concerning. The Silver review remarked on this, but I will get to that a little bit later.

The latest Productivity Commission’s report on government services, issued on 10 February 2026, confirmed some pretty damning figures and statistics. The Productivity Commission’s report on government services only last month confirmed that Victoria under the Allan Labor government continues to have the lowest rate of students completing VET qualifications per capita in the nation, with the exception of the ACT, with student satisfaction levels at or below national averages. Real recurrent VET expenditure per annual hour in Victoria has plummeted by 18 per cent, from \$23.70 per hour in 2020 to \$19.44 per hour in 2024 – we are the lowest in the nation under this Allan Labor government. Real recurrent VET expenditure per person in Victoria has decreased by 6.7 per cent, from \$403 in 2017 to \$376 in 2024. The number of TAFE provider locations in Victoria has collapsed, from over 6000 in 2022 to just over 1800 in 2024. That is a 71.3 per cent reduction in the number of TAFE provider locations.

The minister in her speech liked to talk of the past. She liked to talk of 13 years ago, well before I even ever thought of being a member of Parliament. Potentially my colleague the member for Warrandyte might have been in the same boat then. We were not even on the horizon of being members of Parliament back then. The minister likes to live in the past, saying that at that particular time the government of the day was making some changes to the TAFE network. She tried to be very political in doing so, but again, as I will say, she is living in the past. That was some 12 or 13 years ago. We are talking about today. We want to strengthen the TAFE system today. The Labor government clearly does not, because the number of TAFE provider locations in Victoria has collapsed by over 70 per cent. There are 70 per cent less places to go and get your TAFE qualification under the watch of this Allan Labor government. The government members will not talk about that, but that is a stark figure that we should all know about.

The number of government-funded training providers in Victoria has dropped from 456 in 2020 to 423 in 2024, a 7.2 per cent decline. Government VET funding paid to non-TAFE providers was cut by \$37.3 million from 2018 to 2024, with non-TAFE providers only receiving 25 per cent of all VET funding. The reason I refer to non-TAFE providers is, whilst I understand this motion is about TAFE, our non-TAFE providers, our registered training organisations, form an important part of the overall vocational education and training system in Victoria. In fact that is so much so that their completion rates – I do not have the figure in front of me – are hovering around more than 80 per cent, so they are doing something right. It is not to say they are doing something different or better; it is that clearly in the registered training organisation sector they are doing something right, because they are attracting students and students are fulfilling their course over a number of years, completing their course, getting qualified and getting into the workforce, earning a crust and contributing to our economy. That is unlike the TAFE system under the Labor government, where people are enrolling in their course but are not completing it. Nearly half of all students do not complete the free TAFE courses under the Labor government. So whilst the government will spruik their free TAFE system – and we are not saying that that is an issue for them to do so – the issue really is that only just over half of the people enrolling in a free TAFE course are actually completing it. I think that that is the sign of a broken system under Labor. The Silver review found this, and that is why I moved an amendment to this motion:

After 'fees', insert the words 'but notes the Silver review was scathing of the performance of Victoria's TAFE system under the Allan Labor government and that real recurrent expenditure per annual hour in Victoria is the lowest in the nation'.

It is precisely because Helen Silver AO, who was engaged by the Labor government to conduct a review of various parts of the Victorian public service, as part of her review was quite scathing of the performance of the TAFE network under the Allan Labor government. The Silver review found that there were significant areas for improvement. Again, this is not to say that Silver was saying we should cut the TAFE network or anything – as a matter of fact, that is something that we are not saying either – but there were considerable issues that the Silver review wanted to highlight. The Silver review was highly critical of the performance of the VET system and stated:

Performance of the VET system is mixed, with continued skills shortages in priority industries, completion levels lower than the national average, and student satisfaction at or below national averages. The system also has financial challenges: the Review understands financial viability remains an issue for several TAFEs.

That is not me saying this. That is Helen Silver AO in the review she was asked to do by the Labor government. It is the Silver review that found these issues, that uncovered these issues, that publicly stated the criticisms of the performance of the TAFE system under the Labor government. The Silver review went on to find that there was scope for financial efficiencies that could be realised within the TAFE sector. I will get to that in a second, but it will be interesting to see if the Labor government will say anything about this. How will they respond to Helen Silver and her review in relation to the TAFE network? We know that they have already accepted a number of recommendations of the Silver review, and I call on the government members contributing to this motion today to confess whether they will take up the recommendations of the Silver review when it comes to the TAFE system. As I say, the Silver review was extremely critical – scathing I have to say – of the TAFE system under the Allan Labor government.

The Silver review did find that there was considerable scope for financial efficiencies to be realised in the TAFE sector, notably accelerating shared service reforms. Silver found that each TAFE had its own student system, meaning there were duplications in costs and processes. This also impacted adversely on service delivery and student experience. Silver recommended that TAFEs should pursue shared service reform. That sounds like cuts. That sounds like cutting things, cutting services to students, rationalising under this Labor government those services and having less people to deliver those services.

The Silver review also considered mergers and that a number of TAFEs should merge into a single entity. Interestingly, we know that is already happening under Labor. We already know that across the north and north-east of regional Victoria, in places like Shepparton and Wodonga, these TAFEs, or 'GOTAFE' as they are called, have already been merged under Labor. Labor likes to talk about having TAFE, but they are already merging TAFE under this government. As I said, even pre-empting the Silver review, this Labor government is merging TAFEs, It is taking courses from in-person courses to online courses. It is limiting that face-to-face experience for students. It is cutting courses in some parts of Victoria, particularly regional Victoria. That is to the detriment of those Victorians that live in those regional communities. Even though we know Labor is already merging TAFEs, the Silver review quite clearly suggested and recommended that TAFEs should be merged into a single entity, saying that this could result in \$200 million in savings. I would like to know from government members speaking on this motion today if they will implement the Silver review's recommendations in this regard, or perhaps they will hasten their rationalisation of the TAFE network under Labor.

Silver also found that there was significant underutilisation of assets across the TAFE network and recommended that these assets be sold. I will just repeat that: Helen Silver, engaged by the Labor government, in her review recommended that TAFE assets be sold. Which Labor government member will be courageous enough to stand up today to say which TAFE assets they are selling off? That is clearly in their plan, because the Labor government engaged Helen Silver AO to conduct the Silver review, and the Silver review states that TAFE assets should be sold off.

So which assets is the Labor government going to sell off from the TAFE network? Which assets in the TAFE network will Labor sell, further causing a decline of TAFE? Revenue from the disposal of these assets, again, Helen Silver is suggesting, would be approximately \$525 million. Given the state of the economy – that debt is nearly a quarter of Victoria's economy, at \$160 billion in the midyear financial report tabled on Friday a week ago – and given that debt trajectory and the significant level of debt that this government has because it has an expenditure problem, I think it is going to be looking for every avenue when it comes to savings. So watch this space as to which parts of the TAFE network the Labor government will be selling off.

*Members interjecting.*

**Bridget VALLENCE:** I am reluctant to take up interjections, but members are talking about the Lilydale TAFE. To make sure there are no mistruths, to make sure that the Labor government do not spout anything that is not true and is misleading, it was a Liberal government in 2014 that opened Lilydale TAFE. Let that be on the record, because that is the fact of the matter.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke):** I remind the member for Evelyn that it is unparliamentary to take up interjections.

**Bridget VALLENCE:** Thank you for your guidance, Acting Speaker. It is a fact of the matter, and it should be on the record to categorically ensure that no Labor government member today seeks to mislead the Victorian public in their contribution in that regard.

It is so funny that this government is so bereft of policy ideas. They fail to have an adequate legislative agenda such that they only had two bills on the program for this week and only introduced one bill this morning. They have such a weak legislative agenda that they need to find ways to fill up the time, fill up the space. This is the people's house. We should be spending time talking about things that are most important to Victorians at the moment.

I am not denying that a TAFE education or a TAFE qualification is important to many young people. As I said earlier in my contribution, so many people I know, so many of my family members and my friends, are TAFE qualified and have fantastic careers as a result. But there is a crime crisis gripping Victoria, we have a debt crisis gripping Victoria and we have a housing crisis in Victoria, and they are the matters that Victorians want to hear us debate in the Assembly, in this Parliament. They are the matters that Victorians demand their parliamentarians find solutions for, not rehash old news about

the government's free TAFE program. This has been a policy of the Labor government for many, many, many years. We only debated a bill about free TAFE just days ago in this chamber, and here we are again talking about free TAFE.

I might add that I have only just been on the phone to the Minister for Skills and TAFE's office this afternoon. I have only just been on the phone to three members of the minister's office this afternoon who, despite the fact that the Labor government put the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026 on the Legislative Council business program this week, have just told me that they are bumping it from the Legislative Council government business program to a subsequent week. So it is curious that we only debated it in the Assembly as a bill last week and we are now discussing it as a motion today but the government are bumping it from their program in the upper house. It is curious. I am not really sure what is going on. Clearly the Labor government are tired after 12 years. Heaven forbid that Victorians would have to suffer 16 years of this Labor government. They are so tired they cannot work out what they are doing with a legislative agenda.

On a final note, with the 40 seconds that I have remaining – and I remind members that the minister had 18 minutes left and sat down; she had nothing more to say – I want to give a shout-out to our TAFE teachers. They are fantastic, our TAFE teachers, absolutely. Under this Allan Labor government, TAFE teachers are forced to work unpaid overtime. TAFE teachers had to fight for a reasonable pay offer from this Allan Labor government. They have been forced only as recently as this year to work unpaid hours by this Allan Labor government, and that is shameful on Labor. I give a shout-out to all the TAFE teachers who train our skilled workers.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (18:51): It is a pleasure to speak on this motion, and it is a pity that the member for Evelyn did not take a leaf out of the leadership of the manager of government business, who yielded the floor for her colleagues to make a contribution also. And what generosity that was compared to the absolute oxygen-thieving thing we just saw for the last 30 minutes. You know, when we came to office, what we actually saw was TAFEs closed. We saw student numbers declining. We saw the financial viability of TAFEs on a downward spiral. In fact, just to remind people, because this is where the journey began, the Liberals sacked more than 2000 TAFE teachers. The Liberal Party did. They shut 22 campuses and ripped \$1 billion from TAFEs across Victoria.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, just to ensure that we are factual in this debate, how many TAFE teachers are quitting under this Allan Labor government today?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke):** Member for Evelyn, what is your point of order?

**Bridget Vallence:** To be factual and ensure that all facts are on the table.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke):** There is no point of order.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** There were closures of TAFEs at Lilydale, Greensborough and many other places. But it was not just the closures, it was the courses that were cut, the teaching expertise that was let go – hundreds and in fact thousands of TAFE teachers who had another two, five, 10 years to teach Victorian students were let go by the Liberal–National–One Nation coalition. They were being cut from horticulture, tourism, automotive businesses, music, cooking, event management and IT. They were just absolutely spiralling out of control. In fact the number of students in apprenticeships and traineeships was down by 40 per cent from 2012 to 2014.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, just to make sure that we are direct and factual, horticultural courses were cut under the Labor government at Burnley.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke):** There is no point of order.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** There was a 40 per cent decline under the Liberal Party in student apprenticeships and traineeships in two years – a 40 per cent decline. Enrolments at TAFE dropped by 33 per cent. It was just extraordinary. So what we did was we opened closed TAFEs. In fact the former minister for education James Merlino reopened Lilydale TAFE in February 2016. So let us not believe the rubbish we hear from the opposition. As much regard as I have for the member who just spoke in her personal capacity, she was being absolutely mendacious in her commentary on the past. How could James Merlino open a TAFE if it was already open? We opened TAFEs. We augmented existing TAFEs. I went to I reckon about a dozen openings of buildings and facilities at Holmesglen TAFE, my local TAFE, in the first three or four years. That was because of the bounty the TAFEs got under our government. We arrested the decline in student enrolments, and the trend has been increasing ever since. But we went further, and this is something that those on the other side do not get – do not understand. We went further. When you believe in education, you act on it. The member said that she believes in TAFE I think about 17 times in her speech. She believes in TAFE. Oh my God, you could have fooled me.

When you believe in something, your budget output and your budget capital investment match your beliefs. Otherwise you are literally just lying – that is what you are doing. The fact that she stood there with a straight face and said, ‘We believe in TAFE’ 17 times and ‘My cousin’s uncle’s brother’s wife is a TAFE graduate’ – it does not matter, mate. None of that matters. What matters is: do you put your money where your mouth is? We did for tens of thousands – in fact hundreds of thousands – of Victorians. Not only did we rebuild the TAFEs, unlock the gates and invest in TAFEs – in buildings, in facilities, in people – but we also then created a pipeline of infrastructure projects across hospitals, schools, public transport and roads for those same TAFE students to then graduate to a job in the construction economy. That was good for the community. We have got new hospitals, we have got new schools, we have got new public transport and we have got new roads. In my electorate the community benefited in spades – level crossings removed and new train stations right through Hughesdale, Oakleigh, Murrumbeena, Carnegie and Clayton. When I was a kid those stations did not have escalators and did not have digital screens telling you when the next train was coming. This does not just happen because you believe in something and do not follow through. We followed through. We have built all that for the community. We have built it for the economy. The economy is far more productive because all of that is productive infrastructure. We had the workforce to be able to build it.

You know what else we did? We painted the circle right around. We completed the circle. We said to all those major contractors on major projects, ‘You will put on a percentage of apprentices on your jobs,’ because we wanted those apprentices to get a job. We wanted to train them from TAFE into the workplace and back to TAFE and back to the workplace. We have done this right through. We have done this with the health sector. We built the infrastructure, the hospitals, and we also employed more nurses and we employed more doctors. We provided accessible free courses for nurses to come into the workforce. This is what happens when you are ambitious, you are bold and you have values: you build an entire sector. You close the entire loop: the workforce, the infrastructure, the accessibility and the fee reduction or fee waivers. You build an entire sector in health, in transport and in construction. In my own portfolio of tourism there are tourism courses that we have provided free. We provided a free certificate III in tourism, certificate III in hospitality and certificate IV in outdoor leadership and a diploma of hospitality management. Since 2019, 129,000 women have benefited from free TAFE, and 57,000 regional Victorians and 22,300 people with a disability. This is what happens when you actually care about and believe in what you are saying and what you are doing.

But I cannot expect much different, to be honest, from the Liberal–National–One Nation coalition. I do not expect anything better. They have always been divisive. They always divide. They seek to divide based on your humanity. They seek to divide whether you are gay, whether you are Muslim, whether you are anything else, whether you are a woman. They are not builders. They do not build. Do you know what my grandmother used to say to me before she departed?

**Matthew Guy** interjected.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** ‘The louder you get, the more the factual inaccuracies are on your side.’ The member for Bulleen can talk as loud as he likes. His record is appalling, as is his party’s record, on TAFE closures, on hospital closures and on railway closures. They have no right to come in here and pretend they have built the Victorian community. They should be embarrassed walking into this motion. They should be embarrassed walking into a motion on free TAFE. They would not even know what free TAFE was. They voted against anything that resembled access and equity for the Victorian community, from TAFE to hospitals. They are absolutely reprehensible. Do you know why? Because none of their family or friends are really TAFE people. Their friends and family are Oxford and Cambridge graduates. They are St Kevin’s and the –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt the minister.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Adjournment*

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

That the house now adjourns.

### **Comeng trains**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (19:00): (1579) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and I want to talk about rail heritage weekend. I am sorry to disappoint the member for Oakleigh; it is not anything which I can yell at him or he can yell at me about, but it is about rail heritage weekend. On the recent long weekend at Newport rail workshops – credit to Steamrail Victoria and a number of other rail heritage organisations – they had a fantastic rail heritage open day program where a number of them came together and showcased the best of Victoria’s rail heritage. Rail heritage, like restoring cars, trams, trucks or old buildings, is like artwork. It is the same kind of premise: you restore something and you keep it because it is something that is part of your historical form and historical past.

Victoria has a reasonable history in rail heritage compared to other states. We learned the lessons of what we did not do in the 1950s. Then in Victoria quite a number of particularly steam locomotives were restored and kept operative in this state, particularly compared to New South Wales, although nowadays we are lagging behind New South Wales. Recently I was in New South Wales for the retirement of what are called the V-sets, which was a big deal – credit to the Minns government for putting on a big deal for the retirement of the very, very popular V-sets. One of my colleagues up there who I met while I was in New South Wales said the V-sets are to Sydney what the W-class trams are to Melbourne. The New South Wales government did a good job of restoring both the livery and the colour scheme of the V-sets for their last revenue run from Lithgow back down to Central. I think Victorians would think the same about our Comeng trains, which have been operative since 1981 under the Hamer Liberal government, who ordered the Comeng trains, and then they were progressively reordered by the Cain government through the 1980s. They were 60-odd per cent of our fleet in the 1980s, and people will know them and remember them. They have been part of Melbourne’s suburban fleet for a long time.

The reason I raise this and my adjournment action for the minister tonight is: looking at what New South Wales has done with the V-sets to keep a number of them in good, restored order, I ask the minister to preserve two sets of Comeng trains, restored to their original early-1980s condition for rail heritage in Victoria, so that we can retire with dignity what has been a stalwart of our metropolitan rail network for the last 40 years.

### **Filipino community**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (19:03): (1580) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ms Stitt in the other place, and the action I seek is an update on how we are supporting our Filipino community. I recently attended the Pinoy Olympics at the Old Cheese Factory,

and I would like to thank the Pinoy Casey Community Inc not just for their work and the joy that they bring but for embracing Mr Tarlamis from the other place and me into their community in a way that had our hearts singing, with a little bit of karaoke going on at the same time.

Then only a fortnight ago I attended the Kamayan festival in Cranbourne. This was an event that was filled with delight, with family fun, with food, with families – I like a bit of alliteration. There was a lot going on at this amazing festival. Again, I want to thank the Filipino Australian community. This community have been so deeply embedded in our community for such a long time that they have ensured that we have thrived as a successful state. Certainly in the Casey council area, the south-east of Melbourne, and right across Melbourne and Victoria, this strong, generous, law-abiding and altruistic diaspora have worked as clinicians, as engineers, as teachers, as researchers and in trades.

Hence I was shocked to see that the federal Liberal Party have compiled a hit list of countries. Reading from the *Australian Financial Review*, a tome that is not necessarily known for its socialist leanings, opposition leader Angus Taylor said that he would adopt plans that had been worked up by the previously deposed opposition leader to curb immigration from places deemed ‘high risk’ or too high risk, and not only that, but he would go further. In fact he said he would cut deeper into the annual migration intake.

We know that this new immigration policy has been founded on an inclination and an aspiration to be able to make sure that Pauline Hanson’s One Nation preferences come flowing their way. This is not sport. In Cranbourne we are a community built by families from all over the world – people who came here, who worked hard and who have raised their children and built a life. The Filipino community have told me that members of the community are anxious about this. They are anxious about being on a hit list, and they are anxious that they are collateral in an attempt by the Liberal Party to cosy up to the One Nation party. People are getting picked on, and families are worried. I call on the minister for immigration to continue the work she is doing. I am looking forward to her updating me on the actions she is taking to reassure the community, but I do call on the community to – (*Time expired*)

#### **Mooroopna police station**

**Kim O’KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (19:06): (1581) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action that I seek is for the minister to adequately resource the Mooroopna police station. The Mooroopna station is rarely open, leaving the residents frustrated and vulnerable when it comes to crime. The \$1.8 million police station was built back in 2013 by the then Coalition government. It was built because Mooroopna needed a police station. West of Shepparton, Mooroopna has a population of over 8000 residents. Based on Victoria’s own policing ratios, that represents the need for around 25 officers serving the community. There are no regular opening hours, and Mooroopna residents question whether it is open at all. My region is significantly neglected when it comes to our police stations, and I have called on the minister numerous times to also provide more support to the Shepparton police station, which is a 24-hour station. Seventy-five per cent of the Shepparton police’s time is taken up with dealing with domestic violence incidents, taking them off the street, unable to get to call-outs. The minister has been asked for a dedicated family violence response team to be located at the Shepparton station. This would require six extra officers and two sergeants. Breach of family violence orders now sits as the number one crime in Shepparton. There is an expectation that the Shepparton police will cover Mooroopna, but it is clear that Shepparton police station is already significantly under-resourced and struggling to get to local police matters, let alone cover another 8000 Mooroopna residents. In February Mooroopna had two shops in their main street torched and several rammed. Across the electorate we have seen increasing crime, car thefts, retail theft and burglaries. Communities deserve to feel safe and to have their police stations open with police presence.

#### **Geelong bus services**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (19:07): (1582) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action that I seek is for the minister to meet with constituents in the Lara

electorate to hear from them about the improvements they want to see across the Geelong bus network. The Geelong bus review is now live and open for feedback, and as part of this review we want to hear from as many residents as possible about their experiences using local buses. We want to be guided by them about what is working and what is not, so that we have a service that reflects the needs of our local community. Geelong and Lara have undergone significant growth over recent years, and that growth is continuing. It is important that we have a bus network that keeps up with that growth and caters for how people move around our community. Buses are central to local public transport, connecting people to jobs, schools, trains, hospitals and their homes. I encourage local residents to jump online and have their say in the Geelong bus review.

### Housing

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (19:08): (1583) Two years ago I spoke in this Parliament about a little girl with a severe handicap who was homeless. I pleaded with the government to do something to fix it. And what has been done? Nothing, zilch, zero. For the last two years the government has had every chance to resolve this. The issue I am raising for the Minister for Housing and Building tonight is to once again ask her to urgently find Nova a home. Nova is 10 years old and lives with severe cerebral palsy. She is non-verbal, relies on a wheelchair and requires 24-hour care. Her father Doug is despairing. He simply cannot work and care for Nova and her little brother. Nova's mother tragically passed away when she was four. Doug has been on the public housing list now for six years. The NDIS provides services for Nova, but it cannot provide housing, as this is the Allan Labor government's responsibility. Two years ago the concerned community found out that this family were living in a caravan in a paddock with no running water or power. Upon first being informed about Nova, I took this to the minister and asked her to quietly intervene because I did not want this to be politicised and this proud father did not want pity or charity. But when it was ignored I had no choice but to raise it in this Parliament. Still the Allan Labor government did nothing. Nothing has happened. The Allan Labor government have failed this family. This is a disgrace. How can we as a society accept a little girl with cerebral palsy who requires a motorised wheelchair and 24-hour care being out on the street? Clearly this Allan Labor government has no shame.

It was a kind community member who ended up stepping forward and offering the dad and the children a temporary roof over their heads, but that arrangement cannot continue due to other circumstances. The only communication Doug has received in the last two years from the government is an aggressive correspondence asking for him to fill out a form or risk being chucked off the housing list. In two years he has had one phone call – with no offer of hope, no timeline and no information. What a disgraceful way to treat our most vulnerable. Doug has hit rock bottom. He actually said to me that maybe he is better off giving Nova up. At least she will get a house, because the government will have to take her into their care.

A family break-up is not the answer. Nova deserves her dad and brother in her life. She has already lost her mum. Every taxpayer in Victoria would expect a family like this to be looked after in these circumstances. That is why we pay our taxes. Nova and her family need safe and secure housing, because a disabled child should never be left facing homelessness. If this government had any semblance of decency, they would take a good hard look at themselves, check their priorities and give this family a home.

### Monash Medical Centre

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (19:11): (1584) My action this evening is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for an update on the progress and anticipated commencement of construction at the Monash Medical Centre redevelopment. This is a significant project for our local community. This will be in addition to what is one of the most substantial locations in Clayton, home to Victoria's largest adult hospitals and one of the state's busiest emergency departments and located alongside Monash Children's Hospital. This is a teaching and research hospital very similar to the recently opened Frankston hospital, now known as Peninsula University

Hospital. That was a significant \$1.1 billion investment in health that has substantial benefits across the south-east. This is linked in there with Peninsula University, and you can see the hallmarks of Monash Health and Monash University coming together as some of the best researchers and clinical practices in the world. It is the envy of the world, and it is a fantastic example of health research coming together in clinical practice.

Recently I had the opportunity to join a stack of colleagues to celebrate the third anniversary of the Victorian Heart Hospital, the only heart hospital in Australia. This is a specialist cardiac service that has thousands of opportunities for cardiac surgeries and tens of thousands of emergency department presentations. It really adds to the support for cardiac care and health and wellbeing in our communities. Just the other day I got to travel out to Footscray. I got a visa from the member for Footscray, who showed me around the Footscray Hospital. And goodness me, what a redevelopment that is – again, clinical practice with the teaching and allied health from Victoria University interwoven and supported. But it is not just Victoria University, there are a range of other clinical practices as part of their research and outcomes. It was a privilege to hear the joy from patients both at Frankston and at Footscray Hospital and to see and hear from the clinicians at the Victorian Heart Hospital.

Imagine what the Monash Medical Centre upgrade will be. Over \$500 million has been invested into the critical health outcomes. But it is not just about the built form; it is about the health workers that support the most vulnerable Victorians in their time of need and it is about backing those health workers. Tens of thousands have been added by the Allan Labor government over the time that we have been in government. There is also the support for wages growth – 28.7 per cent – and the backing of our nurses in nurse-to-patient ratios. This is putting action into practice. It is backing our health workers, not doing some of the things that we have seen previously, where literally the middle finger was given to the nurses who support our critical workforce here in Victoria. That is the history there – cuts, an \$11.1 billion black hole and not investing in health – unlike what we have seen under the Allan Labor government.

### Government performance

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (19:14): (1585) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to stop wasting Victorians' money. Nearly \$600 million was spent on a Commonwealth Games they cancelled, and instead Victorians are paying for Scotland to host the games on the other side of the world while we get nothing. We had the worst corruption scandal in Victoria's history under the Premier's watch on their government worksites, yet the Premier still refuses a royal commission to chase down where the \$15 billion of taxpayers money went. \$125 million of taxpayers money was spent on settling a class action over the COVID failures that gave Melbourne the longest lockdowns in the world. Rather than face the courtroom, Labor chose to cover it up and sent Victorians the bill. And how could we forget the \$13 million spent on machete bins as their solution to the crime crisis, yet we see machete attacks almost every single week still, including the tragic death of 22-year-old hero Aidan Becker. Then, in even more waste, while teachers march in the streets for better pay, Labor spends half a million dollars on marketing treaty in a single year, not to mention spending \$200,000 on rented pot plants for government offices. When will it end?

This is all while state debt is spiralling towards \$200 billion by 2028, and they have added \$10 billion to state debt in just the last six months. Victorians are pleading with the Premier to stop wasting their money. In fact the opening ceremony of Melbourne's Commonwealth Games was meant to be held this week at the MCG. Instead Victorians have paid nearly \$600 million to cancel the games and have picked up the bill for them to be held in Scotland, on the other side of the world. The Labor government begged for this event so that they could sell it at the election, using taxpayers money to wine and dine Commonwealth Games officials with trips across Victoria, complete with chartered flights and private grand prix access. Just to win the election the Labor government campaigned on promises of infrastructure and housing right across Victoria, all while knowing it was a big fat scam. Once the election was over they cancelled the games and Victorians got nothing except a big fat bill of nearly \$600 million. One town was promised an Olympic-grade aquatic centre – cancelled. Other towns were

promised ovals and stadiums – they are still empty fields. Ballarat was promised an athletes village that would become social and affordable housing for 1800 locals. That is still an empty field. There are a ton of examples from all over the state. The truth is these games were another Labor scam, and Victorians will not be falling for it next time.

#### **Broadmeadows electorate ministerial visit**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (19:17): (1586) My adjournment is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in a visit to a local retirement village. I have several retirement villages in the electorate, and I know that many people enjoy the social aspects of communal living. But I also know that financial security and peace of mind are paramount for the generations that have worked so hard to build our communities and our country, which is why I am so proud of the reforms we have made in the Retirement Villages Act 1986. Our Labor government has also introduced the older persons housing service, which provides free advice and support to residents of retirement villages. I would appreciate the opportunity for locals to hear directly from the minister about this support and other important services such as Scamwatch and the fabulous new Servo Saver app to help locals get the best local fuel prices.

#### **Narracan electorate ministerial visit**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (19:18): (1587) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my community and explain why the government has failed to deliver critical infrastructure we desperately need. On Friday the minister issued a press release titled ‘More homes and thousands of jobs in the south-east’. I always wonder why she is limited to the south-east. I wonder what happened to the government’s slogan in 2022 when it said, ‘We govern for all Victorians. We do what matters.’ For my community, Labor have totally failed to live up to these words. Warragul and Drouin are the two fastest growing towns in this state. Planning for the future should mean that these towns have the critical infrastructure they need delivered at the same time as the growth occurs. Let us look at what the government have not done: the West Gippsland Hospital was promised and not delivered; the Warragul and Drouin interconnection and road upgrade has no delivery date; the Weebar Road upgrade is still not done; Gallaghers Crossing has no plan for an upgrade; early learning centres are behind schedule; more bus routes and expanded timetables have no plan, no funding; the Warragul and Drouin SES upgrade has no plan; Nar Nar Goon CFA station has no plan, no funding; Bunyip CFA station has no plan, no funding; and the Bunyip railway crossing, probably the most dangerous intersection in my electorate, has no plan, no funding.

It is not good enough that the government just focus on Labor seats. I hear it all the time in this chamber. I hear about the hospital upgrades that happened in Footscray or wherever – whatever Labor seat it is; I cannot remember them all. They have done a few, but they have only done them in their seats. They have not done them in my electorate. They promised the West Gippsland Hospital upgrade would start in 2023, and it still has not started; it is still vacant. If the government make a statement at an election that says, ‘We govern for all Victoria. We will do what matters,’ then they should stick to that promise, not break the promise. My community, between congestion and a health service that is under so much pressure, has had a gutful. Live up to your promises. I want the Minister for Planning to come down and explain to my community why this government has left them behind.

#### **Point Cook Homestead**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (19:21): (1588) My adjournment is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is that the minister join me to visit the Point Cook Homestead. I am so glad you are at the table, Minister. Minister, we have spoken many times before about the wonderful homestead in the electorate that I represent, at the Point Cook Coastal Park. The homestead itself was built at the same time as this Parliament, amazingly, and it was built by the Chirmsides, who had great involvement in Melbourne’s west at that time and beyond. Minister, members of the community talk about the wonderful coffees and picnics. They talk about their weddings at the site.

They talk about the ghost tours – just not the ghosts of leaders past of the Liberal Party. They talk about the Ramsar wetlands and the dolphins that swim by across our bay. Minister, it is a much-loved place, and I look forward to welcoming you there.

### Responses

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (19:22): Very few things would give me more pleasure than spending some time with the wonderful member for Point Cook at one of the awesome assets in Victoria and also in his community. I would love to come to the Point Cook Homestead, and I will make some time very, very soon – asap.

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (19:23): Through you, Deputy Speaker, to the member for Broadmeadows, I would be delighted to visit the Broadmeadows electorate and in particular to visit some retirement villages in the electorate, because of course the Allan Labor government has reformed retirement villages legislation in this state. We have made retirement living fairer. We have done a number of things. We have ensured that we are regulating those costly exit fees, but we have also ensured that we are establishing a mandatory code of practice to protect residents of retirement villages. We will be launching a conciliation scheme to ensure that we are dealing with disputes when they arise in retirement villages. I also highlight that the government will be introducing the older persons housing service, which will be an \$8 million investment by our government. What this will mean is that if you are a Victorian who lives in a retirement village or in a residential park or a Victorian who is over 55 and lives in a private rental, you will be able to access advice and support, including legal advice, on the other end of the phone thanks to our government. I would be delighted, member for Broadmeadows, to visit your electorate, particularly to visit retirement villages in your electorate, to explain to them all of the important reforms that the government is making to retirement living in this state.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (19:24): The member for Bulleen raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport on rail heritage. The wonderful member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in relation to the Filipino community. The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Police on the Mooroopna police station. The wonderful member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport in relation to the Lara community's local bus network and the review there. The member for South-West Coast – she wants me to say 'lovely' member for South-West Coast – raised a matter for the Minister for Housing and Building to assist a local family to find a home. The member for Mordialloc – I cannot say enough about him – raised a matter for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and that is to provide an update on the upgrade of the incredible Monash hospital. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Premier in relation to an update on budget expenditure. The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Minister for Planning, and that was to visit his community and to look at infrastructure needs. I will refer all of those matters to the relevant ministers.

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

**House adjourned 7:26 pm.**