



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 3 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, Alison Marchant,  
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

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

Jacinta Allan (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

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**Tuesday 3 March 2026**

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

*Bills*

**Crimes Amendment Bill 2026**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:05): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Crimes Act 1958 to make further provision in relation to who can commence a prosecution for an offence against section 195N(1) or 195O(1) of that act and for other purposes.

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

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:06): The Crimes Amendment Bill 2026 will make it easier to commence prosecutions for serious vilification offences.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Sonya KILKENNY:** Under standing order 61(3)(b), I advise the chamber that representatives of all parties and independent members have received a copy of the bill and a briefing in accordance with the standing order. I will therefore move the second reading immediately.

*Statement of compatibility*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:06): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026:

**Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026.

In my opinion, the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview**

The Bill seeks to amend the *Crimes Act 1958* in relation to the prosecution of serious vilification offences.

**Human Rights Issues**

**Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill**

**Right to retrospective criminal laws**

Section 27 of the Charter provides that a person must not be found guilty of a criminal offence because of conduct that was not a criminal offence when it was engaged in, and that a penalty must not be imposed on any person for a criminal offence that is greater than the penalty that applied to the offence when it was committed.

The Bill amends section 195Q of the *Crimes Act 1958* to remove the requirement for the Director of Public Prosecutions' consent to police prosecutions of serious vilification offences, namely sections 195N(1) and 195O(1) of the *Crimes Act*, unless the accused is under the age of 18 years. A transitional provision, new section 640C, provides that section 195Q of the *Crimes Act* as substituted by the Bill applies in relation to an offence against section 195N(1) or 195O(1) irrespective of when the offence is alleged to have been committed. These offences commenced operation on 20 September 2025.

While this provision will amend the consent requirement retrospectively, it does not limit or interfere with section 27 of the Charter. Section 195Q of the *Crimes Act* is a procedural provision and does not alter the elements or penalties of the offences in sections 195N or 195O of the *Crimes Act*.

Protection of families and children

Section 17 of the Charter protects the rights of families and children. Section 17(2) recognises the vulnerability of children because of their age, conferring additional rights on them. It is concerned with protecting the ‘best interests of the child’ (*Certain Children by their Litigation Guardian Sister Marie Brigid Arthur v Minister for Families and Children* [2016] VSC 796 [145]).

While the Bill removes the requirement for Director of Public Prosecutions’ consent to police prosecutions for serious vilification offences alleged to have been perpetrated by adults, section 195Q(b) of the *Crimes Act* requires Victoria Police to obtain the Director of Public Prosecutions’ consent to charge an accused who is a child (under 18 years of age) with serious vilification. This safeguard promotes the protection of children by ensuring that their unique characteristics and vulnerabilities are considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions before deciding to proceed with a prosecution.

**Sonya Kilkenny**  
Attorney-General

*Second reading*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:08): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

The Crimes Amendment Bill 2026 will amend the *Crimes Act 1958* in relation to the prosecution of serious vilification offences.

The Bill will change the Director of Public Prosecutions’ (DPP) consent framework regarding the serious vilification offences in section 195N(1) (incitement on ground of protected attribute) and section 195O(1) (threaten physical harm or property damage on ground of protected attribute) of the *Crimes Act 1958*.

These offences, and other landmark reforms, were contained in the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 (the 2024 Bill).

Currently in Victoria, due to amendments made during Parliamentary debate on the 2024 Bill, a prosecution for a serious vilification offence may only be commenced with the consent of the DPP and the DPP must consider all the circumstances, including social, cultural and historical factors, before doing so. This additional prosecutorial burden may impact the effectiveness of these offences, preventing or delaying police from using them when appropriate to respond to seriously hateful conduct which is of concern to the Victorian community.

The Bill will revert these aspects of the anti-vilification laws to the form in which they were introduced into Parliament by the government. In particular, the Bill will amend section 195Q of the *Crimes Act 1958* to provide that the DPP’s consent is not required for a police officer to commence a prosecution for a serious vilification offence unless the accused person is under the age of 18 years. Consistent with the approach to the Nazi symbol and Nazi salute offences, this safeguard ensures children’s unique characteristics and vulnerabilities are considered before deciding to proceed with a prosecution.

The Bill also provides that only Victoria Police and the DPP will be able to commence prosecutions for these offences, meaning that private citizens are not able to do so. This will ensure there is a level of experienced prosecutorial oversight before a matter progresses to court, involving a consideration of whether there is sufficient evidence to support a conviction. It will not prevent any person from making a complaint to police when they think they have experienced or witnessed serious vilification.

Removing the explicit requirement on the DPP to consider surrounding circumstances, such as social, cultural and historical factors, does not mean that the DPP or police officers will not consider such circumstances. Police officers and the DPP would still be required to consider whether alleged offending was likely to incite hatred against, serious contempt for, revulsion towards or severe ridicule of the target person or group with the protected attribute. This necessarily requires taking the surrounding circumstances into account.

These changes will apply to a serious vilification offence irrespective of when it is alleged to have been committed, noting that these offences commenced on 20 September 2025.

Together, these reforms will help facilitate timely, appropriate and effective responses to serious vilification conduct.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:08): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

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

**Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill  
2026**

*Introduction*

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:08): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to expand the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's jurisdiction and provide further for public hearings and for other purposes.

Today is a test for this government, after this Parliament has said very loudly and very clearly that we cannot stand for the cover-up of corruption that has occurred in this state.

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** Only one sentence into seeking to speak to the procedural motion that would enable this bill to occur, and the government is calling out 'no'. This is a test for our Parliament but more a test for this government and whether they have any integrity at all. The coalition, the Liberals and Nationals, have announced a package of measures because we want to clean up this state. We know and have seen the most shameful examples of corruption uncovered over recent weeks. I think it would be fair to say that every Victorian we have spoken to, and I am sure every Victorian the government members have spoken to, has raised their horror – there is no other word – at the corruption that has been uncovered: a minimum \$15 billion of corruption.

As the member for Laverton herself has said, this issue has been raised with government members. The government members have belled the cat; it is being raised. So we are proposing to introduce a bill today which does something meaningful and significant and will bring about change, because what this bill will do is provide our chief anti-corruption agency with the powers it needs to chase down the crooks who are getting taxpayers money. How could any government stand to see Victorian taxpayers money go to crooks and turn a blind eye – turn their back on it? Shameful. We will not, and that is why today we are moving this bill, which has two significant powers. Firstly, it will allow IBAC, the chief anti-corruption agency, the powers it needs to follow the money, to chase money, and to have oversight of public expenditure in terms of third parties. In terms of third-party expenditure IBAC will have the capacity to investigate, to look into and to understand where that money has gone, because a contractual shield should not obstruct integrity of taxpayers funds. At the moment IBAC cannot look beyond that shield and understand where taxpayers money has gone. Sadly, it has taken a significant effort by specifically the *Age* to uncover where a lot of this money is going, but we know it is only the tip of the iceberg. We know, sadly, it is only the tip of the iceberg. We know that this behaviour is rampant, and it requires immediate investigation.

The second thing this bill seeks to do is change the exceptional circumstances rule for public hearings. Where a public hearing will be in the public interest, this new power will change the default level of when a public hearing occurs, because if it is in the public interest it should be public, not just where it is exceptional but where it is in the public interest. There is a balance in when public hearings occur. What this bill seeks to do is strike that right balance. I would say to the government: the members of that side of the chamber will have a chance in a moment, the members of that side of the chamber will have an opportunity to speak to what their level of integrity is, to whether or not they want to see corruption cleaned up in this state, and to say whether or not they believe it was okay for \$15 billion of our money – taxpayers money – to be corrupted. Every Victorian is going to look on to see how

members vote, how the Premier herself votes, how the Deputy Premier votes on this bill. This bill is important. We must do it today, and this is the right thing to do for Victorians.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (12:14): Well, that was quite pious, but I think the member for Brighton just belled the cat in that we will see how people vote. The opposition have shown once again their proclivity for putting up very, very dubious propositions. Also I would like to say that –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Brighton! The member for Brighton was given the courtesy to be heard in silence. I expect the same for all members on their feet.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** Thank you for your protection, Speaker. The right actions, the appropriate actions, were taken on this issue, and I cannot support this binary motion.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:14): I was interested to see who was drawing the short straws over there, but obviously nobody wanted to speak. Nobody wanted to, because nobody on that side wants to defend this corrupt government.

**Jess Wilson** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** They cannot say what they are doing, Leader of the Opposition, that is right, and that is why the opposition is acting to actually protect Victorians from the corruption that has been bedevilling this state – \$15 billion of corruption, as reported by Geoffrey Watson SC, the CFMEU-appointed investigator. I have had people on my social media in the last couple of days saying ‘Where’s your evidence?’ It came from the CFMEU’s own appointed investigator and was only revealed because of a Queensland Parliament commission of inquiry, because those on that side of this Parliament are not interested in knowing anything about this. The *Age* has been raising this for years, and the government has said, ‘I referred it to the police. We did this, we did that. I referred it to IBAC.’

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Leader of the Nationals, this is a procedural debate. I ask you to speak to the procedural motion.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** I am doing so, Speaker, because I am explaining why we need to have this legislation introduced and debated. This is very important for the Victorian people, who have seen \$15 billion of their hard-earned taxpayers dollars diverted to bikies and criminals because a government absolutely turned its eyes away from what was going on despite repeatedly being warned over the years. That is why we need this legislation today. The member for Brighton has indicated exactly why we are bringing in this legislation – to give IBAC those follow-the-dollar powers. The Premier was advised by IBAC that IBAC could not investigate these claims, because it did not have those powers, and what did the Premier do? Nothing. The Premier did nothing. The Premier did not respond to IBAC’s directions.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member on his feet is required to be factual. He is simply outlining things that are not true, and I ask that you call him back to –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Under standing order 58, there is a requirement that all members be factual.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** If we are going to be factual, let us remind ourselves that a couple of weeks ago the Premier released the letter that she wrote to IBAC, from 2024, asking them to investigate, but she neglected to tell the rest of the Victorian people that IBAC wrote back to her and said they do not have the power. I would invite the Leader of the House to explain what the government did after that. What did they do to actually satisfy themselves that anything was being done about the corruption on the Big Build projects? The evidence so far says they did very, very little. They have not given IBAC the powers. They have not followed up with police. They have not followed up with the AFP, with the ATO, with WorkSafe – any of those. They have sent off emails and said, ‘We referred it. We referred it and nothing has happened.’ And Victorians are continuing –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a further point of order, Speaker, the member on his feet is defying your ruling. You have reminded him that contributions are required to be factual, and once again the member on his feet is neglecting –

**The SPEAKER:** I have made this point before. Standing order 58 requires members to be factual. It is not for me to determine. It is a rule of the house.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Thank you, Speaker. I was not defying your ruling, because you gave that ruling. If the government would like to get up and explain the facts, it can do so. We saw the first speaker from the government sit down after 30 seconds. They are so embarrassed about this. They know that they have overseen abject corruption – \$15 billion of taxpayers money. As the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety, have a think about how many roads we could fix for \$15 billion. The government is saying it is doing 200,000 a year. It could do 2 million a year if it was actually putting that money towards roads. Yet we have got a government that is not interested. It does not want to find out about the extent of corruption in this state.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** The Leader of the House says that that is not true. If it is not true, speak up and vote for this legislation today.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Nationals, I remind you it is disorderly to respond to interjections and that you should address your comments through the Chair.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:20): I will remind the chamber that this is a strictly procedural motion and not a referendum on integrity, as the opposition are trying so very hard to claim. When we reflect on the seriousness of the matters that they are seeking to rush through here, we know that there is the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026, and we would love them to support that, because they purport to be the party of law and order. But we are not seeing that here, so I would suggest that they allow the proper conduct of the Parliament to continue.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (12:20): Government member contributions will speak for themselves. Government member contributions on the introduction of this bill, as moved by the member for Brighton, will speak for themselves. *Hansard* will record the response of government members who are speaking for less than a minute on the introduction of a very important bill seeking to be introduced by the member for Brighton. It will be on the public record of this state forever and a day, and what will also be on the public record will be this government's inability to address the largest issue facing this state: to unearth, to uncover, to get to the bottom of a \$15 billion – billion with a 'b' – corruption tax, which has been enabled by government ministers sleeping at the wheel and a union that has just run rampant through this state.

**Sarah Connolly:** On a point of order, Speaker – I loathe to interrupt the member for Sandringham – may you remind the member for Sandringham that he is required to be factual. He is not being factual in his contribution.

**The SPEAKER:** I have ruled on this matter previously. Members are expected to be factual when they are on their feet.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** It is important for this bill to be first read. It is critical for this bill to be first read. The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission has for some time called for these powers which this bill will enact. All we are asking the government to do is to allow it to be introduced, for it to be second read and for them to support very good public policy, which the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission has called for itself as recently as December 2025 in that very good parliamentary committee, the Integrity and Oversight Committee, contributed to by the member for Rowville and the member for Mildura. There was recommendation 5, which suggested that IBAC have 'follow-the-dollar investigatory powers'. Respectfully to that committee, I suggest that the powers IBAC are actually seeking are not follow-the-dollar powers but follow-the-\$15-billion powers.

Every cent of it deserves to be uncovered – every cent of it. What members opposite do not recognise quite clearly, by the disdain with which they are conducting themselves through the course –

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Sandringham, I am not sure what you are looking at, but the Chair is here. Through the Chair.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** Speaker, to assist you, I am looking at the time. The \$15 billion that needs to be uncovered – every cent of that is a cent of the hardworking Victorian taxpayers, who are being taxed to the hilt by a government who is ripping them off and does not give a stuff about them, frankly. Unlike them, unlike members of the government –

**Sarah Connolly:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Sandringham is not only casting wrong aspersions onto the government but also not telling the truth.

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

**Brad ROWSWELL:** It is quite clear that this government is determined to turn the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, the independent watchdog over these matters, from a watchdog into a lapdog. They want to under-resource it. They have been under-resourcing it year after year after year just to meet budget. The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission has been relying upon Treasurer's advance after Treasurer's advance year after year just to meet budget. This government – a government who quite clearly do not value integrity, who quite clearly do not value hardworking Victorian taxpayers contributions – of course want nothing to do with this.

Of course they want nothing to do with this bill. Of course they do not want to give IBAC more powers and of course they do not want to give IBAC more investment, because they know the consequences of that: as soon as they give just a centimetre of acknowledgement that what has happened is the wrong thing to do, they will unearth a Pandora's box of problems for the Premier, which goes to the heart of who they are, which goes to the heart of the labour movement, which goes to the heart of the union movement.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, again, I ask that you remind the member on his feet that this is a narrow procedural motion and that he is straying far and wide. I ask that you bring him back to the narrow procedural motion.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Sandringham's time has expired. I will take points of order at the end of the procedural debate.

**Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (12:26):** I rise to make a brief contribution on this procedural matter and to echo the comments of the member for Frankston and the member for Albert Park. As the opposition are well aware, there are proper ways to deal with these important issues. I would also add while I am on my feet that there are proper ways to do quantitative analysis. I did a little bit of that work in a previous life, and I would suggest some of the figures that have been quoted do not follow that proper work. I will leave my contribution at that.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, before you put the question, I do want to raise with you from *Rulings from the Chair* Speaker Smith's ruling of 21 March 2013 in relation to the principles of points of order, and I specifically draw your attention to principle (6) and principle (7) on continual repeating of points of order and frivolous and spurious points. Sorry, did I say something funny?

**The SPEAKER:** No. Your point of order is noted.

**James Newbury:** Can I finish my point of order?

**The SPEAKER:** Can you be direct with your point of order.

**James Newbury:** I am getting to it, as I am entitled to do. When one of our speakers spoke, the Chair did suggest that members from this side of the chamber were required to hear the speakers, and

we did respectfully listen to the speaker. Of course we did. We respectfully listened, and I put to you that there were repeated frivolous points of order and at no time was there protection given from that frivolous, spurious behaviour.

**The SPEAKER:** I am not quite sure what the point of order is, member for Brighton. However, I do remind all members to abide by the *Rulings from the Chair* and also the standing orders. It is incumbent on all of you to know the standing orders. It is my job to enforce them.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (31):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

*Noes (50):* Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, 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, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

**Motion defeated.**

**Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Tough on Corruption)  
Bill 2026**

*Introduction*

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (12:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 in relation to the meaning of 'corrupt conduct', to provide for follow-the-dollar powers, to remove unnecessary barriers to holding public hearings and for other purposes.

It differs from the bill produced by the opposition just now in that it includes all three of the amendments that members will recall were circulated in the upper house in the last sitting week. The one that was missing from the Liberal bill was the removal of a restriction on IBAC which currently requires it to only investigate matters if they are a criminal offence. It is something of an understatement to say that the Allan Labor government has serious corruption and integrity questions to answer right now, and every Victorian deserves to know the truth about what has been going on under its watch. The fastest way for Victorians to get these answers is to immediately pass legislation to strengthen IBAC, and that starts with everybody in this chamber supporting this motion today. If the Labor government oppose this procedural motion, we can only conclude that they do not want the Victorian public to know the truth about the depth and breadth of Big Build corruption.

I have seen media reports that Labor has labelled the Greens amendments in the last sitting week a political stunt. If they are a stunt, then I do not know what word we could use to describe the Premier pretending to the media that IBAC was investigating these allegations when she knew that they were not. The Premier's stunt of hiding behind a referral that IBAC had already dismissed was dishonest and a misjudgement. It is a bit like the old teenager trick of swapping out your parents' gin with water: a short-term, desperate ploy that is certain to be uncovered.

We have an opportunity in this chamber this morning to turn the Premier's stunt into something meaningful by supporting this motion seeking to introduce a bill to give IBAC the powers it actually needs – the powers that IBAC told us yesterday in public hearings that it needs. Turning the Premier's pretend IBAC referral into a real investigation of Big Build corruption would be an outcome that is the opposite of a stunt. I have also observed the government suggesting that proposed reforms to IBAC are rushed, that they need more than the 12 years in government they have had to make any changes to the anti-corruption commission. Rushed? The Independent Commission Against Corruption in New South Wales has had these powers for at least a decade. Rather than rushed, what is scandalous here is that we are actually having to debate them today in Victoria.

I could point out to state Labor that their federal Labor colleagues managed to create an anti-corruption commission from scratch and give it equivalent powers by passing legislation in a little over six months from being elected. Anti-corruption giant the late Honourable Stephen Charles AO KC, the father of Victoria's IBAC, who died last year, had been advocating for these very IBAC powers from the moment he helped create IBAC in 2011. Since being elected in 2018, I have observed the Greens trying on several occasions to introduce these laws and be repeatedly blocked by state Labor, so these reforms are not rushed.

The reforms in the bill that I wish to introduce are based on the considered recommendations from integrity experts, and you heard them all in the inquiry that the Integrity and Oversight Committee had into IBAC's legislation late last year. Integrity experts like IBAC itself, Integrity Oversight Victoria, the Centre for Public Integrity, the Victorian Bar and the Law Institute of Victoria all want these reforms, particularly the broadening of the definition of 'corruption', the one that the opposition has not yet decided to support. These reforms are long overdue and predate the recent revelations of billions of dollars of Big Build corruption. But surely an estimated \$15 billion corruption scandal – alleged corruption in Victoria on a dollar scale akin to any of the worst kleptocratic governments anywhere in the world – must mean that we see no more delay.

Victorians deserve answers. They deserve to know how much of their money has gone to bling adorning Mick Gatto and other organised criminals and how this was allowed to happen. They deserve to get the investigation that the Premier wrote to IBAC about. The public must be able to see IBAC working to hold state government officials accountable and upholding integrity in this state. A government with nothing to hide would support this bill.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (12:38): I rise to oppose the motion put forward by the member for Brunswick. We have a very large agenda this week, including changes to the Crimes Act 1958, which will obviously go through the usual process in the government business program and the usual legislative process. I know it is one that we have been trying to debate for some time to get some changes, and it is going to be really important, amongst the other legislative amendments that are proposed. For that reason, I oppose the motion.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (12:39): I rise to briefly make some comments about the member for Brunswick's motion to urgently introduce this bill to amend IBAC and give IBAC greater powers to investigate and report on corruption here in Victoria. It could not be more urgent. We just heard a Labor member get up and say 'We can't possibly do it this week. We don't have the time. We've got other important things we need to do.' What could be more urgent and more important than finding out where potentially \$15 billion of Victorian public money has gone, and what could be more important and more urgent than rooting out corruption in Victoria?

I think this might be the third time that the Greens have attempted to introduce laws to strengthen IBAC and give our anti-corruption watchdog the powers that it has long, long been asking for. This bill does three things. It gives IBAC follow-the-dollar powers, it allows for public hearings with IBAC and, thirdly and very importantly, it expands the jurisdiction so that IBAC does not have such a high threshold, a high bar, of what defines corruption and therefore what it can look into. The bar in Victoria is so much higher than anywhere else, which means IBAC is significantly hamstrung. These three

things match the amendments that the Greens have moved in the other place. I note that the Liberal Party do not support the expanded jurisdiction, and I urge them to reconsider, because I think this is something that many experts have been calling for and a really important part of bringing our anti-corruption laws up to scratch with other states.

The Greens have done this – introduced amendments and introduced bills to reform the anti-corruption watchdog – despite consistent blocking from the Victorian Labor Party. I think that Victorians have every right to ask what more the Labor Party have to hide, when in particular Labor this week have gone to quite extraordinary lengths to stop Greens amendments in the other place, which had the numbers to pass this Parliament and which, if they had been allowed to get to a vote last week, would have meant that we would have fixed our anti-corruption system here in Victoria. We could have had this done and dusted last week, which is why it is so urgent to bring it this week. The reason that we are seeking to introduce this bill today is because we have tried every other measure. We have tried amending the justice bill in the other place. We have tried moving it in a general business slot in the upper house previously. We have even said to the government, ‘We don’t need to own this issue.’ If the Labor Party want to bring their own IBAC bill, then we are all for it. We will support it. But of course they will not.

The Labor government has blocked every single one of those attempts to strengthen our integrity measures here in Victoria, and now it is urgent because we have seen these explosive allegations about the cost of alleged corruption on Victoria’s Big Build construction sites, corruption that Geoffrey Watson SC has estimated cost \$15 billion. Even if it is only a small percentage of that, that is quite an extraordinary amount of money. State Labor has said that this \$15 billion figure, despite also being supported by Fair Work Commission general manager Murray Furlong, is in the Premier’s words ‘untested’, to which the Greens’ response is ‘Then let’s test it.’ What does the Labor Party have to hide? If you believe that that figure is incorrect, let us test it, let us investigate, let us get to the bottom of it and let us give IBAC the powers to do that. Good governments should not hide from anti-corruption watchdogs. It is a core tenet of a democracy to have functioning anti-corruption watchdogs, and Victorians deserve answers. They deserve to know how much of their money has gone missing and how it was allowed to happen. We simply cannot afford another corruption scandal. Victorians are being told now that we do not have enough money to fund our environmental agencies, we have got to cut VicHealth promotions to make budget savings, we cannot fund our community health centres, we need to cut public schools funding and we have got to demolish public housing, all because we do not have enough money for these basic, fundamental, essential public services. The Labor Party are happy to cut all of these services because they do not want to look into where public money has gone on Big Build construction sites, and I just think that is not right.

Surely it is also in the Labor Party’s interest to support this bill. Surely they do not want this corruption scandal hanging around until election time. What have they got to hide in not supporting this bill? Who knows? But the public will be watching how the Labor Party and how the Liberal Party vote on this bill.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (12:44): I stand to oppose the motion of the member for Brunswick, and in doing so I do it to represent my community, a proudly diverse community which deserves protection and which deserves the safety of the justice legislation that we are bringing to this place. My community is looking to us for the respect and the protection that we want to provide, and those opposite may be dragging their feet to get there, but we simply need to cut the stunts and get to the serious business of keeping people safe in Victoria.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (12:50): I note the brevity of the government MPs’ contributions to this debate, because there is actually very little to find in being able to justify opposing this motion by the member for Brunswick. In fact it is pretty urgent that we introduce these robust anti-corruption laws to Parliament this week. It has been a long time coming through countless recommendations from inquiries, KCs and other commissions, which have recommended that we expand IBAC to give it some teeth so that it can actually investigate corrupt behaviour. By referring

the Big Build corruption allegations on to IBAC, the Premier has indicated that she knows that these allegations should be investigated. She was happy for the whole state to believe that an investigation was underway. Now we know that it was not and that –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, this is a narrow procedural motion and the member on her feet is required to be factual. I ask that you ask the member to come back to the narrow procedural debate and that she remain factual in her contributions.

**The SPEAKER:** I again remind members that there is a requirement in the standing orders to be factual when they are on their feet. This is a narrow debate. The member for Richmond to come back to the debate before the house.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI:** It is imperative that this bill be debated right now, because now that we know that an investigation was not underway and that the best part of two years has been lost to this sham, there is no time to lose. This Parliament must give IBAC the teeth that it needs to commence an investigation so that Victorians know the full truth about the \$15 billion lost to corruption. If the Premier wants to get to the bottom of Big Build corruptions, then she can support this bill and she can refer the matter to them again, knowing that IBAC can actually investigate.

We should introduce this bill without delay. Everyone has already seen most of it. It is mostly exactly the same as the three amendments that we circulated in the upper house only two weeks ago. That would be considered the bathwater that Labor found so objectionable that they threw out their own baby in the form of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. It did a whole lot of other things that the government presumably wanted to do, but they found it so objectionable that we added these IBAC amendments that they got rid of their own bill. We have just added, to be clear, the power for IBAC to make findings of corrupt conduct and clarified the definition of a public body and public officer. Members can surely understand the urgency of legislating more power for IBAC this week, given that every moment counts after we have lost so much time to the Premier's IBAC referral stunt. We know that the coalition supported two of our three amendments: introducing follow-the-dollar powers and making it easier to hold public hearings. It is worth asking why the Liberals want to restrict IBAC to only investigating indictable criminal offences, bribery and misconduct in public office after the many, many recommendations that they be allowed to investigate grey corruption as well. That restriction actually prevents IBAC from making findings of corrupt conduct, as IBAC said yesterday.

Introducing this bill is also an opportunity for both major parties to show their commitment to investigating corruption. Victorians expect that. Victorians deserve nothing less than a corruption watchdog with real teeth, not some watered-down, decaffeinated version. Unless we see urgent legislation empowering IBAC to fully investigate outsourced government projects, Victorians will be asking, 'How much more money will be lost to corruption in the future?' We are unlikely to claw back that \$15 billion. That has likely been spent on bikes and bling and meth by now, but Victorians have a right to know how their money was lost, and what the government knew and when, so that this never happens again.

**Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (12:49):** I rise to make another brief contribution opposing the procedural motion from the member for Brunswick. I want to echo the very thoughtful contribution by the member for Yan Yean and totally agree with her that there is some constructive and important business for all our communities for the government to get to and for this Parliament to get to. I did find the member for Brunswick's contribution slightly more compelling than the member for Brighton's. I did not quite follow the gin and water analogy, but I will check that out in *Hansard*. But I will otherwise oppose this motion for the same reason as previous government members.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (31):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett,

Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

*Noes (50)*: Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, 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, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

**Motion defeated.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion**

**The SPEAKER (12:55)**: General business, notices of motion 20 to 21, 59 to 60 and 66, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

#### *Petitions*

#### **Point Cook electorate pedestrian infrastructure**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) presented a petition bearing 112 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly to the lack pedestrian access for Point Cook resident to a train station, their local hospital and university. Meanwhile residents of Hoppers Crossing and Williams landing do not have such barriers. As part of the Werribee Precinct Development plan a bridge is proposed to span the Maltby bypass ideally this bridge should include pedestrian facilities to allow Point Cook residents to access local amenities.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to improve pedestrian access for Point Cook residents as part of the proposed Werribee Precinct Development.

#### *Members*

#### **Acting Speakers**

**The SPEAKER (12:56)**: Under standing order 20, I have tabled my warrant amending the panel of members to preside as Acting Speakers to discharge Alison Marchant.

#### *Committees*

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

#### *Alert Digest No. 3*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:56): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 3 of 2026, on the following acts and bills, together with their appendices:

Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Act 2025

Justice Legislation Amendment (Community Safety) Act 2025

National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026.

**Ordered to be published.**

*Documents*

**Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

**DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

*Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* – Education and Care Services National Further Amendment Regulations 2025 under s 303

*Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984* – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 145/2025 (*Gazette G8, 19 February 2026*)

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

Alpine – GC269  
Alpine Resorts – GC269  
Ararat – GC269  
Ballarat – GC269  
Banyule – GC269  
Bass Coast – GC269  
Baw Baw – GC269  
Bayside – GC269  
Benalla – GC269  
Boroondara – GC269  
Brimbank – GC269  
Buloke – GC269  
Campaspe – GC269  
Cardinia – GC269  
Casey – GC269  
Central Goldfields – GC269  
Colac Otway – GC269  
Corangamite – GC269  
East Gippsland – GC269  
Frankston – C148, GC269  
French Island and Sandstone Island – GC269  
Gannawarra – GC269  
Glen Eira – GC269  
Glenelg – GC269  
Golden Plains – GC269  
Greater Bendigo – GC269  
Greater Dandenong – GC269  
Greater Geelong – GC269  
Hepburn – GC269  
Hindmarsh – GC269  
Hobsons Bay – GC269  
Horsham – GC26

Hume – GC269  
Indigo – GC269  
Kingston – GC269  
Knox – GC269  
Latrobe – GC269  
Loddon – GC269  
Macedon Ranges – GC269  
Manningham – GC269  
Mansfield – GC269  
Maribyrnong – GC269  
Maroondah – GC269  
Melbourne – GC269  
Melton – GC269  
Merri-bek – GC269  
Mildura – GC269  
Mitchell – GC269  
Moirā – GC269  
Monash – GC269  
Moonee Valley – C240, GC269  
Moorabool – GC269  
Mornington Peninsula – GC269  
Mount Alexander – GC269  
Moyne – GC269  
Murrindindi – GC269  
Nillumbik – GC269  
Northern Grampians – GC269  
Port of Melbourne – GC269  
Queenscliffe – GC269  
South Gippsland – GC269  
Southern Grampians – GC269  
Stonnington – GC269  
Strathbogie – GC269  
Surf Coast – GC269  
Swan Hill – GC269  
Towong – GC269  
Wangaratta – GC269  
Warrnambool – GC269  
Wellington – GC269  
West Wimmera – GC269  
Whitehorse – GC269  
Whittlesea – GC269  
Wodonga – GC269  
Wyndham – GC269  
Yarra – C333, GC269  
Yarra Ranges – GC269

Yarriambiack – GC269

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Conservation, Forests and Land Act 1987* – SR 13

*Planning and Environment Act 1987* – SR 9

*Road Safety Act 1986* – SRs 11, 12

*Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983* – SR 10

*Unclaimed Money Act 2008* – SR 8

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 5, 7, 8, 9, 11

Documents under s 16B in relation to *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* – Electricity Distribution Code of Practice (Distributor Reporting Obligations) Amendment 2026.

### ***Bills***

#### **Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025**

*Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (12:58): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2026 without amendment.

#### **Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025**

##### **Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Bill 2025**

*Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:58): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Bill 2025.

### ***Motions***

#### **Motions by leave**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (12:58): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that Israel and the US have illegally bombed Iran, killing 148 children at a school, and that the weapons parts made here in Victoria form part of a global supply chain that is fuelling and facilitating illegal military aggression and refuses to be drawn into US–Israeli war crimes.

**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) (12:59): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2):

- (1) the order of the day, government business, relating to the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026 be considered and completed by 5 pm on 3 March 2026; and
- (2) the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 5 March 2026:

National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025

Electoral Amendment Bill 2025

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2025.

Firstly, can I touch on the very important bill that the Attorney-General has introduced and second read this morning, and which will form the basis of debate for the rest of the day up until the guillotine, and point to how important it is that this bill be before the house today and that we move quickly to make these amendments to the Crimes Act 1958 in order to acquit commitments that were made by the Premier in light of the terrorist attack on Australia's Jewish community in Bondi in December of last year.

This is a very significant piece of legislation that was unfortunately subject to a political stunt in the other place in the last sitting week. What we have seen again this morning are stunts performed by both the Liberal-National parties and the Greens political party, all of whom have chewed up valuable time in this house this morning when we have got this important bill to debate here so that we can, as we have long committed to, strengthen our laws to combat antisemitism and protect public safety. That includes amending the way that serious vilification offences are prosecuted to address concerns that the current DPP consent requirement imposes unnecessary prosecutorial burden, impacting the offence's effectiveness. I thank the Attorney-General for her leadership in bringing this here today.

We will also be debating the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025. We are proudly, here in Victoria, well on the way to transitioning away from fossil fuels to cheap and reliable renewable energy, but we have always said that gas is an important part of the transition. To that end, we will be debating this bill today in order to ensure that we have that important transitional supply. We have not just talked about climate change – unlike some in this chamber – but taken real action. Again I want to commend the Minister for Climate Action, who has been the most consequential energy and climate action minister this nation has ever seen, overseeing Victoria's transition to renewable energy. I might reflect that over this summer what we saw was renewable energy really coming into its own. The facts of the matter are that despite having a record heat over summer – in fact we recorded one of the highest temperature days on record – our electricity generation was maintained through the entire period, which is thanks to the investments that we have made in renewable energy. The Electoral Amendment Bill 2025 is also to be debated this week, and I am sure members on all sides will have various opinions that they will want to share with the house in relation to that bill.

What I really wanted to save time to outline for everyone is the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026. Of course I will take this opportunity to commend the Minister for Skills and TAFE in the other place for her leadership in transforming the TAFE sector here in Victoria. Victorians well remember the cuts, the cuts and the cuts that the Liberal Party made to TAFE colleges across this state, locking the gates to the Lilydale TAFE –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is an outrageous abuse. On relevance, simple sledges have nothing to do with the motion that the minister is moving.

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

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I was only outlining the facts in relation to TAFE. Across this side of the house many members look forward to talking about how TAFE and free TAFE have transformed the lives of our constituents. This will be a great debate. I cannot begin to express the gratitude which I have for all of those students right across Victoria who have taken the opportunity to study the diploma of nursing and make a great contribution to Victoria's public health system. That will be an excellent debate. I commend the government business program to the house.

**James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:05):** I rise to speak on the government business program and oppose the government business program. It is a government business program that has changed. I do want to give a bit of background. When the Attorney-General's office contacted me in relation to a new bill that the Parliament was to consider today in the Assembly – a new bill which splits off the strengthening of hate speech laws – at that time, on behalf of the coalition, I said to the Attorney I would ask and hopefully see that bill be considered immediately when the house commences. I proposed that the bill be considered today and be acquitted by 5 o'clock today. I asked the Attorney

on behalf of the coalition if, by 5 o'clock today, that bill could be taken away from the normal 5 o'clock Thursday finish for bills, and that this particular amendment, through the bill, be considered by 5 o'clock today. I say to the government, in relation to accepting that request from the coalition, that that was a good thing, and I do not think that reflects on our broader views of the government business program.

This is a government business program, as I have said for a couple of weeks in a row now, that is so mismanaged that the government is seeking to pull stunts every single Thursday. Every single Thursday the government pulls stunts. Each week the government say in this debate they will not pull stunts. I note that the second item on the notice paper is another sledge motion which just bells the cat that Thursday we will see another sledge. What this government business program is about is management of time of this chamber. When we have bills listed for consideration before 5 o'clock on Thursday, it would be fair for Victorians to assume that debate in this chamber until that time was on the bills that are listed, unless the Leader of the House raised another matter that could be considered through the week. It is fair and reasonable for Victorians to assume that. In fact when there are other motions that are to be considered, often the Leader of the House, especially when they are bipartisan motions, will note in her contribution on the government business program that, in addition to the bills of the week, we will be dealing with whatever the other thing is. What we have seen over recent weeks is the government seeking to use the whole of Thursday afternoon to deal with motions that attack the opposition, and of course on every occasion –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the government business program clearly outlines the four bills that are being debated, and I ask that you ask the member to come back to discussing the government business program, which is the four bills that are on the program.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Leader of the House, you were allowed context, and I will allow the member for Brighton the same courtesy.

**James NEWBURY:** Of course the Leader of the House does not want me to give context which is completely reasonable in the debate on the government business program and how the time of the week is apportioned. I give context because not only have the government each week on the government business program debate said that they would not be debating other motions and then done so, but the notice paper today lists a sledge motion as the second item, which shows that is what the government will do. It is worth noting that on each of those occasions on Thursdays the Leader of the House has never spoken. The Leader of the House has never had the courage to speak and has always sent out backbenchers. Then, on moving the substantive motion initially, the government minister last week spoke for 8 minutes of the 30-minute allocation – very short. To the minister who is at the table, in no way am I reflecting on the quality of the debate, but it did not go for the full time.

So I will say that, as much as I enjoy procedural debates and speaking on these motions, I do not know why the government wants to keep giving me the best part of an hour of debate time every Thursday afternoon rather than dealing with substantive matters. Of course we are going to oppose the government business program because the government is misusing chamber time. It is shameful. It reflects on them, and sadly, every Victorian is let down.

**Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (13:10):** It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise and speak on this week's government business program, and I have to say it is great to follow the member for Brighton. I feel like I should refer to him as the fall guy. We know he is no Ryan Gosling, but the stunts he pulls here in this chamber each and every single week are just as funny.

We have a really busy week before us. We have four major pieces of legislation being debated in this house – really, really important pieces of legislation that we know that Victorian people, busy people, working mums and dads want us to bring to this place, debate, pass and get on and deliver for their communities. Our government is focused on getting on and delivering with these much-needed legislative changes. To start with we have the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025, which aims to make a

range of improvements to the way that our state elections are run, and it makes good on a number of recommendations and a number of reports made on Victoria's electoral system and processes since the previous review of the act in 2018, which was some time ago. I will be speaking on this one, and I cannot wait to share my thoughts on the changes in this legislation. I have a lot of thoughts on this.

We also have the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026, which is going to thankfully enshrine our government's free TAFE program because we do not want to have those opposite – God forbid they ever get into government – come and cut free TAFE, because free TAFE has saved hundreds of thousands of Victorian tradies and apprentices over \$3000 in course fees to upskill and get qualified for the jobs that they need. Just while talking about tradies, here is a fun fact that a lot of people did not know: more than 80,000 apprentices and trainees have now had the support to build real skills and real careers thanks to this government. Would you believe that is enough to fill a stadium.

Because we are coming into International Women's Day I will give a big shout-out to women who are doing apprenticeships on the tools. We are going ahead and helping more women get into trades with mentoring, wage subsidies and tradie boot camp. Tradie boot camp is giving our young women apprentices the real hands-on experience and skills to go ahead and get an apprenticeship. But like I said, this bill had to come before this place because we know those opposite will cut free TAFE, and that message of cutting free TAFE is going to be one that I am going to be taking all the way to the election, member for Lowan – all the way to the election. TAFE matters to people, and I cannot wait to speak on this bill.

We also have the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025, which will empower the minister to make some much-needed augmentations so that our state's transmission gas pipeline has the flexibility and the capacity it needs to meet the energy needs of Victorian consumers. Because we are talking about energy and energy transition, I do want to give a big shout-out on a personal note to folks in Braybrook, Tarneit and Truganina. They are getting a brand new neighbourhood battery. There are 79 that we are rolling out across the state. I think it is 79; it could be 129. I need to check that. But folks in my local community are going to benefit from having a community neighbourhood battery. It is a big deal, and I know they cannot wait to see it switched on. These are all really important changes and important amendments that are before the house this week, and I am sure that they will be accompanied by robust debate, because we know those opposite want to cut and shut down these sorts of important institutions like our TAFEs, like they did last time they were in government. It will be a very interesting debate to watch on these three pieces of legislation.

The fourth one that we are bringing before this place is the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026, which is really important. We are going to get that job done today. I am very much looking forward to speaking on that. By the looks of this week we are certainly not going to be slowing down with our legislative program and delivering the changes that all Victorians need. As the former Premier, one of the member for Brighton's favourite people, liked to say in this place – let me say it, member for Brighton; it might bring back some memories – every day of government is a precious gift, an opportunity to make real and lasting change. I think if anything, debating a bill that is going to enshrine free TAFE into law to protect it from the Liberal Party and those opposite, who will cut it if they get into government, is about making lasting change – the change that people really, really want and that matters to busy people and working families. That is why I will be supporting the government business program and getting on and delivering exactly that.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (13:15): I am more than happy to speak on the government business program today. But as the Manager of Opposition Business pointed out, we will be opposing this week's government business program, not because of the bill that was added to the program but just because of the mismanagement that we have seen since the beginning of this parliamentary year. It has been persistent. It has been a circus – I have said that before – and it is happening every week. I am sure that whilst there is the news of taxpayer dollars being funnelled into the pockets of bikies and organised crime, the taxpayer in Victoria certainly does not want to see more time wasted playing

games to sledge the opposition in this place, which is exactly where we should be doing work to make life-changing legislation that can actually improve the lives of Victorians.

I am talking about improving the lives of Victorians. With the indulgence of the house, I must send a shout-out to the Mildura SES, who did an amazing job over the weekend and up until last night, which is when I think they stood down – 192 call-outs in Mildura alone, after receiving 159 millimetres of rain in 36 hours. I am not quite sure what that is in inches – I should have looked at the rain gauge more closely – but that was just shy of our total rainfall for the entire of 2025. There were an incredible amount of rescues conducted and sandbagging. Bunnings was flooded; it is a travesty. Every golf course in Mildura is closed. The Swing Society tournament on Sunday has been postponed; it is a golf tournament, just to be clear. So I did want to send a huge shout-out to the Mildura SES. I have trained with them before. They taught me to tie some fancy knots for rescues at height, and they are a magnificent bunch. So thank you, Mildura SES, sincerely.

Getting to the bills that we have on the program this week: the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026, we have a few speakers on that. That is the one that was added late to the program. Again, just to run you through this, we are all very busy in this place. We all work very, very hard, I am sure of that – some harder than others, I am sure. Although I am not a rigid or scheduled person, when it comes to my job as the Nationals Whip in this place, I do have a rigid schedule. Thursday we get the government business program – and this may lead to my schedule being thrown out the window – and Thursday night I put it all together and send it out to my Nationals colleagues. When things change early in the week or over the weekend and I am out, busy at community events or community events have been cancelled – also a shout-out to the Sunraysia drag racing club, who had their event cancelled after it had started, which was, again, an awful thing to happen – it really throws my whole organisational schedule into chaos. That is why we are opposing the government business program – because of the mismanagement in this place.

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM:** And because, yes, I need to stay up late and do my paperwork and administration, and I do not like administration. I would much rather be out talking to people in my community, attending community events and finding out exactly what the top issues are in the Mildura electorate. At the moment it is an abundance of rain. But I would much rather be doing that and using the time in here when we come here every second week to the best of our ability, and since the beginning of this parliamentary year, we have simply not been able to do that because of the shambolic management that has gone on within this government that does not know what it is doing from one week to the next. They are splitting. It is just absolute chaos, which is why we are opposing the government business program this week.

**Dylan WIGHT (Tarnait) (13:20):** It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak in favour of this fantastic government business program. But before I do, I would like to take a moment to apologise to the member for Mildura for her having to do paperwork on a Sunday.

*Members interjecting.*

**Dylan WIGHT:** No, no, no, fair crack, I would like to sincerely apologise to the member for Mildura for messing up her weekend. It is a pretty good insight into what this place would be like if they were ever given the gift of government. The state just stops on a Sunday. We will stop running the state because it is a Sunday – really?

This government business program is a pretty clear demonstration of the priorities of this government, that the priorities of this government are in the right place and that we are here to represent the Victorian people and to be on their side. It is a pretty jam-packed program. Judging by the member for Brighton's contribution, it is going to be a bit of a week. He is in a sassy mood – 'sassy' I think is the best way to describe it – but it is going to be a jam-packed government business program all the same.

We have the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025 here, which is in response to, as I think the member for Laverton said, several recommendations across several reports over the last little period to make some amendments and changes to the Electoral Act 2002 to give the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) the tools that they need to be able to run fair, unbiased elections, as is a pretty fundamental pillar of our democracy. I do not think it will be a surprise to anyone that it is my view that this election coming up is probably going to be one of the grossest, most unstable and nastiest elections that we have seen in this state, perhaps ever.

**James Newbury:** Well, just ask Jacinta not to do it.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Not to have an election? As I said, sassy. It is going to be a long week. These amendments may seem minor but I think are going to play a pivotal role in making sure that the VEC have the capacity to deliver an election as they need to, and those amendments are on the government business program this week.

We have obviously got our Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026. When we came to office in 2014 we were faced with former TAFE campuses that were locked up, that had chains on the gates and that had been closed by the previous government. What that meant was not a generation but a litany of people, particularly in our outer suburbs and particularly vulnerable people, did not have the capacity between 2010 and 2014 to undertake tertiary education or to go and get a trade certificate. It was hard to get into trade school when you were an apprentice. It was hard to do TAFE courses because the previous government ripped funding out of TAFE and closed campuses.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Minister Tierney in the other place in respect to free TAFE and the power of work that she has done in this space. It took a Labor government and it took Minister Tierney to have the leadership and the foresight to deliver free TAFE, which is a huge cost-of-living saving to hundreds of thousands of Victorian families, to hundreds of thousands of Victorian tradespeople and to hundreds of thousands of Victorian workers that had the capacity to go and get the training that they needed for the job that they wanted and had the capacity to do it for free. Why is it on the government business program? Why do we have to legislate free TAFE? Because we know that if they are ever given the chance a coalition government would once again rip funding out of TAFE and close campuses. It is too important and it means too much to Victorians to allow that to happen, so we have to legislate it.

We have obviously got the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026, which is a new addition today to the government business program. It is incredibly important. As I have said in this place before, community safety is our number one priority. That is why we have had two different legislative packages to make sure that we can keep the community safe and make sure that we can hold people that are doing the wrong thing in our community accountable. As I said, it is a jam-packed government business program that shows that this government has the right priorities, unlike those opposite.

**Nicole WERNER (Warrantyte) (13:25):** I rise to speak on the government business program as well. I very much take exception to the member who just spoke about the government getting their priorities right, about the priorities of Victorians and talking about being on their side, when we know that there are members from the government that have already spoken out publicly and said that one of the priorities of Victorians is the \$15 billion in corruption money that is out there that Victorians are incensed about. They are incensed about this level of corruption that belongs in a Third World country. The government's own members have spoken about the fact.

**Mathew Hilakari:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is disappointing that the member for Warrantyte considers Victoria a Third World country, and that should be on the record. That is quite a disgraceful statement. On relevance, of course, she has strayed well beyond the debate that is in front of us.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members have been giving context, and I encourage the member to continue on the government business program.

**Nicole WERNER:** As I am able to do according to the standing orders, I would like to correct the record. The member absolutely misled the house on my statements. I said that the Allan Labor government are treating Victorians like it is a Third World country with their level of corruption. That is what I said, just so we do not continue to gaslight in this house.

I continue to say, the reason that we are opposing government business on this side of the house today is very clear. It is very clear that the government is not taking this time in the chamber seriously. They are spending week after week after week with sledge motion after sledge motion and talking about the fact that this is the priority to Victorians. Is it the priority to Victorians for the government to be talking about the opposition day in, day out when there are major issues, when we are facing the greatest corruption scandal in the history of our state? We are hearing about this day in, day out – every day in our communities. I commend the member for Mildura. She is working hard in her community every single day. There have been floods in her community, there have been fires in her community, yet there are members on that side of the house that would dare to speak against –

**Pauline Richards:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, again, this is a government business program debate, so I would be looking forward to the member for Warrandyte responding to the program that is being debated.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member to continue on the government business program.

**Nicole WERNER:** Absolutely. The reason that we are opposing the government business program this week is because this chamber has descended into madness under the government's watch. It is shambolic, it is a circus, and they have spent the entire time in this Parliament –

**A member** interjected.

**Nicole WERNER:** It is a shemozzle, absolutely. They have spent this time –

**A member** interjected.

**Nicole WERNER:** I did hear that, but I am not going to take issue with it. It absolutely has been a waste of time, trying to spend the time sledging the opposition, talking about that being the priority. What the government have done is turned this into a circus where they have used the chamber – abused the Parliament – to deflect, to gaslight, to make a mockery of what the truth is and to duck and weave and hide when there is the greatest corruption scandal facing our state here in Victoria. That is why we rise to oppose the government business program. Again –

**Paul Edbrooke:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, could you please bring the member for Warrandyte back to the motion.

**Sarah Connolly** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Laverton is warned. The member was actually on the government business program.

**Nicole WERNER:** Again, we are here opposing the government business program. I do not understand the members opposite. It is like, 'Where are your hearing ears?' I do not even know because we are talking about opposing the government business program here today because it is just ridiculous the way that the government have just been playing games in the chamber and opposing the things that matter to Victorians, opposing the things that are priorities to Victorians, opposing private members bills on this side of the house and also shelving their own legislation. We were meant to talk about the Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025.

The justice bill was meant to come back to the house this week, but instead what they have done is they have killed their own bill. They have killed their own bill because they refuse to talk about

corruption in Victoria. They refuse to investigate. They refuse to actually take it seriously – when \$15 billion of taxpayers money has been spent on corruption under their watch.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (50):* Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, 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, 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, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (30):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, 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, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallenge, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members*

**Member for Carrum**

*Personal explanation*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (13:36): On Thursday 19 February 2026 I was asked about a matter raised with me in 2022 in my capacity as the member for Carrum and at a point in time prior to my ministerial appointments. In responding I stated that I had immediately referred the matter to the agency and the authority responsible for delivering the project. That statement is accurate. I referred the matter to the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority. I also stated that the matter had been referred to and reviewed by Victoria Police. I made that statement believing that it was true. I now understand that no referral to Victoria Police was made at that time. I note that some media reports and statements by members of this house have suggested that I said I referred the matter to police. That suggestion is wrong. A review of *Hansard* confirms that I did not make that statement, nor was it my intention to convey that. I have taken the earliest opportunity to correct the record. I trust that this clarification will now be reported accurately and that members and others will reflect the corrected position fairly and precisely in any and all commentary and reporting. I make this explanation to ensure the record of the house is accurate and complete.

*Members statements*

**Norman Gibbs**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (13:37): I rise on a bit of a sad note at first because last sitting week in the house I mentioned the fantastic Norman and Topsy Gibbs, who were celebrating their 75th anniversary. Norm has since passed away. Norm has been spoken about not just by me in this house but by other people in Canberra. He was a fantastic member of our community. I will not reiterate everything except to say that he will be sorely missed, and our love and support go to Topsy, his daughter Linda and the family. Vale, Norman Gibbs.

**Mount Waverley Reserve**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (13:38): On another matter, we have had the Mount Waverley Reserve redevelopment opening for the first footy season. Obviously the cricketers down at Mount Waverley Cricket Club have had a great session, and they are loving the turf that was funded by, I think,

\$2 million from the Allan–Andrews governments. The reserve and the pavilion are looking fantastic, and we are looking forward to a big season. A shout-out to the Blues, Chris Hale, the cricket club with David Grossman there and all of the little young players.

#### **Frank Dando Sports Academy**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (13:38): We have also in the patch been able to have a look at the progress at the Frank Dando academy. \$2.4 million from the independent schools fund went to upgrading Frank Dando. Frank Dando is a very special school. It is a place for kids that would otherwise be falling off the system and leading lives that we do not want them to get another chance and to get some structure. They are doing a great job.

#### **Helen ‘Helsie’ Brustman**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:39): Melbourne’s Jewish community has lost one of its greatest and most passionate advocates, Helen Brustman OAM, the beloved Helsie. Helsie was larger than life. Whether she was running or attending many of our community events, she would arrive in the biggest hats and the brightest outfits. She always made everybody feel welcome. May her memory be a blessing and may her extraordinary legacy of service continue to inspire all of us.

#### **International Women’s Day**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:39): For International Women’s Day I want to shout out to all of the wonderful women doing amazing things in Victoria, but particularly I want to shout out to the incredible work of the entrepreneurs at CreativeCubes, who are paving the way for future industries. Your leadership, resilience and innovation are not only building successful businesses but also reshaping opportunity for the next generation of women to come.

#### **Clean Up Australia Day**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:40): Clean Up Australia Day is always a big thing in my electorate. I want to particularly shout out to Love Our Street 3162, which is an annual event. Sophie Vid and Julian Donlen do that, not only on that day but in other months as well. Also, Glen Eira Stonnington Scouts group under district scout leader Jamie Rosa and 10th Caulfield Scout Group under scout leader Tim Gaspar helped us clean up Caulfield Park. We had over 70 Scouts in attendance doing that. Thank you for all the wonderful work that you do.

#### **Construction industry**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:40): I say to the government: hand back the \$15 billion that you have, in short, wasted on the CFMEU corruption that you have been responsible for.

#### **Williamstown Open Water**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (13:40): Swimming and lifesaving clubs are the backbone of our coastal communities, including in the Williamstown electorate. Over the weekend I attended the Williamstown Swimming and Life Saving Club for their 2026 WOW event – Williamstown Open Water – which had more than 600 entrants. Thanks so much to all the volunteers who came to make such a successful event and make sure that there were swimmers safe in the water.

#### **Borrack Square, Altona North**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (13:41): It is with great excitement that I would like to share that our Labor government is backing \$250,000 through the multicultural business precinct revitalisation program into Borrack Square in Altona North. This grant will make sure that there is more green shade, there are more footpath rebuilds and there is improved pedestrian and cycling access for Borrack Square. It is much-needed revitalisation and will support our local businesses.

### Ramadan

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (13:41): It is Ramadan. For our Muslim communities this is a sacred time of prayer and reflection. I would like to wish worshippers every blessing this Ramadan and in the year ahead. It is more important than ever that we say to our Muslim community: you are welcome here and you are respected here. I look forward to attending the iftar dinners, particularly with the Australian Islamic Centre in Newport and the Association of Islamic Dakwah in Altona North. To all those observing, Ramadan Mubarak.

### Kim Walsh

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (13:42): I would like to pay tribute to Kim Walsh, who was the original founder of Altona Village Traders Association and ran it for more than 20 years. Vale, Kim Walsh.

### Dental services

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (13:42): Our public dental health system is in absolute crisis, and it is worse in my area than in most, where patients are waiting up to 18 months for service, well over the 12-month benchmark that exists in other areas, and even that is too long. There is more this government can do to address this situation. At present, for urgent work, we have the public sector issuing vouchers to the private sector. But it is a complete mess, and I will give you four reasons why. Firstly, the vouchers have a short end date, so by the time the private dentist gets to see this public patient, the voucher has expired. Secondly, when the work is done by the private practice, they have to wait months to be paid, sometimes up to eight months. This is not good enough, and no wonder they then do not want to see public patients. Thirdly, there is a price gap in the work to be done. If you want to get private dentists to do the work that the public dentist should, they need to be paid at the private rate, so often there is a pay gap that exists. And finally, if there is any discrepancy, the claim is denied. Is it any wonder private dentists are not taking on these patients. The minister needs to fix this and get it right.

### Road maintenance

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (13:43): I recently drove to Canberra, and it told the state of our roads. Between Cann River and the border, there were 37 signs warning of danger ahead; on the other side of the border, there was one on the way to Canberra. It is not good enough.

### Thomastown electorate schools

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (13:43): It was a big education week in Thomastown electorate. First up was the opening of the brand new school Umarkoo in Wollert with the Minister for Education Ben Carroll. Of the 120-plus new schools the state Labor government has built, this is the sixth new school in the electorate. It is led by experienced foundation principal Leanne Tingwell. Students told me they love their new school and are eager to learn. The facilities are second to none, with carefully designed learning spaces and landscape areas to encourage play and inclusivity, and even a kiln for ceramics.

Next stop was distribution of prep bags to all prep students at Lalor Gardens Primary. The 2026 prep bags are full of books to read. They also include a sturdy Myki card tag where students can put their free public transport under-18s Myki card. Thank you to lead teacher Christine for organising my visit and to principal Frazer Thomas. The new school uniforms look great.

I ended the week with a visit to Thomastown Meadows Primary School to have coffee and cake with parents and principal Fiona Rosa, an initiative to engage families and welcome them into the school.

### Clean Up Australia Day

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (13:45): Congratulations to Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh Australia, HSS for short, who organised a team for Clean Up Australia Day on Sunday at the Aurora Park in Epping North and surrounding streets. I was proud to take part as we collected over 30 kilograms of rubbish, even though the park is nicely maintained. This is one of the many community projects HSS Australia runs. Thank you for your selfless sacrifice to others.

### Construction industry

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (13:45): How convenient that the Attorney-General can come in here with a personal explanation now, and as quick as can be, as someone who had already said she misspoke and put the facts on the table, the reality was that the Attorney-General did not report alleged crime that went to her to Victoria Police. Do you remember when the Premier said very quickly in this place that every time we raise an issue it is your responsibility to report it to Victoria Police? Yet the Attorney-General, as quick as a Patrick Dangerfield handpass from under a pack, managed to pass the buck to somebody else – ‘Not my responsibility’. Then the other side continues to say, from the Labor side, ‘Do you know what, you might want to do a fact check.’ Well, I will put the best fact check that we can on the table today: why doesn’t every person from the Victorian Labor Party back a royal commission into the \$15 billion of crime and corruption here in Victoria? Why won’t they back the biggest fact check that we can have, to ensure that we know to whom and where that money has gone? Maybe there are people protecting themselves; you never know. They might be protecting people they know. They might be protecting people in the unions who keep them here, or maybe they are protecting money that has gone to the Victorian Labor Party through this corruption through the CFMEU. But it is about time that we get rid of corruption in Victoria so we can get that \$15 billion back into the places it should be, which are education, housing and crime.

### Julie Buxton

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:46): I want to give a shout-out to a great friend of mine, Julie Buxton, who is Labor’s candidate for the seat of Bayswater at the upcoming state election. I have got no doubt that she is going to make a far better member of Parliament than me. She is someone that I have known for a number of years. She is a quality human – a very decent person – and it has been great to see her getting out and about and hitting the ground running already. It is a great pleasure to support her, and I look forward to seeing her elected as the next member for Bayswater, continuing to get things done.

### Boronia revitalisation

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:47): Of course it is great to see major construction underway at Boronia station. We are demolishing the two businesses compulsorily acquired to create a new direct route, with a landscaped plaza from Dorset Road, where we are going to have a new signalised pedestrian crossing, all the way through to a widened concourse at Boronia station. It is the biggest single investment by any level of government in a generation in Boronia, and I am very, very proud that it is getting done by this Allan Labor government. A huge thankyou to everyone who made it happen, to all the locals and of course to the wonderful team at the Level Crossing Removal Project. Thank you so much. You are an absolute gun crew.

### Wally Tew Reserve, Ferntree Gully

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:48): Of course I know the member for Monbulk was just as excited as me to see the opening of the Wally Tew Reserve pavilion. Fantastic work by all of the club members, committee members and everyone involved to get that project over the line.

**Tormore Reserve, Boronia**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:48): There is construction underway and nearly complete at the new Tormore Reserve pavilion. I am hoping to get in there in May. I know the club is pushing, and I thank all those involved in getting that over the line as well.

**Housing**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (13:48): Young people I chat with across my community aspire to own their own home, but the sad reality is that it is becoming extremely hard and housing affordability feels out of reach for so many as a result of government decisions causing a lack of housing supply and high property taxes. Under Labor, Victoria has the highest property taxes in the country, and fewer homes are being built now than a decade ago, meaning higher prices, higher rents and less choice. While interest rates are going up, the Allan Labor government is failing to meet its own target of building 80,000 new homes every year to make housing more affordable. Victoria needs a fresh start and a commonsense solution to deliver new homes and housing affordability.

So, together with Victorian Liberal leader Jess Wilson, our team has a plan to deliver more homes, more choice and greater housing affordability for all Victorians, a new plan to restore the dream of home ownership that I know so many in my community aspire to. To improve housing affordability we will release more land and fast-track homes in existing growth areas, rejuvenate Melbourne's CBD as an exciting and safe place to live and work, restore local voice in planning to ensure communities have their say in future local neighbourhoods, and build more new homes in regional centres. The Victorian Liberals have a comprehensive plan to grow all of our state, providing Victorians with choice as to where and how to live. We want to give every Victorian the best opportunity to own their own home, restoring the dream of home ownership.

**Bellarine electorate bus services**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (13:49): Today is a very exciting day for the Bellarine as we have our Bellarine bus review now open from this morning. Over the next six weeks the residents of the Bellarine will be able to share their experiences and ideas through an online community consultation and/or at some pop-ups across the Bellarine to help shape and have more efficient and more accessible public transport for our region. The review will explore how buses and services can better reflect our changing travel patterns, support our growing suburbs and provide better connections between our towns, schools, shopping precincts and workplaces. This review delivers on the funding that we secured in the 2025–26 budget, strengthening our public transport, and it does build on the introduction of those initiatives such as free transport for under-18s and free weekend travel for seniors, carers and disability support pension recipients. These public transport initiatives are really important to help families with the cost of living. I encourage everyone to jump across onto the website to have their say and share what a better Bellarine bus service would look like.

**International Women's Day**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (13:50): This week has International Women's Day, and I want to say I am immensely proud to be part of a government that champions women and paves the way for a brighter and more equal future for everyone. Each year I see more women and girls stepping into leadership roles across the Bellarine community and organisations, in emergency services, in schools and in workplaces. I am confident this momentum will continue to grow and women's voices will be heard.

**Morwell electorate bus services**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (13:51): Our V/Line timetable has changed down in Gippsland, but our bus line timetable picking up students that use the rail line service to get to school, particularly in Moe, is not marrying up. Students are walking to the local school and missing homeroom. It is

taking up to 40 minutes for them to walk from the train station to the school if they do miss the bus or they cannot fit on. We need some work done to work that out.

### **Moe police station**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (13:51): Also I know from talking to people of Moe that the Moe police station next month will only have the doors open from 6 am till 6 pm. Our wonderful police officers struggle with numbers to fully staff the station. They need to be out on the streets, and we all welcome that, but staffing issues at head office and Victoria Police are making it difficult to keep it open. Crime stats show that crime is up 30.7 per cent in Moe alone. Is this Allan Labor government saying that Moe is now the safest place to live in Victoria, because we are not having PSOs and we are having less police? Or is it the fact that the Allan government have conceded that this state is Jacintegrating in front of our eyes and they have no answers to the mountain of problems that they have created and that the crime stats, which are up 30.7 per cent, do not matter for the people of Moe and the Latrobe Valley?

### **Women's health**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (13:52): Last week Victorians watched the *Four Corners* investigation and heard allegations that were incredibly shocking – women who sought care for endometriosis instead describing profound betrayal. These are women living with debilitating pain seeking answers, relief and the chance to reclaim their lives. They placed their trust in someone to help them heal. Instead they describe a profound misuse of power, mistreatment and lifelong harm. Most of us cannot fathom the depth of their anguish nor the enormity of their courage in speaking out. In Victoria we have heard the moving testimony of thousands of women through our women's pain inquiry. Through their voices we are only just beginning to unpack a system steeped in power imbalance – a system where for centuries women's voices have been silenced and women's bodies have been sites of control rather than care. There is yet so much to do in reforming women's health, and as Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health I want to say to all Victorian women that their pain is real and their experiences make our resolve all the stronger. It is why we are working to deliver an entirely new model of care: dedicated women's health clinics; virtual, mobile and Aboriginal women's health clinics; women's health research; workforce training; and for the first time a connected network of public patient-centred services shaped by and for women and girls. Yesterday I was proud to announce a new women's health clinic will open at the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg in partnership with Mercy Health. It will deliver free specialist care close to home for my community in Northcote, because care must always be grounded in safety, dignity and trust.

### **Myanmar**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (13:54): I rise to speak about a conflict that has faded from our headlines but has not ended. In Burma the military regime continues to bomb villages and civilians. International media, including the BBC and Reuters, report ongoing airstrikes right across Myanmar. Survivors describe jets circling overhead before bombs fall on schools, churches and homes. Parents speak of digging their children from the rubble. Entire communities are hiding in forests without reliable access to food, medicine or shelter to escape further attacks. Human rights organisations report that civilians remain the primary victims. Millions have been displaced internally or forced across borders into neighbouring countries. This sustained humanitarian emergency is now in its eighth decade, and it is worsening.

Here in Ringwood and across the eastern suburbs we are home to proud and resilient Karen and Chin communities. Many families in our local area have direct ties to those regions now under attack. They follow the news daily. They receive phone calls and messages from loved ones in hiding. For them this is not a distant geopolitical issue, it is deeply personal and part of their lived experience of this conflict. This may be a forgotten war in parts of the media, but it is not forgotten by communities in the eastern suburbs, and I know the member for Croydon shares my concerns. The cameras may have

moved on, but the bombing in Burma has not stopped. We must continue to press for regime change and for an end to the murder of innocent civilians.

### **Vic Scerri**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (13:55): It was terrific to present local business owner Vic Scerri with the inaugural Local Legend award last week recognising the significant contribution of a local business within our community and also to present Vic with a \$100 voucher. Most importantly, I have the opportunity today, as I had last week, to acknowledge and celebrate Vic for his 20 years of hard work at Vics Food and Wine serving Italian and Mediterranean dishes and for being a terrific local member of our community, sponsoring a number of local groups and organisations. He works so incredibly hard each and every day for the community, and that is something that I want to put on the record. Congratulations, Vic, both for the work that you do and for everything that you give back to our local community.

### **Killara Primary School**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (13:56): It was also terrific to join staff and students at Killara Primary for the annual leadership assembly last week to chat with students and formally present 2026 school captains Stevie and Nadia with their badges. Having an opportunity to join with students and an opportunity to say just how important they are and how hard they work is something that I greatly value. I also want to acknowledge, very briefly, Sue Muir, a terrific principal at a terrific school.

### **Attorney-General**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (13:57): What is the meaning of ‘misspeak’? It is to say something wrong. You can misspeak by pronouncing someone’s name incorrectly or you can misspeak by saying something that accidentally offends someone. Sometimes when politicians are called out on the controversial things they say, they claim to have misspoken. But what is the meaning of ‘mislead’? It is to cause someone to believe something untrue or to have the wrong impression, often through deliberate deception, false information or omission. So what is it that the Attorney-General did? Do you think it was misspeak or mislead? Maybe it was misinterpret, maybe misrepresent or maybe misappropriate – plenty of them she could be responsible for. The fact of the matter is the Attorney-General got up in this chamber last week and, according to her, misspoke. I believe the Attorney-General only admitted her mistake when she was called out by Victoria Police. In my opinion the Attorney-General deliberately misled. To the Attorney-General I say this: checkpoint. Sorry, I misspoke – checkmate.

### **Good Friday Appeal**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (13:58): The Good Friday Appeal is a special day and a special event across Victoria, and it highlights the generosity and care that we have for each other in our communities. On Saturday I was delighted to take part in the Bacchus Marsh Little Athletics relayathon to raise money for the Good Friday Appeal. As of this morning they had raised \$7816 and a staggering 89.6 kilometres have been run by our little athletes and a few ungainly sponsors. Last year they raised more than any other club in Victoria, and there is still time to donate and make it happen again.

Another great event in my electorate was the Inverleigh and District Good Friday Appeal Family Fun Day, but in sad news it will not go ahead this year. This has been such a great event for the region, growing in size each year, run by a very small band of committed committee members and volunteers. It became such a big event that the committee realised that, for all their commitment and hard work, they could not continue. I want to put on record my deep thanks to all of those who have been involved for the last 10 years. Your efforts raised more than \$320,000 for the Royal Children’s Hospital and will have made a real impact on many children and their families.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Construction industry**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:01): My question is to the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General said in question time on 19 February in relation to allegations and evidence of criminal behaviour put to her on a Big Build site in October 2022 that ‘those matters were referred to Victoria Police’. This afternoon the Attorney admitted she misled the house. Why did it take investigations from the *Australian Financial Review* for the Attorney-General to admit she has misled Parliament?

**Mary-Anne Thomas**: On a point of order, Speaker, my understanding is that, if the member for Brighton has allegations that he wishes to make in relation to the Attorney-General, he needs to do so under a substantive motion.

**James NEWBURY**: On the point of order, Speaker, at no point did I say ‘deliberately’. I said that the member misled the chamber, which previous rulings have found to be in order.

**The SPEAKER**: Member for Brighton, I understand. The Attorney to answer the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:03): I am actually not quite sure what the question is in all of that, but I refer the member and the house to my clarifying statement that I made earlier in this house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:03): Are there any other instances where the Attorney failed to refer allegations of coercion and corruption on Big Build sites to Victoria Police?

**Mary-Anne Thomas**: On a point of order, Speaker, the question that has been asked by the member for Brighton is a speculative question, and I therefore ask –

*Members interjecting.*

**Mary-Anne Thomas**: No, you need to read the standing orders. I ask that you rule it out of order.

**The SPEAKER**: I will allow the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:04): I reject the premise of the question entirely. It presupposes that there were other allegations, and I refer the member to the statement that I made earlier today.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, to assist, this was a question where I asked whether there were other, whether there are other –

**The SPEAKER**: There is no point of order. The Attorney answered the question.

**Ministers statements: working from home**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): Victorians want the right to work from home, and my Labor government is going to protect the right for Victorians to work from home. Victorians want this right protected because they know it saves workers time and they know it saves them money and gives families more space in their day as well. Whether it is time to take the kids to school or whether it is saving time on their commute, working from home is good for families. It is also good for the economy because it gets parents back into the workforce – more people in the workforce lifting productivity, cutting congestion and also putting more money back into those household budgets, estimated at more than \$5000 a year.

But right now your ability to access this flexibility depends on who you work for. If you are in a big company, like a big bank, you are far more likely to have the opportunity to work from home. If you work in a small business, you are far more likely to have that opportunity knocked back. Even more than this, 3000 Victorians who responded to our survey told us that they did not even feel confident enough to ask for the opportunity to work from home even though they could. That is not fair, which

is why my Labor government is making it fair. If you can work from home, you will have the right to do so, no matter the size of your workforce, whether you are in a small business or a big one, because flexibility should not be a privilege. It should be something that every Victorian can rely on and the families that they support.

While we are making working from home a right and protecting it, there are some who want to see a return to the office. There are some who are wanting to cut the opportunity for working people to have the right to work from home. Only Labor is going to back those families.

### Construction industry

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:06): My question is to the Attorney-General. The Attorney said in question time on 19 February that:

... anyone that has allegations of any criminal or illegal conduct on construction sites needs to refer those to the relevant authorities.

The Attorney was included in emails where an Indigenous labour hire firm alleged illegal activity on the Big Build, including union coercion abetted by the Labor government, on 28 October 2022, 1 December 2022 and 29 December 2022. Did the Attorney refer any of these allegations to an appropriate authority or Victoria Police?

**Danny Pearson:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Brighton is asking the Attorney-General a question, and in doing so the member for Brighton is quoting emails that predate the Attorney being appointed to the cabinet. I ask that you rule the question out of order. It has nothing to do with the member's responsibility as the Attorney-General, and I ask that you rule it out of order.

**James NEWBURY:** On the point of order, Speaker, the minister raised this identical point of order last week when a question was put to the Attorney of a similar nature. At that time you ruled that out of order and allowed the Attorney the opportunity to respond. On multiple occasions the Attorney has responded, and my question goes to directly how the Attorney has responded to these issues.

**The SPEAKER:** I will allow the question because the Attorney has the right to respond in any way she chooses.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:09): I have already answered this question previously, and I will note that the member raises matters that predate my appointment in my ministerial responsibility.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:09): Exactly how many emails and letters containing allegations of illegal coercion and militant behaviour on Big Build sites has the Attorney-General not acted upon?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:09): The member for Brighton does not have his listening ears on here. As I just responded to the original question, the matters he refers to predate my appointment to my ministerial responsibility and –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, to assist, the question went to any point in time, including the time the member has been the Attorney-General.

**The SPEAKER:** The Attorney has responded to the question.

### Ministers statements: working from home

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:10): In the week that we celebrate International Women's Day, I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's commitment to increase women's participation in paid work by making the right to work from home law. Despite gains over the past 50 years, women in Australia still face barriers that mean they work less, earn less and retire with less. Women are still more likely to work in insecure roles where the pay is lower and to take

time out of paid work to care for children. Other responsibilities, like caring for ageing parents, work around the home and carrying the mental load that is associated with caring for a family, often fall to women. That is why on our side of the Parliament we have long fought for flexible work arrangements to increase participation for women, narrow the gender pay gap and support work–life balance. It is why our government will enshrine the right to work from home in the law. Work from home makes balancing the competing demands that often fall on women just that little bit easier, and it means that working women and mums can save time and money spent on travelling to and from the workplace.

As a Labor government, we know that working from home works for women and indeed it works for everyone. On this side of the house we are very clear about that, but there are some in this place who oppose flexible work, who oppose our government’s plan, despite the massive benefits that it would bring for women and families. But that is unsurprising when not a single member on that side of the house has ever had the privilege of representing working people in their fight for rights at work. On this side of the house we know that work from home works for women, and we will make it the law.

### Construction industry

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): My question is to the Premier. Isn’t it the case that the Premier is refusing to give IBAC follow-the-money powers because it will expose \$15 billion in corruption under her watch?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): There are three parts to the answer to this question. The first part is no, the second part is that those claims do not have any evidence for them and the third part is that we have already taken action. We acted immediately. Those actions are working. Victoria Police have laid more than 70 charges. The Labour Hire Authority has cancelled 126 construction licences. These actions are working.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): Why is the Premier so disinterested in getting Victorians their \$15 billion back?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): Let us be clear: if anyone has evidence to back up that claim, they should be putting that evidence to Victoria Police, because there is no evidence for that claim. Let us be clear what these questions really reveal about the Liberal Party. They have always been anti-worker. They have always opposed our Big Build. We are proud to back the hardworking men and women who have built schools, built hospitals, built the road and rail that Victorian families rely on. And those same Victorian workers know that when it comes to the Liberals they just want to cut into their wages, cut conditions and cut the projects that Victorians rely on.

### Ministers statements: working from home

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (14:15): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government’s plan to grow the economy, create more jobs and protect Victorians’ right to work from home now. Luckily, last week I attended the LaunchVic Alice Anderson Fund International Women’s Day event alongside my good friend from the other place Ms Watt, where we celebrated female founders and great Victorian startups. Through programs like the Alice Anderson Fund, the Allan Labor government is helping more women founders launch and scale companies that create jobs and strengthen the Victorian economy. We have already supported 43 startups through the Alice Anderson Fund, creating hundreds of jobs and unlocking \$67 million in private sector investment. One of those startups is WORK180, who have recently released their newest *What Women Want Report*. This year flexibility remains a priority. The number one positive change reported by women is better flexible-working policies. But some workplaces are rolling back flexible working, and one in three said that women are being held back by limited access to flexible work.

That is exactly why the Allan Labor government will proudly introduce legislation to make working from home a legal right for at least two days a week where the work can be done remotely. Work from

home works for families. It is good for the economy, it is good for businesses, it helps modern businesses stay competitive and attract top talent, and it increases diversity in the workplace. Our economic plan is about the three Ps. It is about population, participation and productivity. Work from home increases productivity because it means less time commuting. Work from home increases participation because it gives people more options when looking for work, particularly amongst women, carers, primary carers and people with disabilities. And, with an increasing population, we have got a growing economy. On this side of the house we are backing Victorians every step of the way. We are growing the economy, creating more good, well-paid and flexible jobs.

### **Maroondah Hospital**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Health. In June 2025 reports that paediatric services were to be removed from Maroondah Hospital sparked significant community backlash, and the minister intervened to stop those cuts. Eastern Health has now confirmed that the minister has approved the removal of orthopaedic and urology services from Maroondah Hospital. Maroondah Hospital is the primary acute hospital for the outer east, serving growing communities across Ringwood and the Yarra Ranges. Not only has the promised rebuild not begun; services are now being taken away. Cutting services at Maroondah Hospital means cutting care close to home. Why did the minister agree to cut these services from Maroondah Hospital?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:18): I thank the member for his question. In fact today I had the opportunity at the breakfast for the Royal Women’s Hospital to talk about the women’s health clinics that have been established in Victoria at our health services, including of course at Eastern Health, and I hope that the member has the opportunity to learn more about the fantastic services that are being delivered by that health service, better meeting the needs of the women and girls at Eastern Health. I would also say that this government has proudly invested record funding into our health services, including, again, to Eastern Health.

**Will Fowles**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, my question is about the specific service cuts, and the minister has not come anywhere near addressing those cuts.

**The SPEAKER**: The minister will come back to the question that was asked.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS**: Again, I thank the member for his question, but it is relevant to point to the fact that our government has made record investment into each of our health services and that, as members in this place should know, each year we negotiate with each of our hospitals a statement of priorities that sets their funding for the year and the services that they will deliver. Of course from time to time what our health services will do is assess the demand for the various services that they may offer and seek to realign the service offering in order to better meet the needs of their communities. But let me be clear, there have been no cuts to frontline services under this government. There is only one party in this chamber that has an \$11.1 billion budget black hole and that will deliver cuts to Eastern Health, to Monash Health, to Latrobe Health. On this side of the house we are very clear: we will never cut services to frontline health services in this state.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (14:20): Is the minister suggesting that the cuts to orthopaedic and urology services – those frontline service cuts – are because there is not enough demand for those services?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:20): Again I make the point that our government has delivered record funding to our health services for them to deliver the services that meet the needs of their communities.

**Ministers statements: working from home**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:21): I am pleased to inform the house that Victoria is the cheapest place to work from home thanks to the work of the Allan Labor government in slashing power bills. We know that working from home works for families, which is why we are backing workers and protecting their right to work from home in law. We are also making sure that when they do work from home it is as cheap as possible to heat and cool their homes, to power those Teams meetings, to cook the family dinner during the lunchbreak or to do a load of washing during the lunchbreak using the free electricity from their rooftop solar during the day and the cheaper hot water thanks to our Solar Homes rebate. \$1400 off the up-front cost of their panels saves these workers over \$1000 off their energy bills each and every year. That is money back into the family budget. We are backing households to lower their bills through solar and electric upgrades, including the 850,000 Victorian homes with solar panels. Victorian electricity bills are consistently the lowest in the country because we invest in cheap renewables for Victorian families, putting more money back in their pockets.

Working from a luxury cruise ship travelling around the North Pole will not count in our new laws, at least not when I last looked. But whether you work for a small business or a big bank, we are protecting Victorians' right to work from home and ensuring they save money on their energy bills as they do it. Only the Allan Labor government will back Victorians' right to work from home, keep power bills low and make life easier and more affordable for all of their families. Those opposite will get rid of all of this and take us backwards. There will not be any working from home, and people's power bills will go through the roof, as they did when they were last in government.

**Social media**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:23): My question is to the Premier. I refer to a report showing that the Premier miraculously doubled her Instagram following in a single day.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Lowan can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Lowan withdrew from chamber.**

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Warrandyte will be heard in silence.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The Minister for Transport Infrastructure can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Minister for Transport Infrastructure withdrew from chamber.**

**Nicole WERNER:** My question is to the Premier. I refer to a report showing that the Premier miraculously doubled her Instagram following in a single day.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for an hour and a half.

**Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.**

**Nicole WERNER:** My question is to the Premier. I refer to a report showing that the Premier miraculously doubled her Instagram following in a single day. Can the Premier guarantee that no taxpayer funds were spent to purchase fake followers in a vain attempt to boost her popularity?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

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

**Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.**

**Brad Battin** interjected.

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

**Member for Berwick withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): The Liberal Party are worried about my followers.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am on my feet. Members will be silent when I am on my feet, or they will be removed from the chamber. The Premier to answer the question without assistance. Members will be removed without warning.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The Liberal Party are worried about my followers. They should be more worried about the followers they are losing to Pauline Hanson and One Nation.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:26): Will the Premier release all correspondence between her office and Meta outlining the steps –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Yan Yean! Member for Tarneit, I note that you just came back into the chamber. The Premier will come to order. The member for Warrandyte to ask her question without assistance.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Members will come to order. Enough! I am on my feet. I am going to allow the member for Warrandyte to ask her question while I am on my feet.

**Nicole WERNER:** Will the Premier release all correspondence between her office and Meta outlining the steps she has taken to assure Victorians she is not wasting taxpayers money again?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Narre Warren South will leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Narre Warren South withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): I want to be absolutely clear for the benefit of the Liberal Party, the member for Warrandyte and any social media they may be creating out of this moment. No taxpayer funds were expended in this exercise. Let us be clear: there were none. But what we are seeing here from the Liberal Party is that they are more focused on my followers than the Victorian community. They are more focused on social media and outcomes –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** And this question bells the cat. They should be more worried about the mass exodus of followers going to One Nation and Pauline Hanson that are abandoning the Liberal Party, and it is no surprise with performances like this one.

#### **Ministers statements: government achievements**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:29): On this side of the house we only have one focus: making things easier for Victorian families. Whether

it is building new schools or working from home, on this side of the chamber we are about making sure there is more time with family and friends at the heart of how Victorian families operate and less time on the daily commute. We are delivering more things closer to home that Victorians need. We have built 100 new schools. We have also built 100 kindergartens on school sites, meaning no more double drop-off, and are supporting families with the cost of living and supporting more time for parents with their kids. We know, on this side of the chamber, that saving time and money is essential for Victorian families.

I have never seen a party so disinterested after releasing a housing policy. I do not even know where it is at. On this side of the chamber, when we release housing policies we also build the infrastructure that goes with them. What if I told you 80 per cent of our new schools, eight in 10, are built in growth suburbs? That is what you get with a Labor government, and with a Labor government you also get the protection of the right to work from home, because we know work from home works for families. But we have not stopped there. We are strengthening work-from-home protections right across the Victorian government. We have embedded it in WorkSafe's guidance and with employers. We are also making sure that workers rights are protected across all Victorian government departments.

Others might talk about building new homes in growth areas. We do not just talk about it. We are going to make sure that Victorian families have more money back in their pocket and more time back in their day. Only Labor can deliver that, and only Labor will deliver that. Others have gone back and forth on work from home. We know that. They always say they support it, until they get a call from their right-wing mates saying – *(Time expired)*

*Constituency questions*

**Evelyn electorate**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (14:32): (1528) The Montrose community has raised with me their serious concerns and strong opposition to the proposed expansion of the Montrose quarry as part of a deal to supply more construction materials to the Allan Labor government's Big Build infrastructure projects, which have been embroiled in \$15 billion of taxpayers money lost to CFMEU corruption and criminal bikie gangs. Montrose residents are appalled that the government may permit a 12.5-hectare expansion of the quarry, which would result in razing the natural bushland buffer zone, bulldozing hundreds of trees and removing the remaining protection for nearby schools and homes from excessive dust and noise pollution. I share their concerns and oppose the Montrose quarry expansion. My question to the Minister for Planning is: if you are genuinely concerned the project could have a significant effect on the environment – which it will – and you are aware of significant opposition to the expansion from the community, instead of authorising an environment effects statement to keep the project alive, why won't you just reject the Montrose quarry expansion outright to provide the community with the respect they deserve and the certainty they need?

**Cranbourne electorate**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (14:33): (1529) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health, and my question is: how many ophthalmology services have been performed at the sparkling new Cranbourne Community Hospital? I was delighted to host the Minister for Health at our extraordinary new hospital last week, and it was great to be able to meet some of the many clinicians who were working there. I would like to thank Dr Christine Chen, the head of the unit and the cleverest communicator in the business. Dr Chen's passion for her role is something to behold. But I would like to particularly take the opportunity to thank our health workforce broadly. Our nurses and midwives are extraordinary clinicians, and every day I am grateful to them for their expertise and professionalism. I particularly want to thank those who serve our Cranbourne community. As always, I thank the leadership at the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation and particularly Maddy Harradence. I would like to thank all our allied health staff who keep our hospitals running. Cranbourne Community Hospital is a great facility. I look forward to the minister's response.

**Gippsland South electorate**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:34): (1530) My question is to the Minister for Housing, and I ask: how many public housing homes in the Wellington, South Gippsland and Latrobe municipalities are currently vacant but unavailable for tenants due to the need for repairs, maintenance or other works? This is a question I am asking because we are repeatedly getting concerns from constituents in my electorate of Gippsland South as to vacant homes in the public housing estates that are unavailable, that have been boarded up and that are not being maintained. It is at the stage where people who are on the housing waiting list are actually going around looking at the homes and saying, 'Why can't I have that one? Why can't I have that one?' If the minister also could advise how many public housing homes there are in these LGAs, then we can see, as a percentage, how many are currently offline during a housing crisis. I am not asking two questions; I am simply asking for the information on how many, as a percentage, are actually offline, so that Victorians and Gippsland South residents know where our houses are.

**Glen Waverley electorate**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (14:35): (1531) My question is to the Minister for Health. Women in Melbourne's east, including in my vibrant community of the 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 impact of these reforms, from the presence of BreastScreen Victoria services in Glen Waverley to the dedicated women's health clinic in Blackburn, in the electorate of my colleague in front of me, and the establishment of a virtual women's clinic improving access to those unable to attend in person. The government's rollout of free period products in public settings, packed in the local social enterprise Cape, is also a practical step towards equity and dignity. Can the minister outline how these initiatives are improving access to care, reducing wait times and ensuring Victorian women receive timely, evidence-based health care?

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Glen Waverley asked for an action. Can he rephrase it to ask a question?

**John MULLAHY:** Can the minister provide information on how these initiatives – no. What information –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Glen Waverley can resume his seat.

**Brighton electorate**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:36): (1532) My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the state Labor government admit that steamrolling the community on planning decisions is wrong? The Minister for Planning has approved a planning application for Young Street in Brighton by Brighton Grammar School. Days ago the minister approved an application amendment. The approvals have left the community, who voiced concerns about the applications, feeling that Labor has shut Victorians out of the planning system. We know that planning laws have shut the door on the community's say over what happens in their streets. As one neighbour said about the government's management of the application process:

It makes you feel quite powerless. We have elderly neighbours who can't send an email to object. It's just very sneaky.

For background, the amended application will allow the school to build a new sports hall on a property they purchased which runs adjacent to neighbours. Local views on the new two-basketball-court hall should be central to our application process; they are not. Under Labor the community is ignored. If elected, the Liberal Party will give the community back their rights.

**Bellarine electorate**

**Alison MERCHANT** (Bellarine) (14:37): (1533) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Minister, what is the timeline for the next stage of the Barwon Heads Football Netball Club pavilion upgrades project? This is a much needed and highly anticipated upgrade for the club and the broader Barwon Heads community. We know that our local community sporting clubs are the heart of our communities, and this investment is there to help create welcoming spaces, particularly for juniors and new female participants in the club. I look forward to keeping the club and community informed about the next steps of this important project.

**Sandringham electorate**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (14:38): (1534) My constituency question is to the Minister for Planning. Recently the Allan Labor government announced the next stage of their plans for yet another activity centre in my community, this time in Mentone around Mentone station. This is on the back of activity centres in both Sandringham and Hampton. We all agree that we need more houses, but that should not mean ‘anything in our backyard’; it should mean ‘thoughtfully in our backyard’. The community of Mentone, in this case, has worked incredibly hard to preserve the history of beautiful established buildings – the Mentone station gardens come to mind. This unique history and character should be preserved together with the community. I ask the minister: will the government actually listen and implement the feedback given by the Mentone community to show them the respect that they deserve?

**Narre Warren South electorate**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (14:39): (1535) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police, and it concerns the upgrade of Narre Warren police station. Minister, how will the Allan Labor government’s investment in upgrading this police station support community safety in my electorate of Narre Warren South? The Narre Warren police station services my electorate, and it is currently undergoing a major upgrade under a \$78 million investment into that south-east corridor, which also includes a brand new station for Clyde North. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our local officers and staff who have continued supporting our community during this time, especially those from the Endeavour Hills and Cranbourne police stations, while these works have been taking place, and the public for their patience as well, as we all look forward to the completion of these facilities for the south-east. I look forward to sharing the minister’s response with my community.

**Warrandyte electorate**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:40): (1536) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and my question pertains to the electorate of Warrandyte and the schools that are shut when fire danger ratings are extreme. The constituents that have contacted my office have spoken about the fact that it is unclear, that it is not made public, as to the fire danger ratings, so it is incumbent on the school leaders to pass that information on to the school community, to parents, who then have to make last-minute arrangements to get child care and have their children learn from home or otherwise go to another location in order to get their schooling. The question that I have for the minister is: when will she make these ratings public so that there is not that uncertainty?

**Greenvale electorate**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (14:41): (1537) It was a thrill to visit the Somerton intermodal terminal last week with the Minister for Ports and Freight. This is a private sector led investment and transformative infrastructure project that is a massive vote of confidence in the Greenvale economy. It is owned by Victorian public sector workers through their superannuation – a \$500 million project which, at completion, will be Australia’s largest intermodal terminal. It is creating jobs in the north, local jobs in Greenvale, and enabling truck movements to be taken off city streets and away from the Port of Melbourne. It is also great to see the N-class trains, which were built by Clyde Engineering in Somerton, back in Somerton and now repurposed as Southern Shorthaul Rail locomotives, having

served V/Line passengers for many years. This has all been made possible, though, by the Victorian government through the port rail shuttle network. My question to the Minister for Ports and Freight is: when the port rail shuttle network terminal in Somerton is fully operational, thanks to a \$16.2 million investment by the Victorian government, how many heavy vehicle trips will be saved, making our roads safer for local residents and road users in my community?

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, there are a number of questions still unanswered by a number of ministers: the first is question on notice 3069, unanswered by the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs; also question on notice number 3033, unanswered by the Minister for Finance; and a number of questions unanswered by the Treasurer, being questions on notice 2421, 2777, 2853, 2854, 2855, 2856, 2857, 2858, 2859, 2860, 2861 and 2862. The Minister for Government Services has not responded to question on notice 2763, which is overdue, as well as questions on notice 2764, 2765 and 2776. There is also a question unanswered by the Premier, which is constituency question 1442. These are many, many months overdue, and I would appreciate a response for my constituents.

### *Members statements*

#### **Narre Warren North electorate multicultural and multifaith communities**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (14:43): Today I rise to talk about my amazing community of Narre Warren North, a community I have the privilege of representing. Over the past fortnight across Narre Warren, Hallam, Narre Warren North, Endeavour Hills, Lysterfield South and parts of Harkaway and Berwick we have marked a series of significant cultural and religious events, including the commencement of Ramadan, the season of Lent, the celebration of Lunar New Year and the Indian Holi festival. Each of these occasions carries its own traditions and its own unique stories. In Narre Warren North these celebrations are not isolated to individual groups; they become shared moments that reflect the diverse respect and deeply connected community that we all have. Across the events I saw families, faith leaders, cultural organisations, volunteers, schools and local businesses come together. I saw neighbours learning from one another, participating in each other's traditions and showing genuine curiosity and care. This is what makes our community strong; it is what makes it very, very special. At a time when some people seek to divide our communities Narre Warren shows others the way. We show that diversity is not weakness but a source of strength, and we show that unity is not about being the same but about valuing each other's differences. The events all had one common theme, which was 'Celebrating unity and respect'.

#### **Mollie Holman Award**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (14:45): Can I give a belated congratulations to the following students from the Box Hill electorate, who received the 2025 Mollie Holman Award for STEAM: Katrina Shaw and Marcus Lemm from Old Orchard Primary; Lac Sam from Roberts McCubbin Primary; Malvin Wang and Ayanna Bhatnagar from Kerrimuir Primary; Siddharta Mishra from St Francis Xavier Primary; Nathan To and Viyona Dhavan from Blackburn Primary; George Zhang and Summie Chan from Laburnum Primary; Noah Roberts from Orchard Grove Primary; Eli Jones and Charis Wang from Mont Albert Primary; Cheryl Chan and James Nicholson from Box Hill High; Samantha Issa and Luke Howlett from Blackburn High; Milo Manorathne from Box Hill Senior Secondary College; Anish Sen and Zoe Newbury from Koonung Secondary College; and Gabrielle Regala from Our Lady of Sion. I hope that their passion and enthusiasm for STEAM education continues to burn bright throughout the years ahead.

#### **Lunar New Year**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (14:46): A couple of weeks ago we celebrated the fantastic Chinese New Year Festival at Box Hill. Up to 100,000 people turned out throughout the day and throughout the night. It was a wonderful celebration for the entire community to get together and participate in the New Year celebrations. A special shout-out to the organisers, the Asian Business Association of

Whitehorse. Every year they go above and beyond to put on a wonderful celebration for the community. Congratulations to president Bihong Wang and all of the committee of ABAW.

#### **Footscray electorate women**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (14:46): This sitting week I am keen to celebrate the women in my electorate – the trailblazers, the community leaders, the volunteers who do so much for my electorate of Footscray. I would like to start with the amazing women who are principals in my electorate: at Footscray North Primary School, Kay Willmott; at Footscray City Primary School, Jessie Hand; at Footscray High School, Jillian English; at Footscray High Pilgrim, Jen Bashford; at Footscray High Barkly, Vicki; at St John’s Catholic School Footscray, Emily Conroy; at Kingsville Primary School we have got the lovely Emma; at Yarraville West Primary School, Karen Rush; at St Monica’s Primary we have Andrea; and at Footscray Primary, Jen Briggs. There are also amazing sporting organisations run by women: Mischa’s Boxing, the Maribyrnong Swifts, the mighty West Footscray Bokkers, Yarraville Seddon Football Club, the Women’s Circus, Footscray United Rangers, Rise Netball and of course the Bulldogs AFLW. I would like to acknowledge Elizabeth Drozd from Footscray Rotary; Amanda from Yarraville Traders; Nicky Chung at the Vietnamese Women’s Association; our very own Jill Hennessy, the chair of Western Health; Julia White, the outgoing chair at Footscray Community Arts and incoming deputy chair Bianca Benjamin; and of course GenWest.

#### **Frankston electorate education**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (14:48): Any time that I can get up in this place and share a yarn about Frankston is a delightful day, and over the past week we started with the Chisholm TAFE centre of excellence for AI and digital with the Minister for Skills and TAFE in the other place. We had the federal minister there as well, and our CEO of Chisholm announced and launched this amazing initiative right there in Frankston. Then we followed that up with leadership badges at Aldercourt Primary School and Frankston Primary School. I think you have got to remember that when you are handing these leadership badges out to students at these schools these are the leaders of the future in our communities. These are the people we should be wanting to want our jobs, and that was certainly the case at Aldercourt and Frankston primary schools. I could not be prouder of those students.

#### **Clean Up Australia Day**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (14:49): I ended the week on Sunday with Clean Up Australia Day, and I want to do a massive shout-out to everyone who turned up and got hundreds of kilograms of litter from our beaches and streets. A massive shout-out to Jacqui from Seaford Beach Patrol and Simon from Carrum Beach Patrol for everything they do in our community. They are out there every weekend organising, making sure people know when the events are, signing people up for them and doing their bit to keep plastics from our beach and to ensure that we recycle as well. Their message is very clear, and I think it is well known, but they do a great job, and Clean Up Australia Day was so successful this year because of them.

#### **Mordialloc electorate level crossing removals**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (14:49): Mark it in your calendars: the Mordialloc train station opens on 21 May. This is a massive, massive milestone for our community as we remove the level crossings in Mordialloc and build a brand new train station. It was this Labor government who committed to making the Frankston train line level crossing free by 2029. I remember standing with the Premier and announcing how we would get rid of Aspendale’s Station Street level crossing near Mordialloc College, another great school in our area, and also the level crossings at Bear Street and McDonald Street. This is all about making sure we can get our communities home safer and sooner. We have transformed the Frankston train line with the city loop returning just recently with the opening of the Metro rail tunnel. Level crossings from Chelsea, Edithvale, Parkdale, Mentone and Cheltenham have been removed by this Labor government and brand new train stations built. The excitement across Mordialloc as we transform our community for the better has been palpable. We had Mordi

Fest on the weekend, with people connecting to services, supporting our traders and getting out and about in what we love in our community. But these level crossings have divided us. They have taken time away. They have stopped you from getting home safer and sooner to your community. Well, that will change: on 21 May those level crossings will be gone and we will have a brand new train station. We will have some works over that time, three weeks of construction works, but we are pumped. We are up and about. Mordialloc has never been better, and it only gets better for the future.

### *Bills*

#### **Crimes Amendment Bill 2026**

##### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:52): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026. What an extraordinary set of events it has taken to get here, in terms of both the substance of this bill, which is significant and important, but also the parliamentary failures from this government that have led to this bill being initiated as a standalone piece of legislation. In terms of the substance, this bill is a very, very simple bill. What this bill does is remove the consent requirement from the Director of Public Prosecutions for a serious instance of alleged hate speech before a charge can be proceeded with – a very simple single measure. In fact you would think that when the government legislated their hate speech laws these measures would have been in place. They were not. I remember a particularly fiery debate in this chamber, led then by the member for Malvern, and I spoke after him, calling out the fact that the government brought a bill back into this chamber on their hate speech laws that included this consent requirement before action could be taken to protect people from hate speech. It was a very fiery debate. What the government confirmed and have since said publicly – repeatedly; this is not a new thing – is ‘We put the consent in because the Greens said that the only way they would pass the bill was if we put that consent measure in the law, otherwise the Greens would not support it.’ We of course took every opportunity to work with the government to enable legislation that worked. I remember distinctly the former Shadow Attorney-General, the member for Malvern, making every attempt and every effort to work with the government to ensure we had laws that did work. He went to both the Attorney-General of the day and also the Premier to say, ‘We want to see these laws work.’ We all did. We wanted to see these laws work.

When the bill came back to this chamber including that consent provision, we said, firstly, that it was a dirty deal with the Greens. I mean, the government have admitted that it was a deal with the Greens on this provision. But more importantly what we said was that with the consent provision in, the laws would not work. Let me tell you how many people have been convicted of hate speech since the laws were put into place, the laws that were supposed to provide new protections to Victorians because we know we are seeing behaviour on our streets that is unacceptable and for which we would expect charges to be laid. How many convictions have we seen? Zero convictions. There has not been a conviction because these laws do not work.

Then I would say to you that it is important to ask if perhaps there is a backlog of offences for which people who have committed behaviour that is hate speech have been charged but the courts have not yet considered the matters. How many charges have been laid? As of this morning, the Attorney’s office advised me, zero. The government claimed these new laws would fix the hate speech problem in our state, the rampant antisemitism and hate speech that we are seeing in our state. The Premier said these laws would fix that, but there have been no charges and there have been no convictions. Frankly, it is as if that law did not exist in the first place. I can assure you that no-one on this side of the chamber was surprised when the government got up and said, ‘We got it wrong. We were wrong. The laws do not work, and they need redrafting,’ because we had said it. We said it from the minute we found out that the government did a deal with the Greens to pass laws that could not and would not work. We

called it out. I remember the debate as if it were yesterday because the speakers on that debate, when the amendment came back to this chamber, called it out passionately. We told the government it was doing something which would negate the law in the first place.

We were so passionate because enough is enough. But enough was enough a long time ago, and the community has been calling for action for far too long. For far too long this community has been calling for action because we have seen the most outrageous, illegal, feral behaviour occurring on our streets, and there is a tacit acceptance by the government that it is occurring. In passing laws that do not work, you accept that you are not fixing it, and we called that out. We said that these laws would not fix it, and as of this morning the advice from the Attorney's office is that not a single charge or conviction has been reached under these hate speech provisions. There is currently no legislative mechanism of protection against hate speech. How can that be? Because the government would not work with the opposition, with the coalition, to see laws that do work.

I found out about this bill 2 minutes before the Attorney stood up yesterday at her press conference to announce it. I note that 2 minutes before they went public the first thing I offered to the government, at that exact moment of finding out, was, 'We want to work with you to get these laws through the Parliament today.' I put that offer on behalf of the coalition immediately. As soon as I found out that the government had split this amendment into its own standalone bill – and I will speak to how we have seen this amendment move through the Parliament in other forms later – I immediately said to the government 'We want this new bill considered in the Parliament today.'

Not only did I offer that the bill be considered today, I asked the government if they would split the government business program to see this particular bill dealt with by 5 o'clock today. My view was that waiting till Thursday at 5 o'clock was too long and that we had to not only consider it today – give leave for it to be debated immediately, which we did – but also by 5 o'clock today see that bill pass this Parliament. As I have said consistently for a very long time, we as a coalition support this provision and support it strongly. In fact we have supported it longer than any other party in this chamber, in that when the government did a deal with the Greens to bring a consent amendment into this chamber, we said it was wrong. We said we supported a 'no consent' amendment, because we knew that the laws would not work. The Attorney, by admitting to me that there has been no charge laid, no conviction, has, frankly, admitted that the laws as they stand do not work.

We have seen a sad pathway to these laws appearing today and a sad pathway, frankly, that did not need to occur. As I said, as was said before me by the member for Malvern and as we have said since, repeatedly and publicly, we as a coalition want to see this change. We want to see these laws fixed, and it has taken since enactment in September for the government to work out their laws are not working – a very long time. I am sure that was simply stubbornness – stubbornness in admitting an error. And, frankly, we have seen other instances today where the Attorney has found it difficult to admit error, haven't we? We have certainly seen instances where the Attorney has found it very difficult to say, 'Sorry, I got it wrong', and own the error. This is another one. We saw obviously the instance of the Attorney speaking earlier today where there had been a claim that she had referred a matter to police when she had not, and now with this particular bill where the government took a very, very long time to say, 'We got it wrong.' They did not say sorry, but they have, because of this acceptance of a need for change, admitted that they got it wrong.

So what did they do once they figured out that they got it wrong? I presume they took a long time to not do much, because they did not want to admit, when it comes to what is occurring on our streets, that they had not fixed it – because an admission that they had not fixed it was an admission they did a deal that was wrong with the wrong party, which made the laws inoperable, effectively. I imagine also that the Premier and the Attorney did not have the face to accept that error had occurred. But eventually we got to the point where there was an acceptance the laws were not working. Partly that was led by the community, partly it was led by the bleeding obvious of what has been occurring every single week on our streets – the outrageous behaviour on our streets – and the lack of action on it.

What the government did was find an omnibus justice bill which has done some good things. It was a bill that we did not oppose; we supported measures in that omnibus bill, and it was not controversial in any way. The government expanded the scope of that bill to tack on this amendment to it, so when it got sent to the upper house, no-one should have been surprised to hear that members in the upper house felt that because it was an omnibus justice bill, they had the opportunity to add other amendments to it, of course – that is what an omnibus bill is.

The government did it. The government tacked an amendment onto their omnibus bill, so it is fair and reasonable for other parties to also do so. As I have said publicly, although we would consider each of the amendments that were tacked on to the omnibus bill as a policy position – and we have – my concern and the coalition's concern was that we had a bill being delayed that included a hate speech strengthening because the government did not want to act to give our chief anti-corruption agency increased power. Last sitting week we effectively had a stalemate in the upper house whereby this amendment, this power, was blocked by the government because they did not want the Parliament to consider new anti-corruption powers for IBAC. That stalemate existed to the point that the government said repeatedly to every media outlet that asked on that Thursday, 'The omnibus bill will be debated and will get to a vote on Thursday.' And then – I was there to see it – I saw the Government Whip get up and move a closure motion and adjourn off the bill. Why? Because this hate speech amendment was in the bill. Why? Because the government did not want the Parliament to consider giving IBAC new powers. Can you believe that you would see a government say 'We so much don't want scrutiny of what has been happening under our watch we are going to stop hate speech laws'? I mean, how extraordinary.

I want to put on the record what we did both before they shelved the bill and since. We made every effort to go to the government and say we support the hate speech enhancements – we have since day one; in fact, we said the government got it wrong in the first place. We said we support it. We said we would do everything we can to help make it happen. That was consistent; that was repeated. On multiple occasions we went to the government and said we want to see this happen, not because we did not think that the Parliament should be considering enhancing our chief anti-corruption agency with new powers – we strongly support that; we moved a private members bill today about that very thing. But what we said to the government is that we want to see both. What the government said to me was that with the IBAC amendments attached to the bill, it was not going to debate the bill again. That bill, that omnibus bill which was listed for debate in the Council this week, has now been pulled. It was listed in writing for debate this week and it has now been pulled from debate in the Legislative Council this week. The government is using its numbers to block the omnibus bill from being debated in the Council because it does not want to consider enhancing the chief anti-corruption agency and it having new powers. You almost have to stop for a moment to think through and let that idea settle with you: a government is blocking a bill so that our anti-corruption agency does not have powers.

Yesterday, in a parliamentary committee, we saw the agency itself call for those powers. Just yesterday in this very place the anti-corruption agency said they need these powers. They need them. I mean, it was not some letter between a Premier and IBAC two years ago – you know, there was a response. The Premier only briefed out the first letter; she did not brief out the second letter – did not think that one through, media office. But yesterday the anti-corruption agency called for the powers. They called for them yesterday.

So for that bill, within moments of the agency calling for those powers, to be shelved from debate in the Council says everything. How has the government dealt with it? They have pulled that amendment out of the bill and put it into this standalone piece of legislation. I will note, only briefly, that that omnibus bill, which we spoke about in another debate, has a number of important measures. I would not want to speak for any other member in this chamber, but many members spoke about the bill, because there are important measures in it, including an extension of the Drug Court. The Drug Court extension is contained within that bill. If that bill does not proceed, the Drug Court is now on a very, very short timeline, and sadly, that has been lost in the public debate of other issues. It is important to

note that, because when you split bills, when you shelve bills because you do not like what might be considered, it has other impacts.

We have this bill after that long and rocky path to get here today, where we see a bill before us which does a very, very simple amendment. I would hope that by 5 o'clock today we can see this house pass it, because the anti-hate speech laws that exist in Victoria do not protect Victorians. We have seen the most horrific things occurring on our streets to our fellow Victorians – shameful behaviour, where people are openly attacked and openly vilified, and where hate speech against various communities, but particularly the Jewish community, is vile and rampant. Unfortunately when governments do not stand up and say, 'No, we're going to do something about it, and we're going to do something that works,' you are effectively tacitly letting it happen, because governments have the powers to make laws. Had the government worked with the coalition, we would have ensured there were laws that worked.

It is very difficult to understand and fully appreciate the damage that is being done to communities of ours, fellow Victorians, by what is occurring on our streets. I might say, as someone who has an extremely close connection to the Jewish community – specifically a very, very close connection to the Jewish community – and an understanding of issues that the Jewish community has seen and lived through over recent years, I felt that I understood very strongly the issues that are facing the Jewish community. But I will add something that I have not talked about publicly that I do feel is an important point to note. I am not Jewish, so therefore I have never experienced antisemitism personally. I have seen it, of course – unfortunately I have seen it – and I have helped friends who have had to live through the most shocking circumstances of it. Only recently I attended an event for the President of Israel, who came to Australia and came to Melbourne, and as I do when I attend an event, especially particular types of Jewish events, I put on my kippah. I put it on as I left my car. I always park my car, put it on and walk to the event, as I am sure many other members of this place do when they attend Jewish events. Because of the protests that were occurring around him being in Melbourne, protesters had started to descend upon the location where the President was due to speak. Protesters were milling around and starting to arrive near the locality.

As I walked to the event, protesters thought I was Jewish, and I experienced a level of hate I have never experienced before. I think that in Parliament we are used to people from time to time taking out their frustrations on us. That is not uncommon. Lately people are talking to us a lot about the corruption they are seeing in this state, and they feel their trust is broken. They often will talk to us with incredible emotion. It is part of what we do. We show compassion to people, and we hear what they say. But at no time have I ever experienced a series of incidents – it was not just one – of dehumanisation that included hissing. I have never been hissed at in my life. It sounds so simple, and it sounds like such a little thing, even saying it out loud – and I thought about whether I would, but I feel that it is important. To feel that someone is so degrading you because of who you are, not because they disagree with your action – as I said, that occurs often. Often people question our actions, and it can be robust, but not who we are, not our right to exist. That is what antisemitism is. It is saying to the Jewish community, 'You don't have a right to exist. You don't have a right to be here.' Experiencing that for the first time was very traumatic. I know that that is a big word – very traumatic. I have been to Israel shortly after the war. I have visited terrorist-hit sites. I have seen where children have died. I have watched footage of terrorists doing the types of things I wish I had never known another human could do to a human. But to feel multiple instances of someone dehumanising me on the way into that event really stuck with me. That is not in any way to compare the two things. Of course it is not, and I would not want anyone to conflate what I am saying. But the reason I am raising it is because that is happening all day, every day to part of our community, to fellow Victorians, and it has not been fixed.

We consider this bill now, which we support. We want to see it passed by this Parliament. We want to see it passed with haste. We want it to see it go through the upper house, and of course we are going to support it. Firstly, I would say we could have had these powers initially had the government done

the right thing and worked with us. We could have seen that, and we should have seen that. The government, I think partly because of stubbornness, did not agree to that. I would say that every event that has occurred since then under a regime of laws that have not worked – I mean, the only way you could, I think, fairly describe the government's assertions that they had acted, is gaslighting. That is the only word you can use, that the government recognised there was a problem, said there was a problem and brought in laws which gaslighted Victorians into believing they might have protections. Well, the Attorney has admitted: no charges, no convictions. So those laws did not protect Victorians. And to think, every single instance that someone had to put up with, whether big or small, should not have happened. That does not mean that government can stop everything from occurring. What the government should be doing is putting in place laws that protect people where they need protection, and the government failed at that. When you go through the history of how we got to the laws – failures in the drafting of the laws, failed attempts to pass the laws through the upper house through a different bill – on every single one of those steps you can only see that the government has failed.

I think that when you take politics out of this issue entirely and you look at these issues with a very fair mind, the only thing that you would see is that the government's politics failed Victorians, and Victorians know it. The Jewish community knows it. The Jewish community knows it, because every single day they have had to experience questioning of their right to exist. It has to stop; it is wrong. And it is incumbent on everyone in this place, and every community leader more broadly, to say that it needs to stop, not just in terms of antisemitism but any form of inequality. It requires community leaders to stand up, but it also requires governments, where they see a way to legislate, to help to do it – to do it in a way that will work and to do it in a way that puts politics aside – and to sometimes work with other parties to make sure that it will happen in a meaningful way. It is sad to know that the failure in the government's drafting has seen no instance of those laws working since those laws were introduced. It is good that we have this measure before the house today, which of course we support. We want to see it passed with haste. It should have been done at the start, and had the government had any real integrity, that is what would have happened. Victorians know it, and we will make sure these laws are passed at 5 o'clock today.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (15:22): Well, that was 1796 seconds we will not get back. Goodness me, that was the longest acknowledgement that politics from the Liberals and Nationals in the upper house impacted on these protections coming through. It was a longwinded way of describing how adding in things to a bill and the concession of that, the intention of that, was the politicisation of a piece of legislation that is to protect members of our community from serious vilification offences, particularly what we have seen in the devastating impacts on the Jewish communities. It was an acknowledgement. I point out to the member for Brighton that it was a shame that for such a performance there were not more colleagues in here. The member for Evelyn came through about 40 seconds before the end of it.

It was such a grand presentation of a concession that the Liberals and Nationals politicised anti-vilification and serious vilification offences, because let us remind those opposite that when we first brought bills to this place, the opposition voted against these stronger protections – 12 months ago. When the member for Brighton talks about politicisation, when the member for Brighton talks about unity, there was a moment for unity right there. The member for Brighton, in his revisionist history right here in that presentation, conceded that they played politics and now suddenly want to rush it through in, say, 48 hours as opposed to 168 hours from last sitting week. What an extraordinary contradiction throughout that speech that does not get to the level of what we saw, say, from Michael O'Brien, the member for Malvern, when he was shadow minister. Dare I say even the former member for Kew Tim Smith, that great intellect, would not have dished up such a waffling piece of contradiction, because these are serious matters, and it is serious business in this Parliament to protect people across our communities.

I do not know how shadow cabinet dealt with their policy position on this. I mean, there are a couple of legends at the table right here that might be able to take us through exactly what that might have

looked like, because this whole strategy to say that you are on the side of those being vilified while blocking the very protections and changes that protect them is an extraordinary about-face, and I do not think we needed 1796 seconds to say it. All the member for Brighton had to do was say sorry: sorry for the politicisation, sorry for bringing the construction industry issues into a discussion about how we protect the Jewish community. What an extraordinary thing they did last sitting week; what an extraordinary performance that was, to say that you are on the side of people who need that protection from Victoria Police in our community – something that we absolutely rushed through as quickly as we could.

Facts matter. Your opinions on whatever can be what they are, even if not well founded, but you cannot just make up your own facts. Let us go back only 2½ months ago to 22 December, when the Premier stood up urgently to announce steps that the government would take to combat antisemitism and protect public safety, including amending the way serious vilification offences are prosecuted, to address these concerns that the current Director of Public Prosecutions consent requirements imposed an unnecessary prosecutorial burden impacting on offence effectiveness. That was part of a substantial five-step antisemitism plan. How was that not leadership standing up after such a horrific tragedy only a few days before in Bondi? That is the leadership the state needed and that is what the Premier brought forward: a comprehensive program of combating antisemitism. Our state has been on a significant journey over a number of months and even over the last couple of years. We saw changes throughout that journey when we first brought anti-vilification protections forward. This is what we were doing, because we on this side are absolutely about ensuring that every Victorian, regardless of their faith and their background, is supported and protected and can feel safe.

There have been opportunities that we have all had to connect with the Jewish community. There is a massive anxiety and burden that is felt at the moment that is continuing on post the horrific alleged murders in Bondi that still leaves such a horrible feeling and just a helplessness in Australians about how such hate can be inflicted on others. So our vigilance and our need to stand up in every element of our community to ensure that our Jewish communities are supported are critical as well. It is one thing to attend synagogues, it is one thing to stand there and say that we need more protections, but it was another thing to come in here on the Thursday afternoon and politicise serious vilification laws.

The stunt that was done this morning on introducing bills is the way you do it. Everyone wants politics, an opposition needs to oppose – we know. That was the time to do it today: the Shadow Attorney-General stood up, moved a bill, the bill was voted down, he went out and did a doorstep. That is the way you do it. You do not do it when we are trying to protect Jewish community members from serious vilification and empowering Victoria Police, when we are trying to get a bill through, and then come back into this place and say that you want to rush it through at the end of the day. That is laughable. It is fanciful. It is why those opposite are not a serious and credible opposition, because there is common decency to everything that we do. It is not to say that you cannot have the political discourse and debate. There are moments for that. There is nuance. There is an ability to do your doorstep and do the media grabs, but to politicise trauma like that is absolutely outrageous. That is what it was.

There are the part-timers over there, the Greens political party that we see occasionally. Seriously, they roll through. We have had work-from-home changes, Acting Speaker Tak. I know you have been keeping up with this. I do not know if they are ever here or if they are permanently working from home. The Greens political party rock up occasionally, ask a question once a week and maybe speak on a bill every four weeks. They are absolutely horrendous in their parliamentary performance. Then we see the significant steps that they took to block this work through the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 as well. The Greens political party are once again the part-timers of the Parliament. Goodness me, you can see the socialists chasing them down. The socialist party is chasing them down and hoovering up their support on the left flank, aren't they, because they do not bother to turn up and do the work. Once again we saw on Thursday afternoon the Greens political party also blocking serious protections and reforms and the frustration of our Jewish community at both the opposition and the Greens political party, who teamed up to block important

legislation which was designed to deliver tougher new laws to crack down on people who want to whip up racism and hate against their fellow Victorians.

We now know that the amendment proposed by the Greens 12 months ago has the potential to create substantial delays in these hate crimes being heard in court. Why do they want to create delays there? I am not sure. I am going to give the Greens political party the benefit of the doubt and say it is the lack of attendance in Parliament, the lack of diligence, of fronting up, of hearing legislation, of being a part of the amending process, because it is an absolutely egregious act to delay these protections for any longer than is absolutely necessary in getting them drafted and up to the Governor as quickly as possible.

The change is really important. The administrative delay whereby Victoria Police are currently required to get consent from the Director of Public Prosecutions in every case before it can proceed to court is a significant time delay and impact, so we are strengthening the work and protections of Victoria Police. We have given them the powers, we have got the work that they do at a taskforce level, specialist levels, and we understand the significant work and burden they undertake to make sure that these matters are investigated and brought before the courts. This amendment, the third of its phase coming through, is critically important. Alleged offenders would have more time to continue to commit their unlawful acts if we were not to act quicker as well. In a further step to combat antisemitism and other forms of hate to keep people safe, we need to remove this requirement for consent to police prosecutions for criminal vilification unless the alleged offender is under the age of 18.

As I said, this is not something that should have been politicised in the upper house. It is a great shame that it took 1796 seconds. I mean, the member for Brighton could do night time radio the way he loves listening to himself. But that apology right there was ham-fisted. We acknowledge the member for Brighton. As the time goes off, I will conclude my remarks because I could do 20 minutes on the member for Brighton. We commend the bill to the house.

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (15:32): When the member for Mordialloc was quite critical of the member for Brighton for his contribution, I was expecting something a bit more vivid. Anyway, good contribution, member for Mordialloc.

I note the position that was outlined by our lead speaker, the honourable member for Brighton, who made some pertinent points. As we have heard, this bill changes the framework regarding the serious vilification process. As was pointed out by our lead speaker, it is a change that indicates that this was not quite right when it passed this house in the first place, because the laws that were put in place at that time simply have not played out on the ground not only in relation to any convictions but in relation to any arrests. You cannot have a conviction without an arrest, but we have just seen nothing. Currently a prosecution for a serious offence may only occur with the consent of the DPP, and we know that this has been quite a restrictive process. The DPP must consider all actions before it can do so. The complications there, and the fact that police have not had the ability to take action directly themselves, have been quite concerning. Police have been delayed from having any involvement in some cases, prevented from having any involvement in others, and they need to be at the forefront of the response to the hateful conduct that we have indeed seen.

This bill will amend the Crimes Act 1958 to provide that the DPP's consent is no longer required and that police will have the powers to commence a prosecution unless the person is under the age of 18. This is absolutely right. I am led to believe that when the original bill was voted on in this chamber, the member for Ringwood – and I do vaguely recall this – moved an amendment to give police these powers, and the government voted against it. I see that the member for Ringwood is on the speaking list, and I am sure that he will cover off on that when he has the microphone.

Whilst this bill also provides that Victoria Police can join with the DPP in taking action, I note the consent is restricted to them, meaning that private citizens will not be able to do so. It does not prevent private citizens from making a complaint themselves, either to police, which will be the case in most

circumstances, or indeed to the DPP – as they should be able to do, because these are actions that need to be acted on. The bottom line is that, since these laws were introduced as the big saviour to stamp out actions of vilification, we have had nothing happen – nothing on the ground, not one arrest – and I will touch on that a little bit later.

One point that I want to make before I do is that most laws that we pass through this chamber – and I believe it is about 70 to 80 per year that we discuss through various types of legislation – require commonsense implementation on the ground. When people are prosecuting our laws, whether it be police, whether it be officers in other agencies, they need to provide a level of common sense. Interestingly, over the weekend – and not knowing that I would be standing on my feet speaking on this bill a couple of days ago, because we only got very short notice – I watched a presentation by the acclaimed British comedian Rowan Atkinson, and the point he was making was about the erosion of free speech. He is a funny man, Mr Atkinson, but in this case it was obviously quite a serious topic. He warned about censorship becoming too great and, to paraphrase, that we cannot become, as a society, too precious. While I am supportive of the right to free speech, we certainly need some boundaries when we are crossing over into the areas of hate or promoting uprising. Any commentary that incites violence and any commentary that promotes an uprising of harm, we must certainly be outlawing. That is where I do believe this legislation is aimed, and police indeed should have those powers to take action when required. But I also understand the views expressed by Mr Atkinson, and I go back to the point that I was making earlier: that is where commonsense application is required for these laws. We cannot have people being charged or convicted for frivolous-type matters. It is the serious matters that we have been exposed to of relatively recent times that certainly need to be acted on.

I do note our lead speaker the member for Brighton's commentary that since these laws have come in we have not had one person charged. One wonders why. I came down here and I was at Parliament one Saturday morning to attend a function, and it corresponded with one of the protests out the front. To see some of the slogans that were on placards was shocking, and to hear some of the chants that those protesters were making was abhorrent. Yet we have the laws in place that were meant to clamp down on that and hold people accountable and responsible. For those many actions that we saw over a long period of several weeks and even months, we saw absolutely no arrests. The fact that we are coming back now into this chamber and we are adding police powers to take action is an admission that this was not right in the first place. That is what it is: it is an admission that this was not right in the first place. I want to just point out that in 2022 we had a Ballarat woman Zoe Buhler who was actually arrested for inciting opposition to the lockdown laws. She was arrested for that – inciting opposition to the lockdown laws. Yet some of the things that I have seen out the front of this place on slogans and that have been chanted and that have been said, we have had no action on – no action on whatsoever. There is something not right there. There is something simply not right there.

I do believe that later on the charges were dropped in relation to that woman's actions, but for inciting others to breach lockdowns you get arrested and for inciting other people to kill other people there is nothing that happens in that regard. It is simply not appropriate, and it should not be allowed to occur. In some cases it seems to be that when taking action here it has all been too complex. There is no other reason to put down for why we have had no arrests. These were meant to be laws that stopped vilification and the uprising of hate, and we see them exploding on our streets and see absolutely nothing happening.

Now, hopefully, with the police having more powers to take action on the front line, we will certainly see some changes in that regard. But of course we cannot get to the stage where we are arresting people for lesser actions, and I go back again to repeating my commentary that this is where common sense needs to be applied by the enforcement officers who will be responding to these laws. In relation to that, I will conclude my comments. We do support this legislation. It should have been there in the first place, and hopefully we will see some positive action playing out on the ground and people being held to account for their actions, which has not happened since this came into place.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (15:41): I will say it is frustrating that it is now the third time this important amendment has had to come before the house. I think we need to do a little bit of a history lesson here, because I do remember vividly when we were first debating the bill along the way that the opposition voted against the stronger protections 12 months ago. It was really disappointing because there had been so much careful work with stakeholders. Nonetheless, our multicultural communities, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and other representatives were very passionate, for all the right reasons, about seeing these important protections come through. So I think it is rather rich of the opposition – and that is probably being a little delicate on my part – to suddenly look at us and say ‘Oh, why didn’t you bring about this particular element of the bill then?’ when they opposed the bill, and it was actually a bit of a slap in the face, not least to the Jewish community.

We know that the Greens political party do not support this change, and they certainly have attempted to stymie this change through the upper house. Having been formerly a member of the upper house, I remember many occasions where the government had done the hard work – because obviously preparation of a bill is not just slapping a few words together on a piece of paper; there is extensive consultation and evaluation of all the ramifications of the wording in a bill – and quite often they would lob in something which had very little, if anything, to do with the premise of the bill per se and would try to find ways through that to affect or impede the passage of the bill at hand and to grandstand on a particular issue. This is not to say that other issues that are being put forward that are not central to the premise of the bill are not important, and I am not in any way trying to diminish the significance of matters that may get raised by opposition or minor parties either, because as has been stated in the chamber, the Parliament is a house of debate. But ultimately, if we are to be effective as MPs, we do need to be able to bring reforms through the house. When you see in particular the suffering of the Jewish community – it is not only that, but I will say in this instance that is relevant to the context of the bill, particularly with the Bondi massacre, the bombing of the Addas synagogue and so many incidents that are horrific and offensive to all of us or to any decent Victorian – then we can see the imperative to have these changes here today. To those who are looking with audacity at us putting forward these reforms, well, we simply are compelled, I should say, from an ethical point of view, because so much work went into the formulation of the anti-vilification and social cohesion reforms, and we do want to see the right outcome for the community. I should say, if I read off the purpose of the bill per se, that in a further step to combat antisemitism and other forms of hate and to keep people safe, we need to remove the requirement that the Director of Public Prosecutions consent to police prosecutions for criminal vilification, unless the alleged offender is under the age of 18.

What would be the consequences were this bill before us not to be passed? It has the potential to create substantial delays in these hate crimes – the terrible acts of antisemitism that we have seen to date – being heard in court. It would be devastating, to say the least, if that were to be allowed to perpetuate, hence there really is an imperative to pass these reforms for the good of the Victorian community. Why? Because Victorians deserve to live free from hate, discrimination and intimidation, fundamentally. If we are looking at the purposive element of the legislation we are bringing forward today, which is to ensure Victorians – and I am going to repeat this – live free from hate, discrimination and intimidation.

There is therefore a really strong and compelling argument, to say the least – multiple arguments, I should say – to have a positive passing of this bill in both chambers of the house. I would hope that we do not see further, I will say, tactics, and I am not saying that politics per se is not a tactical exercise. Obviously, in order to be able to get messaging to community and to be able to push forward particular policy or otherwise in an effective way, there are tactics that can be used from time to time. However, we have significant vulnerability in the community, and it really is timely, to say the least, that we get these reforms through, because I do not think any decent person – I would like to think no-one in this chamber – wants to see one more Victorian vilified any day of the week.

We are talking about serious acts that we have seen across this state, and it really is not in the interests of anyone to see them to be allowed to continue. If there was a delay because for some reason we did

not get these reforms through – I am confident that we will – that would mean that whilst the bureaucratic processes of police having to refer a matter to the DPP are being followed through this then would theoretically allow those who are perpetuating discriminatory acts – and we are talking about serious discriminatory acts – to simply continue to do so, theoretically. That means more harm, and that is counterproductive when we are looking at the kind of better and happier and more equal and fair community that we are striving to achieve in Victoria.

I would like to think, and I would hope, that we will not again see the kind of teaming up of the Greens and the Liberals in the upper house. I hope this will get through the lower house of course. I am really hoping for the betterment of Victorians, but I hope that we do not see a teaming up of the Greens and the Libs again trying to lob in other elements to a bill which really has a very pure and decent motive here, and that is to prevent the prosecution of serious matters being unnecessarily delayed by bureaucratic processes. I am not making inferences about the DPP themselves of course but rather showing confidence in police in being able to pursue matters that are authentically being pursued.

I also want to say, and I will put a caveat, it is a pity that we have to have anti-vilification and social cohesion laws in the first place and the fact that we have seen such horrific acts of discrimination and disruption in our community. But that being said, because it has happened and we cannot resile from it, and no-one is seeking to, we therefore need to follow through, take this all the way and make sure that we drive the right outcome for our community, not least the Jewish community, who certainly have worked very collaboratively with the government. I know the government consulted widely in the development of the anti-vilification and social cohesion laws, because I attended some of those sessions on behalf of the Attorney-General at the time when I was Parliamentary Secretary for Justice.

I know very well the very nuanced and careful work that went into bringing about these reforms. That is why it was so frustrating to see, for instance, the Greens political party lobbying in at the last minute chucking in something without giving it the proper consideration that it deserved and in effect stymieing progression of this really important reform. I hope that they will resile from that, and I hope that we will get genuine collaboration this time to be able to see these important reforms through. We genuinely care about our Victorian community, and we want all Victorians to be treated with love and respect and integrity. Getting these reforms appropriately implemented is fundamental, and we would like to see a safe passage of this bill finally. That would be much appreciated.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (15:51): I rise to make some comments on the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026. This just feels like groundhog day, because we have been talking about this for far too long. Every day lost is another day that puts those communities at risk when it comes to hate, and especially the Jewish community, which has seen an unprecedented increase in antisemitism, particularly since the events of 7 October.

I want to highlight to the house that this did not just start 12 months ago when the government failed an attempt to bring in new hate laws excluding the very thing that would have made the law stronger – but it started many, many years ago. In fact it happened 2364 days ago – six years ago – when the parliamentary Legal and Social Issues Committee had a look at strengthening our anti-vilification laws. One of the key recommendations from that committee six years ago was that in order to strengthen the powers of hate laws, you have to remove the barrier so that, for anyone that incites hatred, the police have to ask an independent umpire for further powers before they go and charge somebody. Imagine that: police have all the powers to be able to do their job in everything, but when it comes to prosecuting with hate laws, they need to ask the DPP, the Director of Public Prosecutions, or a third umpire to rule on whether it is valid to charge somebody that spews hatred, incites hatred, to another individual. I was part of that committee, along with the member for Brighton, and we unanimously agreed six years ago to change this law. So what happened 12 months ago? The government brings in a bill, and the one thing that needed to be fixed – that the parliamentary inquiry said would fix our hate laws – was excluded. And you have to ask why. Why did this happen when we spend hundreds and thousands and millions of dollars on these parliamentary committees that are all so important? We did the work, the work was done, and the government ignored the work. Why?

Because this government, who claim they are so good at protecting people, did a dirty deal with the Greens to ensure that this important part of the legislation was excluded.

What happens afterwards is simply this: the Premier, along with the Attorney-General, puts out a great press release headed 'Protecting more Victorians from hate' that says that after this, on Wednesday 2 April, everybody can feel safe in Victoria, because they have strengthened our hate laws. What a false promise that was, particularly since the Jewish community since 7 October have seen an unprecedented piece of hate. I only have to remind the community and this house that it was only months later, on 10 December, that we had people hunting Jews in Caulfield outside a synagogue on the Sabbath.

What happened to those people that targeted the Jewish community, that threw rocks on the Friday night? Were any of them prosecuted for what they did? No. In fact has anybody been prosecuted since the hate laws were brought in? The answer is no. Why? Because the government failed in the one thing that they could have fixed in strengthening the laws – the very reason we are here today. The government failed, the government got it wrong, and they left the Jewish community and other vulnerable communities unsafe as a result of it. The government talks up supporting women, disability, LGBTI, Indigenous communities, the Jewish community. It is a big, big false promise when these laws do not go far enough, because you have to get the third umpire to intervene and decide whether someone passes the test. I will tell you what, this does not pass the test of good government. This fails when it comes to good government.

Let me further mention this to you: why did 10 November happen? On 7 October we had the horrific situation in Israel. People were murdered by a terrorist group, Hamas. In the community it flowed on to Victoria, and people have not been the same as a result. What happened on 10 December? I will tell you what happened. We had a burger restaurant that was firebombed, and who was blamed for that? The Jewish community were blamed for that. Again, what was the result of falsely blaming a community for something which, later, people were charged for doing? Nothing. I will tell you what, the individual that was involved in that restaurant has been running the weekly protest, the pro-Palestinian protest, chanting all kinds of hateful and evil things outside Parliament, week in, week out. And what has been the answer? Have there been any charges? No, because this government has done nothing. Instead what we have had is a good citizen, Menachem Vorchheimer, who went back to study the law because he was also attacked wearing his yarmulke one day, when a bus pulled up and football players got off the bus, knocked his kippah off his head and assaulted him.

Years later Menachem Vorchheimer stood up, because the government failed, and took it to VCAT. VCAT found only last week that the Burgertory founder and pro-Palestinian activist Hash Tayeh had unlawfully vilified Jewish people by leading protesters in the chant 'All Zionists are terrorists!' at a rally in March 2025. The 30-page decision ruled that Tayeh breached both racial and religious vilification provisions of the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001. The tribunal found that by initiating and repeating the chant Tayeh incited hatred towards the Jewish people. He was unable to successfully argue his conduct was in public interest or done in good faith. Tayeh bought the argument that he was referring to Israel, not to the Jews that live here. Again, it was one of these ridiculous arguments that these people continue to make, blindly spewing their hatred out – not blindly, deliberately – to the Jewish community that are more vulnerable. Do you know what, it took an individual within the Jewish community, a good upstander – not a bystander, an upstander – Menachem Vorchheimer, to take this individual through to VCAT and to get a positive finding.

Why couldn't the government do this? Why didn't we have police charge this individual and have him prosecuted? Because we do not have strong laws. We are sitting here 12 months on trying to fix the mess that this government created, and it did not just happen overnight. I said it happened six years ago. The government was aware. The government knew. The government has been going out to the Jewish community, to my community, and telling them 'How safe you are, because we're passing these laws.' Well, I will tell you what, every single day that these laws have not been passed the government has continued to fail. We saw that happen seven months ago or thereabouts when, again,

we had the firebombing at the East Melbourne synagogue. On the same night, on the Friday night, we saw a bunch of these extremists heading down to a Jewish restaurant, turning tables upside down and targeting a restaurant simply because it was owned by Jews. And what happened? Nothing. Nothing happened. This continues to happen, whether it is on the football field, whether it is at a school, whether it is in a museum where kids are targeted for being Jewish, whether it is graffiti on our walls or whether it is the weekly protestors with these signs. No matter where, we see the racist antisemitism.

The Greens have just stepped up now. I am sure they have got something positive to say, member for Richmond. Each and every time we keep hearing this hatred, and the government has done nothing – absolutely nothing. So we will be supporting this. Absolutely we will be supporting this. Why? Because we have been calling for it for years. In fact, we put the amendment up nearly 12 months ago, which the government rejected despite, as I said, doing a dirty deal with the Greens. Now here we are, back to square one. It is literally groundhog day. We are fixing the problems that this government has created. And I tell you what, we cannot wait for this to be passed, because finally we need to give the police the powers to charge and arrest these extremists, these haters that hate communities, that go out and target communities simply for being Jewish or simply for being of another faith, another religion, whatever it may be. These individuals go out there and target people, and that is simply not good enough. This needs to change. The government should have done their work. And I tell you what, hopefully this time we will get it right, because we just cannot continue to have the Labor government fail vulnerable communities. They talk up a big game, but they fail when it comes to action. This is a massive F, a massive failure. The Jewish community does not feel safe under the Allan Labor government. This government has failed them. The fact that we are here now, six years later, trying to pass something that should have been done years ago, is an absolute disgrace and a failure of the Allan Labor government.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (16:01): I also rise to make a contribution on the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026. As has been noted by other speakers, hopefully this is third time lucky to get this amendment into the legislation, which will make an important difference in relation to the vilification protections. I want to echo some of the words of the member for Mordialloc in the sense that I find that there has been an enormous amount of historic revisionism going on in this debate from those opposite in relation to the initial legislation. Can I remind everyone that the opposition voted down the initial bill, which included this provision that police would be able to prosecute and it would not require going to the DPP. The reason that was posited at the time for voting the legislation down was in relation to four words that were applied to the civil anti-vilification protections.

The member for Caulfield mentioned the Legal and Social Issues Committee report that had recommended changes to the anti-vilification laws, which predated 7 October 2023. The inquiry was held because there was a realisation that the existing laws were not sufficient, were not strong enough, and it was difficult to bring both a prosecution for criminal vilification and provide an opportunity to bring civil claims. Interestingly, and as the member for Caulfield said, both the member for Caulfield and the member for Brighton were on this committee and the committee produced a bipartisan report that was endorsed by all committee members. Interestingly, chapter 5, which deals with civil anti-vilification protections, talks about introducing and adopting a harm-based provision. It says:

... the harm-based provision would shift the focus to the victim and the harms they experience as a result of the vilifying conduct.

It then went on to make a recommendation, recommendation 9:

That the Victorian Government introduce a new civil harm-based provision to assess harm from the perspective of the target group.

Further down that page – I am reading from page 120 of the report – it talks about a number of options to introduce and formulate a harm-based test. It suggests that the test:

... comprise a reasonableness test to objectively assess the conduct from the perspective of a reasonable member of the target group. For example, if a person was vilified for their disability, the conduct would be judged against a 'reasonable' person with that same disability.

If you go back 12 months to the debates in *Hansard*, the vast number of contributions made by those opposite were specifically in relation to this reasonableness provision and the concern that it should be a reasonable person generally rather than a reasonable person of the particular affected group. I have talked about this previously and about how nonsensical that would be in the context of vilification. The Jewish community, for example, makes up less than half a per cent of the Australian population. The antisemitism that we see in the streets, some of the words and the slogans – the reason why they are so hurtful is because they have been built up over generations. It is generations of trauma that mean that those words have such an impact. For the reasonable person in Australia they will not have that same impact. They cannot have that same impact, because those people have not been affected by the same trauma. And it would be exactly the same for the Muslim community, again a relatively small proportion of the population, or our Indigenous population, again a very small proportion of our population but a community that has endured years and years of suffering. Sometimes vilification that is targeting that group will be acutely felt by that group, but that may not be translated if you were talking about the reasonable person.

Why do I bring that up when we are talking about changes to the Crimes Act 1958? It is to remind everyone that the proposed changes – in the proposed amendment – were part of the initial bill. The initial bill that was put up to vote 12 months ago included that provision because it had been identified, as the member for Caulfield said, in another section of the report that one of the barriers to bringing a criminal conviction was the process that complainants needed to go through, and that extra process was seen as hindering the potential bringing of a charge. But then we have to ask ourselves: why did the opposition oppose the bill at the time? It was just for those four words, which –

**Tim Bull** interjected.

**Paul HAMER:** The member for Gippsland East wants to say he supports the amendment, but the records show that 12 months ago when the initial bill was presented to Parliament the opposition voted it down. The reason the opposition voted it down – speech after speech talked about the four words that were related to the civil protection, even though what had been stated in the committee report was recommending a civil provision that specifically referenced the group that had been targeted. The member for Brighton made an interesting point. He went on at length to say that the community – and by this I think he means the Jewish community – has called for action for too long. And that is correct. The community has called for action. At the time, 12 months ago when the initial bill was being debated, which included the provision that direct action could be taken by the police, the Jewish community pleaded and urged the coalition, the opposition, to vote with the government and pass the laws.

**Tim Bull** interjected.

**Paul HAMER:** I will take up the interjection because I think the member for Gippsland East is incorrect in his recollection of the event. There was an initial bill and the member for Malvern had put forward an amendment, which had been supported by the member for Ringwood, which had dealt with the political purpose defence. That was taken out as a house amendment before the bill was even passed in this house. So the bill that was put up in this house to a vote did not include that political purpose defence, and the member for Ringwood then withdrew his amendment. When the member for Malvern got up again, the lasting point of dispute, or point of contention, that the member for Malvern had said was the last bit of contention that the opposition had with the bill were these four words relating to the reasonable person test in the civil provisions.

The point that I am trying to make is that this was the opportunity. This had gone through the parliamentary inquiry, and it had support from both sides of Parliament – a bipartisan report. It had strong support from the Jewish community to pass the legislation as is. Once that political purpose test had been withdrawn, it had strong support from the Jewish community to pass it. They were pleading with the government to pass it. They were pleading with the opposition to join with the government to pass it, and instead the only way that we could pass it – and we knew that the overarching provisions were important to pass – was through this change that had been recommended by the Greens. I commend the bill to the house.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (16:11): I am certainly happy to rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026 today. I will pick up a few points that the member for Gippsland East raised during his contribution to the debate. But I think it is important to start off, many might say, by stating that this is a very simple bill and one that has been taken out of the omnibus bill from a few weeks ago. I will get to the other points in that omnibus bill that now have disappeared, one of those of course being the strengthening of IBAC. As the member for Brighton mentioned earlier, IBAC have been calling for it in several public inquiries – never by a formal letter, it appears. In several inquiries they have said that they do not have the powers to investigate corruption within Victoria's Big Build sites because of the confusion between the definitions of 'public officers' and 'corruption', and of course they do not have follow-the-money powers. We know that. The omnibus bill that went through this chamber would have strengthened that, not to the level that they perhaps needed. But then all of a sudden that is out of contention, that is out of play now, and we are presented with this Crimes Amendment Bill, which rightly does take out that needed referral to the DPP, which is probably why there has never been a conviction under these vilification laws – and is it any wonder, if any case needs a referral from the DPP. It was stated that the new section provides that a prosecution for these offences may only be commenced by the Director of Public Prosecutions or a police officer. This prevents private litigants from bringing prosecutions for these offences. There is also the section within the bill that talks about how burdensome it is on the DPP. So this bill will remove that – great.

I do want to pick up on some points that the member for Gippsland East made earlier in his speech. No-one in this place would be surprised that he is highly entertained by the comical genius of Rowan Atkinson and was watching him over the weekend. But the point is about free speech – the difference between free speech and hate speech. I would like to think that growing as you get older and have more life experience is not an uncommon thing, but a much, much younger version of me – and this is probably from time living in the United States – hated censorship of any kind. During my teenage years and my 20s I hated censorship, and I would have hated a bill that could be perceived as putting laws around what you can and cannot say. My friends and I in the States used to say that they are all for free speech until you say something that they do not like, which is essentially true. But there is a very big difference between free speech and the freedoms that we are afforded in this country simply because of those past and present who have served this country in all sorts of roles and have fought for our freedom of free speech. There is a very big difference between that and hate speech and vilification.

As the member for Gippsland East would well know, there are often times when there is not a filter between my brain and my mouth. I might be able to say some pretty outrageous things, but none of that has any venom with it, I think we could all agree – never any venom. There is no place for hate speech within our society. There is just not, particularly based on religion, race, sexual orientation or anything of that nature. Hate speech is simply unacceptable in our society. It simply is. There is no-one in this place that would disagree with that. I have been approached many times in the last few weeks about supporting the anti-vilification laws and going against free speech. That is not what this is. I just need to say that that is not what this is. There is such a big difference. Present-day me, thankfully, now understands that there is a very, very big difference between free speech and hate speech. We have seen what happens when hate and hate speech and incitement go unchecked.

I did listen very, very closely to the contribution by the member for Gippsland East. He mentioned the protests that had been going on out the front of this place for months and months and months. Given the signs and the chants, you would have thought that there would have been arrests and convictions, multiple times. In fact you would think every protest would have seen multiple arrests based on the Crimes Act 1958 and the serious vilification offence against these groups, and of course it was antisemitic, so for there still not to be a conviction or an arrest is just horrific. Hopefully this does put some barriers around it. And I will touch on this: it was not in Victoria, but we saw it all over the media. We had a young female and, like it or not, she was Australian of the Year – I am not going to mention her name in here – chanting. That to me was hate speech – those chants that a young female role model, like it or not, was chanting, which then got spread all over social media. Again, I wonder: if that had been in Melbourne, would there have been an arrest and a conviction? Because in my mind there absolutely should have been. We understand that the reasons she was awarded Australian of the Year meant she had fought a very hard battle, and we respect that. What we do not respect is the inciting of violence against a particular group that we saw all over the mainstream media and social media. It was disgusting.

Although, as I said, younger me would have been absolutely opposed to anything that was going to censor us, censor our speech and stop me from saying exactly what I was thinking, present-day me, thankfully, has grown up. I understand the difference between free speech and hate speech and vilification and being able to express a strong opinion in a diplomatic way. I would like to think sometimes I am diplomatic – not all the time, but sometimes. There is a very big difference in that. Hopefully now, having closed these loopholes that have prevented any convictions occurring, we can see some boundaries put around that hate speech and the inciting of violence and the inciting of hate, because it has been allowed to fester on the streets, particularly on the streets of Melbourne, every weekend, openly, without any consequence for action. Hopefully that will fix this.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (16:20): I too rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026, and the aim of this bill is to make a very small but very poignant challenge to the operation of our anti-vilification reforms. I will start by noting that this is the third time that we have tried to introduce this amendment, and each time those in the other place have rejected it. I want that on record.

What this bill is about, to put it simply, is stopping racism. It is so simple. It is about tackling serious racial vilification that goes on in our community. Indeed there is a major impetus for this change, which we have seen over the past couple of months, and a part of that has been antisemitism – hate weaponised and directed against our Jewish community here in Melbourne and of course in Sydney too. Everyone, every single one of us, deserves to live a life free from extremism, discrimination and hate. As I reflect on this, I also want to acknowledge another very important issue that this bill will help address, and that is Islamophobia. We have seen a massive rise in disgustingly vile, racist attacks on our Muslim communities that are not warranted in the slightest. In December the Virgin Mary Mosque in Hoppers Crossing, which I have been to on many occasions – a wonderful and welcoming Muslim community – had their fence defaced with the phrase ‘Get some pork on your fork.’ I can tell you that when I speak to the Muslim constituents in my electorate they do not go around telling people who are not Muslim not to eat pork; I cannot for the life of me imagine why someone felt the need to do this. Two weeks later, ICOM, the Islamic College of Melbourne, one of our local, fabulous Islamic schools in Wyndham, over in Tarneit, which I had the privilege of visiting many times as the member for Tarneit, was defaced in a similar manner, and it would not surprise me if it was the same person. Their fence was graffitied and defaced with an equally vile message, and do you know what it said? It said, ‘Not okay to eat bacon but okay to’ – and I am not going to say the word – ‘goats.’ This is something that someone has decided to write, likely in the middle of the night under the cover of darkness, at a faith-based school for children, so children can turn up to school and read that. I can tell you what I think they were hoping for. They were hoping that children – students at that school – their parents and their teachers would see this, and they would feel unwelcome in their own community and feel afraid, and worst of all, they would feel threatened.

I want to point out that these attacks on local Islamic schools and mosques are very unlikely to be connected or in response to the horrific events at Bondi. That incident at Virgin Mary Mosque took place around two weeks before the Bondi attack. This is not some kind of retaliatory impulse, and even if it was it is no excuse, but what we know is that there are other factors that are driving this kind of hatred and vilification that absolutely necessitate these reforms. A big part of that, I have to say, is the extremely disturbing rhetoric espoused by people like Pauline Hanson, One Nation and those kinds of supporters. I was absolutely disgusted when she was interviewed recently on Sky News and said quite bluntly that there are no good Muslims. This is the same person who twice wore a burqa into the Senate chamber up in Canberra as a publicity stunt to antagonise Muslims, and in that same interview Ms Hanson thought it would be a good idea to single out and target the suburb of Lakemba in Sydney, a very, very multicultural community and a wonderful community which happens to have a major mosque.

Those comments unfortunately – naturally – led to a series of threats being made to Lakemba mosque, which is surprising to no-one who knows what that kind of rhetoric is intending to do. No-one is surprised by this. I mean, is anyone in this chamber surprised by this? These are stock-standard tactics employed by parties and movements like Pauline Hanson's One Nation party and their friends. It is deeply, deeply disturbing that those opposite and the Leader of the Opposition have refused to rule out a secret preference deal with One Nation.

As I said in this place a couple of weeks ago, it is all about race. It is all about skin colour – whether you are white or you are not white. When you separate that, for God's sake, about what shade or flavour of white you might actually be, communities like mine are always, always the first to suffer. When Pauline Hanson first came to prominence 30 years ago, she said that Australia was being swamped by Asians. She was trying to target communities like our Vietnamese community in Melbourne's west, an amazing, amazing community. Then she returned to the Senate in 2016, and it was all about targeting Muslims. That was the flavour of the decade. We might recall when Muslim communities, many of whom had been here for decades or had been born here, were suddenly cast as terrorists and extremists who wanted to destroy the Australian way of life. Of course the racists never go after the extremists; they always, always target vulnerable people. These kinds of people target people in my own community, like Muslim women, mums in hijabs with their kids at the shops, old men just trying to go about their daily lives or, even worse – and I see this on a regular basis – children. They target schoolchildren, literally kids who are probably more culturally acclimatised and aligned to whatever these people think of when they talk about Western civilisation. This is never okay. It is not who we are. We must stand up against this.

It is funny watching the knots that people will tie themselves up in because they are so full of hate. Very recently I made a number of posts on social media wishing my Muslim communities in my electorate a very warm and welcome Ramadan season. I have made hundreds of little gift boxes with my office to hand out at the community iftar dinners across my communities, like the one I attended with the Australia Light Foundation in Tottenham on the weekend. This is just so sad. These posts attracted hundreds of the most vile comments, the majority of which came from trolls and the majority of which were not actually from Victoria. Ironically, what they were saying was, 'What about Lent? Are you going to be doing Lent boxes for Christmas?' That was what the majority of those comments were about – Christians, or so-called Christians, who were triggered by a local MP wishing her Muslim community a happy Ramadan. They forgot the whole point of Lent is to give up something or sacrifice something. Why be consistent with your faith when you can beat up on another religious community instead? It was a very sad state of affairs.

I have no patience and no tolerance for this kind of hatred in our community, and it is why I overwhelmingly back these anti-vilification reforms. It is why we need to remove the requirement that only the DPP may sign off on prosecution of serious vilification offences and allow police to do the same, because what has happened until now is that until Victoria Police can get the sign-off from the DPP, the offenders, these terrible people who spread this kind of hate, have more time to continue to

commit these awful offences unabated. This needs to change, because we cannot allow racism to fester unchallenged. That is why this is such an important bill.

This side of the chamber will always stand up for our communities of faith and our multicultural communities. We talk about it each and every single day here in this place and out in the electorate time and time again. What makes Victoria a great place to be and what makes Australia a great place to be able to have the privilege to live and raise a family is that everyone has the freedom to be who they are and to practise their faith. Whatever colour they are, whatever colour their eyes are or their skin is, whatever language they speak or country they were born in, they came here for a better life, and we raise our children and our grandchildren together.

We must push back against this vile hate. It is deeply, deeply disturbing that the Leader of the Opposition has refused to call out a secret preference deal with One Nation, who continue to spread the most vile racism across our communities, inciting hatred. It must be called out. You cannot pretend to stand with multicultural communities, as the Leader of the Opposition did in Footscray Park with our Vietnamese community on the weekend, and then behind closed doors do secret preference deals with racists. It is wrong and it must be called out. I commend the bill to the house.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (16:30): I think it was a famous American sportscaster who said ‘It’s *deja vu* all over again.’ That is the case with this bill. The bill we are considering today is part of a bill that was first presented to this chamber in November 2024. Off it went on its winding journey to the upper house with a whole bunch of other things attached to it. The upper house in their great wisdom made a bunch of amendments and it came back to this chamber, and that is when things got very, very interesting indeed. I did need to check *Hansard* on this because I was like, ‘This sounds very familiar, what the government is doing here. This sounds a little bit like something I might have taken a bit of a view on way back when it came back to us in 2025.’ Sure enough, the amendments the Greens made in the upper house – and I worked very closely with my colleagues in the Greens – in my view were not good amendments because they were adding complexity to the very, very important work of police in charging for these new incitement offences. I said it was more appropriate that that additional test, that additional piece of work, not be allowed. So what did I do? I moved an amendment in this chamber when it came back from the upper house way back in April of last year to do exactly what the government is doing today.

There it was. Nearly a year on and we are back to litigating or discussing the position that I put to this chamber and that the entirety of the government voted against way back in April 2025. Who voted for it? The Greens did not vote for it, understandably. The opposition voted for it and I voted for it. It was my amendment, and the amendment I put is exactly what the government is putting to the chamber this day. It gets rid of the artificial, silly extra step of getting the DPP to clear a matter to be charged – not brought all the way through to trial, but charged. We know this intuitively, because when police are in the field, they need to be able to charge people. They then assemble a brief of evidence, take it off to the DPP, and the DPP forms a view. They say, ‘I think maybe you haven’t got enough here,’ or they will say, ‘Yes, this looks to be in order. We’ll go ahead and take this through to trial.’

But, no, as a result of the amendments, which I did not support at the time, we added this extra step where instead of police, whilst in the field, being able to charge someone on the spot, they would have to take their details and say, ‘We’ll get back to you if we’re allowed to charge you. I’ve got to go off and consult with the DPP.’ That rendered the law absolutely useless, in my submission, because you have the circumstance where police are trying to use these laws, in part, for deterrence – to have a chilling effect on some of the behaviours we have seen. We have seen it recently with Grace Tame and others chanting the most abhorrent, appalling things at rallies. What effect would it have for police in those sorts of circumstances where someone is saying appalling things, hateful things and inciting people to violence, going up to them and saying, ‘Can I have your details? We think we’re going to charge you, but I’m just going to go off and check with somebody else,’ rather than being able to

charge them on the spot. That is exactly why I moved that amendment way back in April 2025. It is exactly why I said, and I quote from *Hansard*:

My amendment will essentially be to reinstate Labor policy in relation to the ability of police to charge offences of incitement and threats. These are very serious offences that this bill is introducing into Victorian law. They are very serious offences, and I do not think it is appropriate for the DPP to have a running veto over offences of this nature.

I maintain that position, and I am delighted that the government's bill now adopts the position I put to this chamber. The farcical element of all this, though, is that the government voted against this very element last April. They voted for it in November 2024. It then went up to the other place. They voted against it and it came back here in April 2025 and the government voted against it, and here we are in March 2026 still trying to land a workable position in relation to these incitement crimes. It is an absurd path that we have been on in relation to these crimes that this bill seeks to amend – an absolutely absurd journey when it could have been cleaned up had the government just stuck to their guns in the other place way back when this bill left this place in November 2024 and was considered upstairs in 2025. If they had stuck to their guns, we would not be here today trying to further tweak these rules. So much of the Parliament's time has been wasted on getting these laws right, and getting them, frankly, in line with the very amendment that I proposed to this place in April 2025.

Of course the reason this even comes about is because of a niche bit of political convenience. I do not expect for a minute that people are going to take much interest in the arcane machinations of what happens in this place in relation to particular bills being yanked or otherwise, but the reality is here that Labor pulled these provisions in a bill from the upper house because the Greens – good on them – successfully moved amendments in the upper house to expand IBAC's powers: good amendments, good policy, good law. The government's response? Shelve the bill. Kill the whole bill. The only reason the Greens were able to move those amendments was because it was a broad bill. So what did they do? They take the bill off the table in the upper house, they chop it up into a bunch of little bits, and this is one of the little bits. We are now legislating in itty-bitty, bite-sized chunks to serve a political purpose, not a policy purpose.

I heard the member for Laverton speaking like it was a new idea, this bill, when we have been sitting on this legislation for nearly 18 months. It is not a new idea. This is good policy, it is good law, we just have not finished the job yet. It started in November 2024 and presumably went through cabinet in, I do not know, October of that year. For 18 months it has been wending its way through this process, and it is only for political convenience that the government has now pulled their omnibus bill in the upper house, chopped it up into little bits, and brought this little bit to this chamber for us to litigate yet again. We have discussed it so many times: in November 2024 when these rules were first introduced and in April 2025 when we reconsidered them on the basis of the amendments of the upper house. The government said no DPP veto, then they said okay to DPP veto, then I moved an amendment saying no DPP veto and the government voted against it, and where are we today 11 months on from that amendment? No DPP veto. Back to square one after all this time. What an appalling waste of time. Why, oh why, could not this have been done sooner?

The omnibus bill has been yanked. Why has it been yanked? This is a critical part of the process. It has been yanked to avoid those expanded IBAC powers. It has been yanked to avoid what the government perceives as a political problem in terms of IBAC having follow-the-dollar powers or expanded powers to investigate the CFMEU criminal infiltration of Big Build projects. That is what this is about. As much as we might be here today talking about something very good, it is a direct process consequence of the government seeking to duck and hide when it comes to CFMEU corruption of the Big Build process. That is the reason we find ourselves here today debating yet again these incitement rules.

As I have said, I respectfully disagree with the Greens on their assessment of the DPP veto or otherwise. I do not know if their position has moved at all, but I respectfully disagree with it. I said so at the time, and I moved amendments to that effect at the time, and the government, astonishingly,

voted against their own policy. Just months after first introducing it, they voted against their own policy, and now, full circle, back we come and they are voting up their original policy. It is absolutely extraordinary. I said back on 2 April 2025:

... the most important part of this bill ... is the ability for police to charge, under criminal statute, threats and incitement.

They are very, very important powers, and they are powers that ought not to be exercised, in my view and indeed in the government's own view, by the DPP. So, sure enough, there have been no charges under these laws, because it is unworkable, and we said so at the time. Finally, and I am grateful it has happened, the government has realised that it is unworkable. Finally, they amend their own rule back to the original position. I commend it to the house.

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (16:40): I unfortunately am in the position where I have to speak on an amendment that, as has been observed, has been in this house three times, a particular provision to ensure that charges can be laid for quite serious acts without necessarily getting the permission of the DPP. I spoke about this during a procedural debate when we had the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 come through this place, but unfortunately I did not get a chance to speak about the significance of these changes at that time. I was happy with that, because I thought that the bill would progress and we would get what is an important law in its entirety, as was the government's intention, through the upper house and operational in our community. I was happy, because I was happy to go out to my community and say that this is something that we support and we have supported despite the blocking from the Liberal, National and potential One Nation coalition over these last 18 months of these provisions, despite the clear political machinations of the Greens political party to try and block this again and frustrate it even more.

I think this is particularly important, because I go out a lot in my community, especially out at the new estates, and I speak to a lot of people who are out and about. One particular group that I always try and stop and speak to is a particular group of elderly gentlemen of the Sikh faith who meet at the Wollahra Rise park every day from around 12 o'clock, and they have been targeted. Their group has been targeted by people coming up and using Islamophobic slurs against them, despite the fact they are of the Sikh faith. Unfortunately racists are not very good at understanding the nuances and theological differences between different faiths, but that should not matter. No-one should have that kind of vilification and hate directed towards them. When I sit down with these gentlemen and I talk about the things that they are concerned about, obviously it is family, it is cost of living, it is supporting their younger children and that they are helping to care for their grandchildren. That is what they are concerned about, and that is what we should be here to make sure that we support them to focus on. They should not have to put up with that kind of behaviour.

My colleague the member for Laverton observed a couple of horrific Islamophobic attacks in our community over this summer, unfortunately not long after the Bondi terror attack as well, where people jokingly – well, allegedly jokingly – sprayed Islamophobic comments on the side of Virgin Mary Mosque and on the side of, I believe, the Islamic College of Melbourne. I am just looking to the local member –

**Sarah Connolly** interjected.

**John LISTER:** the ICOM. They were terrible attacks, and the fact that we have to speak again about basic protections and making sure that they can cover these sorts of things is just abhorrent. It is a real shame that those other minor parties in this state – and I say 'minor' parties because I also include the Liberal–National parties in that because they are pretty minor in a lot of different senses of the word – are trying to frustrate this process. They are frustrating it not only because they want to have –

**A member** interjected.

**John LISTER:** Yes, just different political ideas from left and right, and just like a horseshoe, they come together, and in the end we do not actually have any kind of progress for our multifaith and multicultural communities.

It is disappointing as this government made it quite clear that this was a priority. That is why it was attached to a bill that was before the house, so it could pass as swiftly as it could through the processes of both houses. The upper house, the house of review, has tried to frustrate this. I think it is pretty rich that, in the way our state constitution is structured, the policy of the government comes through from this lower house into the upper house. There are obviously provisions for the upper house to lead what they would like to see in different bills – there are those provisions. However, when it comes to matters as serious as this and when it comes to things that we need leadership on for the whole state, to have this messing around at the edges in the upper house, when the house of the people and the government has made it clear that this is a priority and it needs to be passed, is pretty abhorrent.

I think of the gentlemen that I meet out in Wollahra Rise and what I am going to say to them. What I will say to them is that for the last 18 months to two years, and even longer in terms of Labor governments, we have stood up for their right to live free from hate, to pray the way they want, to love who they want and to make sure that they can live a happy, healthy life in our growing suburbs and across our entire state. The fact that we are still here is just not good enough. When we thought about the original bill, we put that through and we used negotiations to make sure that these provisions were in place. But it has become abundantly clear over these last 12 to 18 months that those provisions were unworkable. We have always said on this side that we will give Victoria Police the powers and resources they need to keep us safe, and that also includes making sure that we do not include unnecessary steps that are not going to lead to keeping our community safe.

We do want to see people charged for this sort of vilification in our community, because it is happening in our community. We want to make sure that we can continue to keep people safe and also set the standard – set the standard here in Parliament and say that this is not good enough. It is not good enough to frustrate it in the upper house – originally set up for rich squatters – when the people's house has said that this is something we need to do and we need to do it urgently and that is why it was attached to the bill that we attached it to. It is not good enough. This is the house that represents the people and directs what government is in power. The government that is in power has set up this provision, and we want it passed. I think that is particularly important for the people in my community who have voted for a Labor government, so we can show them that we will continue to be on their side when it comes to protecting them from this kind of behaviour.

I think, too, about the standard that this sets. As we debate this, particularly in the upper house, some of the members of the Liberal–National coalition are more worried about lakes than they are about protecting the community. A few of my colleagues and I observed that debate, and it was pretty disappointing. I know there are a lot of decent people in that party, but unfortunately there is a lot of rhetoric that sometimes gets let through for political purposes on their side. Although it is not necessarily to the degree that we see in this legislation, again it is building this culture that we need to stamp out, and we need to lead with this legislation to crack down on it. This is particularly important because when I go out to my communities and I see and hear these stories, I want to be able to say that there are provisions in place to be able to protect them from that and Victoria Police can use these powers.

I will give another little anecdote. It was a Remembrance Day ceremony at the Werribee cenotaph last year, and as we were standing there someone in a car driving past proceeded to do a Nazi salute, not realising that, I am pretty sure, we beat the Nazis in one of the two wars that are referred to at the cenotaph. We reported it to police and police were able to follow it up. However, if they were to go further, they would need to get permission from the DPP to continue in that follow-up. We need these laws. We need to make it as clear as possible that behaviour like that, and serious vilification and hate speech, can be investigated and prosecuted by Victoria Police.

We need to do this because it is about protecting our community. We need to make sure that minor parties are not frustrating what is something that we have brought to this place and brought to the community on a number of occasions now. The community stands with us on these provisions. That is why we are introducing them as a standalone bill – to make sure that they get through and we can implement them as quickly as possible to make sure that Victoria Police can use these powers and we can see those prosecutions happening. It is particularly important. As I have said, our communities need it. We are out there every day reminding the community who is on their side. It is a Labor government that is protecting them from this kind of vilification and hate speech. We will continue in this place to fight to ensure these provisions are passed and not frustrated by minor parties.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (16:50): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026. Let us be clear about what is happening here. We have this bill in front of us today being rushed through because the Allan Labor government is running scared. Labor has cut and pasted a very, very small part of a broader justice bill that it brought to us two sitting weeks ago and has brought it forward on its own. That original bill was on the verge of being passed through both houses last week – it was a government bill – until the government realised that it did not have the numbers to block the Greens amendment, an amendment that would have given IBAC the powers it needs to investigate the kind of corruption this government is so intent on covering up. The government's response to the Greens amendment was to kill the bill – the whole thing, their bill.

They have created this new bill for one reason only: to avoid scrutiny and accountability – to avoid this Parliament getting to a vote on strengthening our anti-corruption watchdog. Labor is pulling every trick in the book to try to stop IBAC from getting the powers that it needs to do its job. Our anti-corruption watchdog should be able to follow public money wherever it goes, but it cannot. Once public money goes to a private contractor, which it usually does these days, IBAC's jurisdiction ends. Our integrity agencies should be able to investigate corruption of all sorts, but right now they can only investigate corruption if it also meets a very high threshold of being an indictable crime. They should be able to hold public hearings so that governments and ministers cannot hide. But right now, they cannot hold public hearings. The fact that Labor is so desperate to keep it that way, to block these modest and sensible and overdue reforms that pass every pub test imaginable, is seriously concerning. They will do that even when the public and the Parliament clearly want more accountability. When billions of dollars blow out on major infrastructure projects, when money goes missing in plain sight and when there has been scandal after scandal around integrity, the public is entitled to ask, 'What is the Allan Labor government so desperate to hide?' It is shameful.

But Labor cannot avoid accountability forever. While Labor is hiding from IBAC, they are also doing something deeply dangerous and profoundly cynical with this bill. They are teaming up with the Liberals to repeal a key safeguard that the Greens secured less than six months ago in Victoria's new anti-vilification laws. That safeguard is the requirement for the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the DPP, before police can prosecute the most serious vilification offences. Labor wants to strip that away. That safeguard matters. Without DPP consent, police can arrest, charge and prosecute someone without any independent oversight. Legal and human rights experts told this Parliament, they told the community, that unchecked, these powers can be weaponised. They can be used against the very communities that they are supposed to protect. They can be used to silence political communication and used against peaceful protesters and community protectors. They can be used, and will be used, as a tool of intimidation.

When this place passed anti-vilification laws last year, the Greens secured the DPP oversight as a safeguard with the advice and the guidance of trusted organisations – community legal centres, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the Human Rights Law Centre – because we know and they know how these laws play out in the real world. We know that not everyone experiences policing as neutral. Over-policing, racial profiling and discriminatory enforcement are not abstract concepts. They are lived realities for First Nations people, for people of colour and for communities already targeted

by hate and state power, especially in a state where there is no independent police ombudsman and where police investigate police when there are allegations of misconduct and corruption.

The DPP consent is a basic integrity check. It means that before a prosecution goes to court an independent expert authority will review the case, review the evidence, confirm that it is in the public interest to pursue that charge and assess the human rights implications, including for freedom of assembly and freedom of political communication. It ensures that serious offences are used for serious cases with consistency and oversight, not as an instrument of vexatious policing, of political strongarming or as a shortcut response to complex community tensions. Labor will point out that the safeguard is retained for people under 18, and of course it must be, but that does nothing to shield the many adults who would still be exposed to expanded and highly discretionary police powers with no independent gatekeeper. When Parliament criminalises speech, safeguards are not a technicality; they are the difference between targeted protection and political oppression.

What makes this even worse is the way that Labor is doing it. This visionless flip-flopping legislation that was negotiated with the Greens to make it safer is now being unravelled through negotiation with the Liberals. It is sneaky, it breaks trust and it shows that this government cannot negotiate and govern in good faith. It sends an appalling message to the communities these laws were meant to protect that safeguards can be traded away the moment they become inconvenient. This bill is a kneejerk change that creates new risks and solves none of the real problems in our justice system, and it is being used as a distraction, a fig leaf, while Labor tries to dodge a vote on giving IBAC the basic powers it needs to investigate corruption correctly. The Greens cannot support this bill, and we oppose it. We will not support weakening independent oversight of police, and we will not be party to Labor's desperate attempt to avoid accountability.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (16:57): I rise to support the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026. There you have it: the Greens, who claim to be on the side of peace, prosperity and tranquillity, are opposing a bill on anti-vilification. They are opposing a bill that is about cracking down on hate crime, crimes that incite violence and hatred towards minority, ethnic, multicultural and multifaith communities. The party that gets on its high horse, that is always climbing that mountain of hypocrisy – that is what you guys are doing over in the Greens – wants to talk about transparency and integrity. This is the least transparent party, with the least integrity, out of any political party in this country. The Greens political party have secret national conferences and secret state conferences, unlike the Labor Party and unlike the Liberals, to their credit, where any member of the public can register to be an observer to listen to the robust debate within internal political parties. Whether you agree or disagree, a member of the public can register as an observer and can come and watch, join in and end up participating in debate. But no, not in the Greens – it is a secret. You cannot go and watch and hold the Greens to any form of account within their party. They are the biggest hypocrites when it comes to integrity and transparency, because they have none. In fact if they want to talk about integrity and transparency, we had a by-election in this 60th Victorian Parliament because of the misconduct of the Greens member for Prahran. Let us make no mistake about that. We had a by-election because of the misconduct of the former member for Prahran, who was a Greens member.

They have absolutely no credibility in this place to come in here and to say to this Parliament and to this Victorian Labor Party that we should not be progressing tougher action on vilification, particularly in light of the Bondi antisemitic massacre. That is what it was: an antisemitic massacre where innocent civilians of Jewish descent were targeted because of their faith and because of their culture. This is modern-day Australia in 2026. No person, whether of Jewish faith, Islamic faith or any other faith, should be targeted and murdered on the grounds of what they celebrate and commemorate. That is exactly what this bill will seek to crack down on and target, and the Greens should hang their heads in absolute shame for their hypocrisy. Time and time again they vote against action on racism and vilification. They want to shut down debate. As the member for –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage)**: The time set down for consideration of an item on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (77):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Anthony Cianflone, Annabelle Cleeland, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Chris Crewther, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Emma Kealy, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Tim McCurdy, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keefe, Danny Pearson, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Richard Riordan, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bridget Vallence, Emma Vulin, Peter Walsh, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

*Noes (3):* Gabrielle de Vietri, Tim Read, Ellen Sandell

**Motion agreed to.****Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.****Read third time.**

**The SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

**National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (17:08): Strap yourselves in again; there is another energy discussion. It is a good one. You will be very entertained, and you will get a great lesson on gas policy for the ages. Gas policy, not the gas emitted from some of you when I am speaking. Come on, be fair, be reasonable. I do enjoy making some energy contributions. I have got a vast interest in energy policy and the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025. I know the Shadow Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction David Davis has some amendments prepared. I will refer to them, but I will not move them. I will just tell the house about them in advance, clerks, but I will leave them for the shadow minister to move in the Legislative Council. I will refer to them and make some points, because there is a bit to go to. I will try and be succinct, or as succinct as you can be on gas policy – about 20 minutes. It will be riveting, and I am sure you will be most entertained.

**A member** interjected.

**Matthew GUY:** That is okay. You can look at your iPhone. You can do whatever you like, I am sure. I am sure you will be most entertained – all of you, everyone. Victoria has a great history of natural gas, both exploration and use, and post-war natural gas has driven our economy. It is no fluke what happened to our economy after World War II, particularly through the Latrobe Valley, where coal exploration obviously ramped up inexorably for use in our power stations. What was then Yallourn A closed, and Yallourn B, C and D came online through the 1970s, then Yallourn W as well, and Hazelwood in the 1960s, and the others started to close.

But it is not about coal; this is about gas, and of course Gippsland. When my mum's family came to Australia they became Gippslanders, and my dad was a radio announcer at 3UL, which is now 3GG. They met down there, so we have got a family association with Gippsland. I enjoy going to Gippsland. I love Gippsland. It is primarily the member for Morwell's electorate. That is where we are from; it is a great spot.

Further out in the member for Gippsland South's electorate you get some of the onshore facilities which support our Bass Strait gas fields, which have been such rich contributors to Victoria's economic success since World War II. It has to be remembered that our economic success since World War II was built off three things. It was built off the accessibility to new labour, which many of us in this state through European migration were part of. But not just Europe – people from many parts of the world came to work either in factories or in the industry which built the future in particularly Melbourne's northern but also western suburbs and which was powered then off cheap electricity from the Latrobe Valley coalfields, and of course there were other industries which could support their development through natural gas. Natural gas has itself in many ways been the story of modern Victoria – through ingenuity, through risk, through prosperity and, yes, through debate, and increasingly through modern debate, which I will come to at the end of my presentation.

Melbourne has a longer history with gas than just those points. In fact Melbourne manufactured what was then called town gas way back in the 19th century –

**A member:** It was a hybrid of oil.

**Matthew GUY:** It certainly was. Town gas was produced from coal, and it supplied Melbourne with gas –

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**Matthew GUY:** Colac was the last to have it, as the member for Polwarth laments. It was produced from coal supplied to Melbourne for lighting and heating. Melbourne was the first major city in the British Empire, but certainly obviously in Australia, that started to use gas on a larger scale. It was produced locally by municipal gasworks such as the Melbourne gas company and it is why you look around the city, in the northern suburbs in particular, and you come across places which are the gasworks. They are not named for gas storages as such but production in the past, and that is what they were there for. Many jobs and many families came about and developed and were employed through those gasworks which powered the earlier parts of the development of Melbourne, which at that time became Marvellous Melbourne for its development through industrialisation from the gold rush money, which then became civic buildings, such as where we are today et cetera. And then Melbourne of course became the second city in what was then the Empire – London, Melbourne, and for a third part, Montreal.

In the 19th century it was a big deal, and it was something that our city was certainly well used to, and it was certainly something that had powered our city up until the pre-World War II era, in the inner parts of it. Back in those periods – if I can segue into my other portfolio area of transport – gas was used in many ways through our cable trams, through the lighting. Melbourne had one of the largest cable tram networks in the world – it is easy to forget that. I mean, you look at San Francisco and people love the cable cars up there, but we had one of the largest cable tram networks in the world, and some of the cable car networks in Melbourne, or some of the facilities on them, were gas powered in the same way that town gas was powered. In fact if you walk up near the exhibition gardens – and I cannot think of it, it will come to me – off Nicholson Street, you will see one of the old power stations, which was actually used to power the Melbourne cable car network, which still exists today. I am not sure if the chimneys are in all of them, but they had boilers and they powered it, and they were part of the earlier part of Melbourne's development.

Okay, enough of that. In the 1960s we started to look further afield, and the Menzies government had encouraged – and the Bolte government did too – the exploration of gas with Esso and BHP through

Bass Strait. There is no doubt that that, through the Longford gas plant that was then established, had a profound effect on what was then the beginning of large-scale natural gas supply to Victoria. Once the first major find, the Barracouta gas field, was found in 1965, it did confirm that Victoria did possess vast offshore reserves, and soon after in the Marlin field, oil was also discovered, I note.

Certainly the Barracouta gas field in 1965 was world-class at the time and was exceptional in its size and indeed in its vastness. It was considered that there were many, many decades worth of supply that could be used for domestic supply. Ultimately, what happened from then on, from 1969, was that we as a city, as a community, particularly in metropolitan Melbourne, started laying a very large natural gas network into the metropolitan area through what were then growth areas, which were obviously different to some of the more established areas of Melbourne, because it was obviously more difficult to retrofit. You started to see a lot of gas cookers and gas supplies coming into the great boom of 1960s and 70s homes in Melbourne, and it became a natural part of life, from the ads I recall from the 1980s. And it was, particularly here in Melbourne. Then of course in the 1980s, at the end of the Hamer and Thomson governments, but also through the Cain Labor government, that natural gas supply was expanded into some of the bigger regional centres in Victoria. Within a few years, it is fair to say, within a decade or so, Victoria had completely reinvented its energy system.

We went from a system where people had, as one of my grandmothers did right up until almost her death, a wood-fired cooker where she would chop wood every morning and put it in.

**A member** interjected.

**Matthew GUY:** Well, it is the European spirit. She had that, and she would not give it up. We reinvented ourselves from effectively a city and a state of those to natural gas, particularly in the growth areas. Of course natural gas was much, much cleaner. In those days – and I use my grandmother as an example – they would use briquettes, and the cleanliness of briquettes compared to natural gas I will refer to later on. But it was much cleaner, it was much more efficient and, more than anything else, it was much cheaper. As I said, it led to the great economic development of Victoria through the 1950s onto the 70s.

The state undertook one of the most ambitious energy transitions in history. We converted homes and we converted businesses and industries from either wood or coal, or town gas as it was, to natural gas. Appliances were modified, they were replaced, entire networks were upgraded and, as I said, we reinvented our energy system for the better, for the cheaper, for the more accessible, and indeed for what would be great economic prosperity. It is very different to the current government's attitude of phasing all that out, which is going to be for the more expensive, for the more complex, and is going to hinder development economically in Victoria. The natural gas expansions in Victoria, which were in my view – and I have said this many, many times at a number of elections now – a centrepiece of our economic development in the 1970s and 80s, were, frankly, to use a term of the day, misspoken about four years ago by the current government who said, 'No, no, no. The chief scientist said there are no new gas fields', when in fact that is not what they had said. There are in fact gas fields which we should be looking at, and there are gas opportunities for this state that we should be engaging in, that we should be utilising and that we should be again looking at for domestic supply rather than seeking to phase out natural gas with no real replacement in terms of energy supply replacement, or indeed without any studies which say what the then peaking situations might be on the Victorian energy system if you phase out all gas, particularly from homes or indeed your power generation facilities.

While we are at that point, let me just refer to the seven active facilities in Victoria at the moment that are natural gas, and most of them are in fact peaking facilities: Bairnsdale, which has two turbines and is a 92-megawatt facility; Jeeralang, which is a 432-megawatt facility with seven turbines; Laverton North, a 320-megawatt facility with two turbines; Longford, the one which had the accident in 1999, for those who can remember taking cold showers, that is of course coming off Bass Strait for the gas fields, about 32 megawatts and six turbines; and Mortlake, which is a peaking facility, quite large,

550 megawatts. Mortlake, while it is not in her electorate, is close enough for the member for South-West Coast to drive past it a lot and has two turbines and is quite substantial in size, as I said, at 550 megawatts. It is quite substantial. I will come to why they are important. Somerton has 160 megawatts at four turbines; Valley Power has 12 turbines, 300 megawatts. Then there is the thermal gas facility at Newport, similar to Mortlake, with 500 megawatts.

The importance of a natural gas peaking facility cannot be underestimated. You cannot replace this with wind, with solar or even with coal. You cannot fire up a coal turbine as quickly – anywhere near it – as you can a gas peaking plant, which is why we use gas for peaking power. So the concept of, as the government is saying, domestically phasing it out by 2027 and then saying ‘We still want to get out of natural gas even for peaking power into the future’ is very short-sighted and in my view is very poor policy. It is poor policy because how on earth do you replace it? You must have a sensible and a realistic replacement. We have got gas water systems, gas stoves, ducted gas heaters, gas cooktops, gas air conditioners, gas pool heating and gas barbecues. I mean, what are we going to replace all of these things with in a very short period of time in an economically sustainable way if you phase all of that out? There really is not a sensible replacement. So the concept of acceding to minor parties on the left, whether it is the Greens or the socialist party and others who really want to demonise the concept of using gas with a replacement of nothing – and it is a replacement of nothing – is in my view exceptionally silly, considering we do have gas reserves and how important gas has been for our economic development.

Gas uses 486 CO<sub>2</sub> energy particles per kilowatt hour, if I get that right, versus 1001 for brown coal, so it is roughly half, or less than half, the CO<sub>2</sub> emission of a brown coal plant. It has half the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. If you looked at retrofitting any of our major power stations to a gas unit – it might be what you consider a one step back for two steps forward or two steps back for one step forward, or whatever you want to look at in terms of managing our brown coal facilities – that then could transition you into the future but in a sensible way without compromising industry and without compromising household price, by putting downward pressure on household prices if you have actually got more supply.

As the coalition has said for a number of elections, if we have got the extra supply, looking at what Western Australia does – instituted, I might add, by Labor governments – which is by putting in domestic reserves and a cap on a reserve price, that then puts downward prices on people’s bills at home and actually allows people to use gas in the confidence and knowledge that they are not going to have this exponential price growth because it is linked to overseas price and export controls. The Western Australian government do not allow that to happen. They do not allow that under either a Labor government or a coalition government. If we had greater supply, and we do have great supply for potential domestic use in Victoria, with the concept of putting in domestic reserves in Victoria on that supply for household use, for instance, or industry use – quarantine one for the other, maybe at a different price – then the concept of using gas in a more efficient and cheaper way for households becomes real.

That is why on our side of the chamber we shudder at the concept of just saying, ‘We’re going to shut this off overnight.’ It was meant to be 2024 or something. It went to 2026, and now it is going to be 2027 or something a bit longer on, which is mad. I mean, it is mad. You do not replace something with nothing. You do not say, ‘I’ve got a Tarago which fits five or six of my family, but I’m going to move into a Mini Minor because it’s only got three seats.’ Well, none of this makes any sense, but that is what we are dealing with. That is the silliness of the government’s current attitudes toward gas, which have been, as I said, heavily influenced by left-wing parties.

I did say the shadow minister David Davis wanted to move some amendments, and he does. He does have some issues with the bill. He is looking at amendments. I will not move them. I will tell the clerks. I will let him do so. But the bill does require the minister to undertake a specified process of engagement and consultation before making orders. It could include a requirement to consult and engage with the Australian Energy Market Operator. This would add a requirement to consult with consumers impacted by industry segments. We are also proposing to require the publication of more

detailed reasons for these orders, and we are looking at some amendments which will allow that to happen, which will allow shadow minister Davis to move that in the Legislative Council.

They are sensible amendments, and they are simply saying that if we are going to require the industry to upgrade these facilities at its own cost and tap into pipelines which are being put in place and if we are going to require industry to spend its private capital, then we had better have proper reasons for it and they should be well publicised. I do not think that is unreasonable. I do not think anyone spending tens and tens of millions of dollars would think that is unreasonable. I think most people would say, 'Well, that is fair and reasonable.' If the government want you to do it, they should at least have the rationale to go out and say, 'Well, this is what we want you to spend the money for.'

I will put this on the record about the concept of the phasing out of natural gas and the people who are most aggrieved by this. I have heard in previous debates in this chamber today many members, particularly government members, talk about multicultural communities. My electorate in Bulleen is heavily multicultural, particularly with an East Asian background. I asked my colleague who is of a Vietnamese background, born in Vietnam, Trung Luu, who says they cannot fathom the concept of cooking East Asian food without natural gas. It is how you heat the wok to the temperature you want. I asked a number of my neighbours, one who runs a restaurant, and they all confirmed exactly the same thing. The concept of running an electrified wok the way they cook will not work. They do not think it is going to work, and they find it completely ridiculous.

I might add that some of my mates in the Indian community tell me exactly the same thing. If you look at some of the large pots when you go to Indian temples, you will see at the back of a gurdwara, a Sikh temple, or a mandir, a Hindu temple, the very large pots in which dhal and other dishes are being cooked. You will see they are large natural gas fired facilities. The government is planning to phase all that out. I have no concept of whether or not anyone from the bureaucracy, the ministerial offices or even the ministers themselves have been into a gurdwara, a Sikh temple. I will take one as an example. If you go to Craigieburn gurdwara, the kitchen is very large. I have paid for a langar up there a couple of times. It is a wonderful place, and they do a great job, a fabulous job, for the community. I do not know how on earth you would replace their kitchen with electricity. I mean, it just does not work, number one, culturally, but secondly, to provide the radiant heat that they need on those woks. It is not going to work. This is what the government say they want to do, and we find it quite strange.

I sometimes wonder what goes through people's minds – like, who would eat blood sausage, who would vote for the Greens or what politicians would want to ban natural gas. It is cheap, it is reliable and we have lots of it, and Labor wants to replace it. It is like saying we want to replace it with sunshine. We do not have much sunshine for solar, but we have a lot of natural gas. I wonder if the government were consulting with the Legalise Cannabis Party when they decided they wanted to replace natural gas, which we have a lot of, with solar when we do not have much sunshine, and we are renowned for that. I will let the government explain.

I come from a family of tradies – I am the only one on my dad's side who has been to uni – and again, they cannot understand the concept of saying, 'Well, we have an issue here, but the way we are going to deal with it is to criminalise the work of tradies.' Tradesmen who go to actually replace a gas cooker face fines and the loss of their licence. It is not a policy; it deliberately targets people who are making a living. You can put in place regulations, you can say it is not advisable or you can say we are not doing this anymore, but why would you criminalise the work of tradesmen, the blue-collar workers that you claim to be your party's original base? It makes no sense. Again, this is not for me to explain, because I do not agree with doing that.

Our side have been fairly succinct and to the point in saying that we believe that natural gas has a future in this state. I would think that after 21 minutes or 21½ minutes I have said to the chamber that we have in this state a long history of the development and use of natural gas. It has been immensely good for our state's economy. It has been one of the three key components of the post-war growth of the state of Victoria. It is why the state of Victoria developed so quickly, as opposed to even New

South Wales, with an industrial base, because we had the access to new labour, primarily from Europe post war, we had the access to cheap electricity, primarily out of the Latrobe Valley, and we had the access for factories to avail themselves of natural gas in cheap and abundant supplies, which powered our economy forward.

The only message of confidence, building on from those 50, 60, 70 years since from the current state government, is to say, 'All of those economic advantages' – well, two of those key economic advantages – 'we are seeking to shut down with no clear replacement. We are seeking to shut all that down and are not going to tell you what on earth we're going to do to replace it or what comes next.' What kind of government would then have no plan at the end of cheap power and at the end of cheap and reliable and abundant gas? To make us a net importer of electricity on certain occasions, which we never were for 70 or 80 years, and to make us, potentially, an importer of gas in a number of years because we have banned any exploration, which has never been the case since the 1960s – and that is called progressive politics. Well, it might be progressive, but it is going to progressively ruin our economy, and that is going to be the legacy of this government, sadly. I conclude my remarks and again thank the chamber for its indulgence. This bill, I might add, we are not opposing, and we will make some amendments in the upper house.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (17:31): I am pleased to be able to get up and follow on from that contribution. Certainly the first 10 minutes of the member for Bulleen's contribution were actually quite an informative and measured history lesson about energy in this state. I think for the majority of us over this side of the house it was quite enjoyable. There were a few points made towards the back end of the contribution which were a little bit questionable, but I will go to those in terms of a policy sense as we move on through the next 9 minutes. I just wanted to make the observation of what the previous member spoke about in terms of transition. I think some of that history that the member spoke about is really important to our state – to a state that is of course experiencing growing population and a change in energy usage and energy needs.

As I spoke about last sitting week, the notion that as we move on and deal with the elements of climate change and as more severe weather events do occur, making sure we have a more resilient, robust and stronger network is something that is very important. It goes to what I think has been a comprehensive – I will use the word 'robust' again – framework that has been really well shaped, led and driven by the Minister for Energy and Resources. Certainly through her work for a considerable period now, through both budget initiatives and all of the day-to-day work that has been done, we have seen in this state a significant transformation in energy and a significant transformation in the way that energy is supplied to local communities, to commercial operations and to industry. That is the result not of chance but of deliberate policy settings that have set us up for the future. Compare and contrast that to what we had for a decade from the federal coalition, where 24 of 28 coal-fired power stations over a decade closed, and there was a lack of drive, a lack of initiative and a lack of awareness of the impacts of climate change from the federal government. That has now changed, but we have got an opportunity both through the work that has been done at the state level and through the national partnership in national cabinet to be able to provide that certainty and that mix and that change in energy needs.

I spoke about population growth, more severe weather events and making a more robust, more resilient system. What we have remained focused on is ensuring that those developments continue to operate. This bill goes to providing for that certainty of supply and giving the minister those beefed-up powers to be able to pull the lever when needed for certainty. I certainly did not disagree with the member for Bulleen on a number of his comments around certainty and surety of the market, and that is exactly why this government has focused for a very long time on providing that certainty. Increasing supply and the driving down of prices are things that are very, very important. Many members of this chamber, on a number of opportunities when it comes to energy legislation, have spoken about the impact of solar, wind and battery. Having had the opportunity, as I know a number of members have, to meet with local communities about the importance of solar to their household, and battery storage,

goes to that importance of security and certainty. There is a strong and consistent framework that has been enabled to be delivered by the minister and the government.

The most important aspect of the powers that are in the bill before us this evening is the preference for the measures to be able to be used as a last resort for those beefed-up powers, which I mentioned earlier, to introduce the opportunity to shore up supply and ensure that our Victorian declared transmission system has the transportation flexibility and capacity to meet demand. But before making an order, the minister will have to consult with the Premier, the Treasurer, AEMO and the DTS owner. In this way the orders are based on carefully considered advice to ensure that changes are made only when they are needed and that projects will be considered on efficiency, cost and value for Victorians. Effectively these changes go to those additional powers and make for certainty and surety as we move forward. From a management-of-the-grid perspective, having the opportunity to have additional supply and more control, more options, is something that the government supports, and it is for those reasons that I support this bill.

Making the opportunity for our state, and all states and territories across Australia, to be able to deal with challenges around supply, getting energy to and from places when and where you need it in peak demand and making sure that we are building a robust, resilient network that enables that energy to be used through those really severe weather events that I spoke about earlier – bushfires, floods, high wind events – makes for safer and better communities. You have only got to speak to some of the members in this house that deal with some of those severe weather events – certainly the member for Monbulk, who sits just behind me, speaks often about the impacts to her community when such instances occur – and the impacts on communities are of course devastating. It does not matter where you are, if you have a severe weather event or you have your energy needs taken away, the impacts are detrimental to what occurs for you and your local community. What this bill before us, the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025, looks to do is to provide for that certainty and that increased resilience.

I do think it is really important when it comes to these matters, though, to be able to deal with the practicality and the reality of the network, making the observation that the national grid is something that is indeed really, really important. I think some of the reflections – and I do not think these reflections were coming from the previous speaker, but they might come from other sides within the chamber – were making for a world where these practicalities are not considered, where we can just turn a switch on and turn a switch off and suddenly we have all the power and all the energy and no emissions, which is not the reality of the system that is before us. If you speak to environmental engineers, if you speak to those that work in science and those that work in energy, considering the government is delivering in bringing back the SEC and the delivery of the big battery, which is not too far from my electorate – about 20 minutes probably from my place – we are making those provisions and will deal with the practical realities of what is before us. We reserve the right to continue to work with those within the community that support the work that is being done.

I do want to take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge all of those people who work within our energy sector. Making a safer, more robust, more resilient system should of course be the aim of the government. What we remain committed to is delivering all of those targets that we set out in VRET and all of those targets that have been canvassed for the energy upgrades program and working with local communities as they do their very best to support their energy needs. Cost is something that we are acutely aware of, and in cost-of-living considerations we need to make sure we get that balance right. This bill and the provisions within this bill go to providing for that certainty and that increased resilience of the network. What is really important is that we continue to drive forward and continue to innovate and invest, both through the budget and through the programs and initiatives that have been really well delivered by the department and driven by the minister and the Premier. These are important considerations. Just in the last 5 seconds I have, I very happily would like to commend the bill to the house.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (17:41): I am very happy to rise and speak about gas in Victoria through the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025. I actually did not hear what the member for Sunbury was referring to, but when he said something was 20 minutes from where he lives it piqued my interest because 20 minutes from where I live is where all our gas comes from in Victoria, effectively, although not as much these days. Historically the Bass Strait oil and gas industry has been massive for my part of the world, particularly for Sale, with 95 per cent of Victoria's gas coming from the Longford gas plant, obviously through Bass Strait. That has declined, and it has started to decline more seriously. Unfortunately, in the last couple of years the oil has stopped. About 2½ years ago, I think it was, the last oil was taken out of Bass Strait and sent to Long Island Point. We still have a significant amount of gas.

I always find gas an interesting topic of conversation in terms of supply reserves and what is left in Bass Strait, because it is very clear that it is winding down. The proponents – historically we just referred to Esso in my neck of the woods, but that consortium has now changed hands to Woodside. Woodside is taking on the actual production of the Bass Strait gas fields. But when I say Esso, and now meaning Woodside as well, it is always hard to know exactly what they know about what gas is left there. I am always bemused by the workers. Of course there are many that I interact with in the Sale area, whether it is through footy clubs or other groups and organisations. Many people will tell you there is heaps of gas in Bass Strait still, and I think that is actually true. The problem of course is that it is deeper, dirtier and more expensive to get out and in many cases completely uneconomic.

That has been the success story of the Bass Strait oil and gas industry. The gas in Bass Strait that has been processed for over 50 years now through the Longford plant is what they call 'sweet gas'. It is one of the best gas reserves in the world because it has been so clean – I will not say pure methane but certainly very high levels of methane. The latter fields that have more recently been developed, like the Kipper Tuna Turrum fields, had a lot more impurities in them and made it more expensive. There is quite a bit of mercury that needs to be taken out of the Kipper Tuna Turrum gas, CO<sub>2</sub> and other bits and pieces that make it more expensive. But for literally 45 or 50 years there has been this pure natural gas methane coming through that was relatively shallow, relatively easy to get at, and it has been an absolute driving force for the economy of Victoria, not just in terms of household use, which has become extensive – Victoria is by far and away the biggest percentage user in terms of the percentage of the population using natural gas in the country – but also for industry and in the last couple of decades more and more for electricity generation.

Certainly all of that is one of the reasons I am still a very big supporter of gas. I think the notion that we get out of gas any time soon simply for environmental purposes is ridiculous. We will need this as a transition fuel for a number of decades to come, because we simply cannot rely on wind and solar. Until we get better technology in terms of electricity production that is going to be affordable and reliable, we are going to need to rely on gas. I might add that I think we will need to continue with coal-fired power stations for a period longer. I know the Labor government do not like to talk about that, but they are also in agreement with that because they have done deals with EnergyAustralia at Yallourn and with Loy Yang A in terms of keeping those plants open to ensure that we keep the lights on. I think that is going to be important.

Gas is actually an important part of our economy, and we on this side certainly support it continuing to be. We have the member for South-West Coast in the chamber at the moment. Whilst the Gippsland Bass Strait fields are reducing, in the Otways and the south-west there are great opportunities and more gas is being produced there, and I think we will need more. The evidence from Geoscience Australia indicates there is probably a good 25-year supply still in Victoria, offshore and onshore through conventional means. I emphasise through conventional means. We will need that because we need it for industry, we need it for power generation and more particularly we need it for our households and our industrial sector. I certainly support the gas industry and will continue to do so. It is something that is going to take a while to draw down in Gippsland.

As I said, the oil in Bass Strait has stopped. It has effectively dried up, and the companies are now putting very heavily into the decommissioning phase. I know the other place has got an inquiry into the decommissioning process, a process which I might say politically there has been some frankly deceitful and very bad discussion about. We saw a press release a year or two ago from Friends of the Earth saying that Esso wanted to dump radioactive material on pristine beaches of a Ramsar-listed wetland. That was literally what was in their media release. If you did not know anything, you might be alarmed about that. The radioactive material is, as I understand, about as radioactive as a banana. Yes, there is radioactivity in some of that material from offshore. To suggest that it is being dumped on a Ramsar-listed beach in this pristine wetland – it is being taken to Barry Beach, which has been an industrial port for 50 years. Yet we have those green organisations out there saying this rubbish about how it is being dumped on a beach, and scaring people, frankly.

Anyone who understands the industry knows that Barry Beach is where the oil rigs started; that is where they went from and that is where they were assembled. It is simply being taken back there over the next couple of years, and that will be a very big job. It will bring a lot of jobs to the Barry Beach area again in South Gippsland, in my neck of the woods. Yes, there will be some environmental concerns, and Esso and Woodside will absolutely have to deal with those and make sure that there is no contamination and no run-off of any of the hydrocarbons that may well be coming in with these. I was talking to one of the managers at Esso the other day, who showed me pictures of the ship that is coming in. I believe it is the largest ship in the world. It will come in and they will literally cut off the platforms undersea, lift them up onto this ship – it has two large arms that come out – and then transport them into Barry Beach. It is just an unbelievable undertaking. If you consider the size of some of these platforms, they are massive. It is thousands of tonnes lift that this ship can do. It is a big undertaking and it is going to cost a lot of money. That is up to the companies to do. But for some of these NGOs to suggest that there are massive environmental issues with it is just wrong, and they need to be held to account for it. There will be environmental matters that need to be managed. I am sure that both state and federal agencies will be ensuring that they are.

This legislation is more about pipelines, and certainly from our perspective we believe there needs to be more gas. As I said, the Nationals and Liberals are not on an ideological crusade, as the current minister in this place has been for some time. We know that Victorians want the flexibility to choose whether they use natural gas or electricity or other means of production, and we certainly support gas. As I said, it is very clear to me that we will need gas for some time, for some decades, as a transition fuel and also as a feedstock. That is often forgotten by those who campaign against fossil fuels, that it is actually important as a feedstock for things like fertiliser, for chemicals and for various other products that we rely on every day in our society.

We have got some suggestions for amendments to this legislation but are certainly not opposing it. I will stand here and continue to be a supporter of our gas industry here in Victoria, particularly for the jobs and economic development that it provides to my electorate.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (17:51): I also rise to speak in support of this amendment to the National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008, which basically is about empowering the Minister for Energy and Resources with directive powers in urgent situations when gas is required or the shoring up and the continuity and guarantee of gas is required. This legislation has been prompted by privatisation, because we cannot really rely on or expect or enforce or think that private companies will actually act in the national interest rather than the profit motive. It has been widely established that there are expected to be gas shortfalls from, I think it is, 2029 along the eastern seaboard. So this legislation really is about acting proactively and making sure that we can take action in the event that there may be gas shortfalls. This of course is not only important for residents or Victorians in their homes that are still cooking with gas – I have still got a hot water service, an old one, that is gas, so of course we need gas for that – but also, and probably extremely importantly, we need to ensure that our economy and industry are protected. They of course are very heavily still relying on gas even though there has been quite a big shift with companies both small and large moving to renewable energies, which is

great to see. I think it is pretty well established and employers know and company operators know that we actually do need to move to renewable energy. This is important for the climate and important for future generations.

I just want to have a little bit of a talk about some of the businesses in Thomastown, which is known as an industrial area. In the past, and this sort of continues, there has predominantly been manufacturing industry. There has been metal fabrication, structural steel companies and the food industry. Of course all of these industries use a lot of gas, and it is really difficult for them at the moment because of the price of gas and the fact that so much is being exported overseas. It is really frustrating to see the cost of gas and the cost of business in these areas. But there are a number of them that for the purpose of climate change are doing the right thing as well as looking to save some money. There have been a lot of really innovative projects and ideas, often supported and funded at least in part by the state Allan Labor government in order to move to different ways to source energy.

I will give you a couple of examples. We have got the deep hole drilling service, which does a lot of work in the mining industry, for example. Their home is in Thomastown, and they are actually using energy through the biochar process. I will not go into the big technicalities of it. Not only are they producing biochar that they are then on-selling for, in some cases, the agricultural industry, but they are also using this process as a form of energy to then operate some of their manufacturing processes.

Similarly, there is another company – the name escapes me – actually doing work in heat pumps, not for hot water services but much larger industrial-scale heat pumps, again to sell to businesses that cannot just rely on solar panels but maybe need even greater energy. These heat pumps have really innovative designs. They are really taking off, and they are seen as another way in which we can transition to renewable energy. So it is not just about solar panels; there are a whole lot of other technologies that are being developed or tested and have been shown to work. In fact they are being used in a number of companies in the electorate of Thomastown.

But just getting back to this legislation that we are debating today, I will just go through a couple of things. The legislation is about what is called the Victorian declared transmission system, or DTS. This is a definition for the key infrastructure that is required to move gas around the state or the country. It is a whole lot of infrastructure that, of course, is in private hands. It can be diverted to different places and streamlined into others. The idea of this legislation is that the minister – and there are some checks and balances, so the minister cannot just make the decision all by themselves – if required, and if it looks like there is going to be a shortfall in gas and we want to protect our industry as well as households, can make a directive as to where that flow of gas will go. It means that it is not the private company sending it to the most profitable area; it is actually the minister being able to nominate or provide a directive in order to ensure that that gas supply goes where it is needed for the national interest. This is really important and will not be used lightly. As I said, there are a number of checks and balances in this program.

We will not be working on this alone. Victoria has been a key advocate amongst the states to ensure that the market operator does get greater powers to intervene when there are shortfalls. This is one thing that the state can do, but of course only within the state. Hopefully other states will also come along in order to ensure that businesses across the country and households are protected in the event there are gas shortages. We hope that we will not have to use this and that there will be an even greater move to renewable energy such as electricity. It would be great to see even more development around heat pumps and biochar as other alternatives to energy supplies. But this legislation really is important in terms of protecting all of us when it comes to the future in gas supply as we move to renewable energy.

This is happening not just through government decisions but actually the way the world is going and the way finance is moving. We cannot rely on coal-fired power stations. That is why we are transitioning into electricity. It is recognised that gas will be used as a transitional fuel for some time to come, but if we look around, Hazelwood has closed. We have got Yallourn closing in a few years

and even Loy Yang is slated to close. These are not things that governments can make decisions on. Since the privatisation of the electricity industry, these are the decisions of private businesses. And really they are not just private but international, overseas businesses that would not really have any interest in looking after what is best for Victoria or Australia. We really need to start making proactive and important choices about how we are going to deal with the transition, how we are going to make up the shortfall and how we are going to ensure that gas is used in the most effective way to protect us all, if necessary, into the future.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (18:00): I am pleased to rise on the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025. It was quite interesting listening to a number, only a couple at the moment, of contributions from the government members, but I have certainly got to wonder where their voices were when their minister was absolutely demonising gas and wanting to pretty well shut down the industry. We have a bill that is before us which is pretty well doing the opposite. We know that gas is an important part of our transition to renewables. The Liberals absolutely know and understand how important gas is and so do the Nationals, and now I see the government are beginning to wake up just a little bit.

First of all, I want to touch on the purposes of the bill that we have. It is interesting because it is about expanding the transmission system capacity and expediting things. From the minister being very keen to close down this important industry, now they are looking at having to make some infrastructure expansions and to put legislation around it because they know what we have is currently inadequate. With regard to that, the bill introduces a new power enabling the minister to make orders to direct the regulated transmission pipeline owners in the private sector to make augmentations to the deemed-to-satisfy framework. This is quite interesting in itself. It is a big change from the existing framework because these things are normally initiated by the pipeline owners through a regulatory process. I will talk a little bit more about this. This includes directing extensions or expansions to and of (1) the declared transmission system, (2) the connection of pipelines or pipeline equipment to the system and (3) the improvements or upgrades to the pipelines, pipe equipment and related facilities.

I want to mention how absolutely important gas is to Victoria. Ninety per cent of homes use gas, whether it is for heating, cooking, cooktops and ovens, the gas bottle in the barbie, the Bunnings sausages that people partake in or the democracy sausage. These all rely on gas. So many people have gas hot water. I live off grid, and I rely incredibly on gas cooktops and gas hot water. Industry relies very heavily on gas in manufacturing processes. I heard the member for Broadmeadows talking about all of the industry in Broadmeadows that relies on gas and how important that is. I wonder whether she stood up to the minister to say we need gas to remain viable at the moment, because I doubt very much that she did. I want to talk about how within the industry there are low-heat and high-heat industries. Low heat is in some of our food production, for example, such as pasteurisation. But with the high heat, there are the processes that we look at with smelting, plastics, the making of cement and the heating of kilns for bricks and ceramics.

It has been really, really sad that one of our major local glass manufacturers Oceania Glass collapsed virtually 12 months ago. On 27 February 2025 this architectural glass manufacturer based in Dandenong had to close its doors. I do not know that we heard anything from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, the member for Dandenong, at the time about the loss of some 260 jobs that were associated with the closure of Oceania Glass. This closure happened because of the competition from cheap imports from China – there was not enough being done, and that was undermining the local industry significantly – but also the rising manufacturing costs. This was specifically related to the price of gas, and the South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance, SEMMA, their CEO Honi Walker came out and talked about the price of gas putting some of these major businesses out of business. Oceania made specialist glass – coated glass, laminated glass and float glass. They had stuff that was even in Parliament House in Canberra, and there would have been many, many organisations that relied on Oceania.

One of the things that is important with the manufacture of glass is the high heat that is required and the continuity of that high heat. It needs to continue so the molten glass does not cool down. It has to

be kept molten. If it cools, it can crack and ruin the whole process. I was so disappointed to see that happen. They went from turning quite a healthy profit in the year ending March 2023 to having a substantial loss in the year ending March 2024, and that forced the closure. We understand that gas is such an important part of our manufacturing, and there we have seen an example of where it has caused a lot of problems to our industry. Those jobs were lost.

What I also want to talk about are the methane gas emissions from our waste management and organic waste in landfills. Whether they are closed or not, they continue to produce gas. They continue to produce methane in fact. If the government were smart, they could convert this gas. Some of this methane could be cleaned up – they do not need to clean the methane; they can just clean it up a little bit – and put straight into the pipelines, which we are now expanding through this bill, so that we could have additional gas supply. At the moment a lot of that gets flared off. I have been out and seen where that gets flared off. What that means is they burn the methane and it produces carbon dioxide. It means there are less emissions than with methane, but there are still emissions. I think this is something that government have really failed on and that they could do a lot more in this space. They could convert this methane or put it straight into the pipelines, because too much of it is let go into the atmosphere through our landfills. This is happening with landfills that are currently open and landfills that are closed, because they can continue producing gas for 30 to 40 years, so they are not solving an immediate problem environmentally there.

One of the things that I am concerned about with the bill are the ministerial orders. I mentioned earlier that one of the purposes is about the expansion, but there are ministerial orders that grant the relevant minister the capacity to force private enterprise into investing where the government says to. Now, there may be no business case. We have seen the government launch ahead without business cases in certain areas. There may be no certainty that costs may be recovered. We need these businesses to remain able to continue operating. It is no good if they start to lose money hand over fist and go belly up, because then the government will have to look at how they are going to do this. I think this is a big risk.

Section 58D refers to matters that the minister may have regard to in making an order. I am not sure that ‘may’ is strong enough, because I think that it really should be ‘must have regard to’. There are six or seven different areas outlined on page 7 of the bill that the government needs to be mindful of. I heard the member for Broadmeadows say there are checks and balances. I do know that the minister must consult with the Premier and the Treasurer. I wonder if they are the checks and balances or if that is just the government correcting their own homework. They do have to consult with the Australian Energy Market Operator and the declared transmission service providers, but I think they could do a lot more in consulting rather than having that flexibility that they may think about having regard to the costs to the end users of any of the options, for example. That is something that they should be looking at to make sure that we have a viable sector.

Gas is exceptionally important as we move towards renewables. The Liberals know that we must have gas as part of the mix in the coming years. It is essential to business operating. It is essential to homes operating as they are. We are not opposing this bill, but we certainly will be moving some amendments in the other place.

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (18:10): I am delighted to give a small contribution on the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025 and thank colleagues from both sides of the aisle for their contributions. If I refer to the member for Bulleen’s opening contribution, and I agree with my colleague sitting next to me, for the first 10 minutes I do not think we disagreed on anything, and then things started to get a bit different. I think we were living in a sort of bizarro world there for a moment where things are known or unknown. What was the Donald Rumsfeld line about unknowns and things?

Anyway, on gas, I would agree with the previous member’s statement: gas is important. It is a part of our system going forward and will be in the transition as we are moving to renewables, which, and I do not want to verbal the member for Eildon, it sounded like she appreciated – that that was part of

where we are going – and that is good to hear. It is important that we upgrade the network and make sure that the providers are doing so, which is in the relevant part of the bill today. It is also important that we transition away from gas where we can if we acknowledge that fossil fuels in general are a part of climate change, which I think most of us in this house would, and that we want to decrease the effect of that, which I think most of us in this house would agree with. I think it is possible to have the two points in mind: that gas is important – we will have gas in the state of Victoria for many uses for a fairly long period of time – and at the same time we want to use less gas. We can hold those two opinions at the same time. I think the minister has stated in transition statements, in the policy areas and in planning decisions that this is exactly what the government is able to do. Sometimes the debate becomes a very binary argument of ‘Oh, well, you said X; therefore you must think Y, Z and alpha and beta and gamma and whatever’. That is not reality. That is a bit of bizarro world.

I note that our gas operators, the market operators, can effectively be instructed to augment their flexibility and capacity, as for this bill, and I think we have got to that point, because I would imagine from decreasing use that we are going to see that there may be, I guess, cost pressures on the providers. I had a meeting with the Australian Gas Infrastructure Group some years ago when they were talking to me about the importance of the business. They were spruiking their business as people who are employed will obviously do, and they made the point, rightly or wrongly or otherwise, that they were concerned that should the residential market move away from gas, which obviously we are putting forward – we have made strong arguments about that; we have got the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) programs, which I will come to again later – it would increase the price for business. I do not know if that is necessarily going to happen or not, but that was their argument. So I asked the question on that: well, does that mean that the residential users of gas are subsidising the business users? Isn't that the logical placement of that previous statement? And they all said, ‘Oh, no, no, no, that's not it at all.’ But then we look at a point: if you had two completely separate networks – this is the question I asked at the time – which one would be cheaper to run? I did not quite get an answer to that one, and I think I have a hunch which one that would be.

Notwithstanding all of that, I can tell you even from personal experience that moving away from gas in our household where possible saves people money. I have said in this place before that in my house, Bec and I have started that transition away from gas. First, we replaced our heating, which is the majority of the gas usage in our house, and went from a peak gas bill about three or four years ago of \$450 a month, because we have kids who love to crank the heating up. Gas prices were lower than they are now because we are all on a wonderful eastern seaboard market. A gas reserve is a great idea for the federal government, and I will leave that to them. But the eastern seaboard market seems to be doing Japanese gas users better than Australian gas users and maybe they want to look at that. That said, that is the price and that is the system we are dealing with. So if you move away from gas and you go to electricity, from my personal experience and that of others I have talked to, you will save money.

There is obviously a cost of transitioning, so this is something that should happen at end-of-life time. When your appliance gets to the end of its life – again, I sound like a broken record – go and have a look at your options, because heat pumps are going to be cheaper than your old ducted system over time. As I said, if I go back three or four years ago to when I got a bill for 450 bucks a month for gas, which was hot water and cooking and mostly heating, and then I go now to the change in my electricity bill to heat the whole house through the same time of year, I am probably saving 150 to 200 bucks for that month, and I get the added bonus of having air conditioning in the summer that I did not used to have, so I am a convert in this.

We can talk about gas going forward. The member for Bulleen was talking about the history of gas in Victoria. It is a huge part of Victorian history and one that we had a lot of benefits from. We used those benefits, and we all moved that way. But I think it is fair enough to say that time was then, and now we have got to look forward to what we are setting ourselves up for for that next generation and those that follow. I would argue that the work that our Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy

and Resources and Minister for the State Electricity Commission has done over the last 12 years – and her department and everyone else involved, obviously – is setting us up for a future where we will have lower energy costs.

We will still need gas; 100 per cent, we will still need gas. There will still be people cooking with gas, and there will still be people using it in industry. They will need gas for specific reasons. We will need gas for power. The member for Bulleen talked about the peak requirements of power and, yes, we are going to need gas power stations. So the gas that, as the Leader of the Nationals said, we are slowly running out of – economically viable gas in Bass Strait – we want to use for the best reason in this state. We want to use it where we need to use it. And I would argue, where we do not need to use it and there is a cheaper alternative – if electricity powered by renewables and backed up by gas, for instance, is going to be cheaper – we should do everything we can to assist Victorians in making that change. We not only get a benefit for the Victorian household that does that, but we get a benefit as a state as well because our reserves are slowly dwindling. I mean, there are exploration licences open; I believe a couple were granted in the last year or so, so who knows – they might find more. I do not know. But I do not hear that they are going to find significant levels like those found in Bass Strait. So programs like the VEU program helping people make that change when it is end of life are helping us all.

Coming back to the bill, though, we still need to have a gas network that is flexible, that is reliable and that we can count on. So this bill that gives the minister the powers to ensure that is very timely indeed, and I support it fully.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (18:19): I rise to speak on the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025. I find it fascinating: I have been sitting here listening to the debate, and Labor, who have been demonising gas for some time now, are suddenly talking about the importance of gas and the role it will play in the transition towards renewables, which is exactly what we have been saying as Liberals for the last few years at least.

It just makes me not surprised but amazed to hear how the members of the other side are pretending that they have not been demonising gas in the past. The minister was banning gas, and now they are talking about the importance of it as a transition, which is exactly, as I say, what we have been highlighting for some time now. Of course gas is important, because there is not the technology to go to renewables such as wind and solar without gas as part of that transition. It is also very important to recognise the need for consistent, reliable and affordable energy, because we cannot afford to be environmental custodians of the land if we do not have the economic capacity to do so. It is the first lesson in farming: if you do not look after the landscape and the soil and prioritise it, it just does not perform, so you actually have to put that as your number one priority. If we cannot have gas in the mix, we cannot have dairy manufacturing and we cannot get the economic benefit that we get from the south-west, for example, to actually benefit the environment by investing in it.

This bill is at its core basically a bill that hands the minister extraordinary sweeping powers to direct private pipeline operators to undertake capital works on Victoria's declared gas transmission system. A lot of this is happening because the government have been in for 10 years and they have not done the work in the background to make sure we have got a reliable and affordable energy system, so the minister is having to make some rash changes. This particular bill allows the minister to compel expansions, extensions, upgrades and new connections and has powers that override the longstanding independent regulatory processes that have governed our gas market for many years.

The government claim these powers are necessary to expedite expansion and improve the framework, but really it is because they have not done the work they should have done for the last 10 years. When we examine this bill in detail what we see is not improvement but centralisation. We see a profound shift away from a transparent, consultative and independently assessed model towards one where decisions can be made behind closed doors at the discretion of a single minister. That is not unusual from this government. It is something I have been really concerned about for some time and what our

communities are concerned about, because we are seeing this government give extraordinary powers to ministers and take away the ability for community consultation and community having a say.

We see that now in South-West Coast, where we had the government at a federal level come out a couple of years ago now and just make a decision that there will be offshore wind power. That decision was made without any community consultation. There were no environment effects studies undertaken, just an over overarching top-down approach that there will be offshore wind in the South-West Coast region. Whilst we do not have jurisdiction over federal waters where those wind towers will be if the government continue on their plan, I think it is important for us to recognise that the community and industry do deserve to be heard before decisions that affect their livelihoods are made. We believe, as Liberals, in the principle that gives that community the say. That is why we have been clear that Labor's planning changes, where they have included planning amendment VC261, which centralises or gives the ultimate power to the minister, must be reversed. We as Liberals have actually stood by that by voting against it in the Parliament, and in government that is exactly what we will do as well. We will revoke that and reverse that, and we will stand by that. We have seen too many decisions being made in Spring Street, and that is not how it should be. There must be proper local oversight for decisions being made on projects and full environment effects statements for every project – no shortcuts, no exemptions – and that is not what we are seeing. Whilst this is not actually something that we can stop, like the policy we had as Liberals at the federal level, we can absolutely say that we will not be allowing poor process.

If I come back to the bill itself, what we are seeing is a typical Allan Labor government that sees consultation and scrutiny as impractical. Transparency and scrutiny exist precisely to prevent these poor decisions and to protect the public from unintended consequences. Democracy is messy, there is no doubt about that, but having processes in place and sticking to them and being able to trust those processes is important, because we must ensure corruption does not develop. We all know the Labor government's record on that front: the \$15 billion of taxpayer money that has been stolen from our communities that should have been paying for nurses, police, teachers and fixing our roads. We have the right to know where this \$15 billion of taxpayer money has gone in being wasted on Big Build projects. But corruption is not just a law and order issue; it goes to the strength of our economy.

**Anthony Carbines:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker: relevance.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** I bring the member back to the bill before the house.

**Roma BRITNELL:** The bill talks about the minister having sweeping powers and extraordinary powers to direct the private pipeline operators to undertake capital works, going away from the longstanding tradition of the regulatory process that has governed the market for a long time. On that basis, I am talking about the fact that we need to have trust in the process and make sure that corruption cannot occur, because that is what the bill is talking about: changing to giving the minister overarching power and being able to call in. On that basis, I absolutely see an opportunity for corruption to occur if we are not using the Parliament but just giving ministers all the power, which we have seen in other examples, which is what I was referring to with the wind farm.

We also see that in regional towns. Terang residents have been compromised in the past because they have had their autonomy cancelled. In Terang, in my electorate, the announced cancellation of the gas supply left households and small businesses facing enormous disruption and stress. Families who built homes only three years ago are now being told they have to replace appliances and convert from reticulated gas to bottled gas or full electrification at a cost of thousands of dollars, simply to meet basic needs. These are the things that happen when we do not plan in advance, and that is why this bill is concerning, because we have not got the oversight of consultation and communities being listened to. These costs are not abstract; they affect household budgets, business viability and community confidence. The Terang residents, for example, deserve answers. They deserve transparency about why this decision was made and what it means to their future. Instead they are left with uncertainty and a growing sense that regional communities are paying the price for poor planning and mismanagement.

This is a bill that we have consulted widely on with industry, including the APA Group, Lochar Energy and the Clean Energy Council, and the message is consistent: there may well be a need for additional capacity because there has been poor planning by this government for 10 years now, but industry is deeply concerned about the breadth of these ministerial powers. As I pointed out already, there are examples in South-West Coast where these powers for a minister to come in and make a decision without consultation do erode established regulatory processes and erode trust. It does leave opportunity for corruption, and that is what we are seeing with this government – a long history now that is proven, in black and white, in reports that are exposing \$15 billion stolen from communities like South-West Coast, whose roads are poor, whose hospital is not getting funded now, as it should, to the scope it was promised, because this government has been corrupt. Covering up that corruption is not going to work, because the people can feel the stolen money that has disappeared out of the system and that is leaving Victorians in a worse off position.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (18:29): I just want to pick up on the matter of how the orders are made, because I did hear some concerns being raised about that. Before making an order, the minister will have to consult with the Premier, the Treasurer and AEMO – noting they are a pretty massive player in the energy market – and the declared transmission system owner. In this way the orders will be based on carefully considered advice to ensure the changes are made only when and where they are needed, when the projects will be at an efficient cost and when they will deliver value for Victorians. If we are talking about democratic processes and transparency, the responsible minister will also have to publish the order and why they made it in the *Government Gazette* and on the department's website. So clearly it is not under cover of darkness, it is actually going to be made public, and that is via the *Government Gazette* and the department's website. I just wanted to surmount that particular concern that was flagged just a few minutes ago. How the ministerial orders will work in practice – the orders may set out specific improvements on the declared transmission system and timeframes for these to be undertaken by the declared transmission system owner.

I do want to go back to a fundamental premise when it comes to energy in Victoria and our government. We are getting on with the transition to net zero and continuing to shift our energy use away from fossil fuels and onto renewable energy, noting that there are a number of great positives and imperatives when it comes to, one, obviously our planet and making sure that we mitigate the impacts of climate change. But also it is cheaper, and I have already had colleagues in the chamber reflecting on their own energy bills that renewable energy is definitely the way to go from an economic perspective but also from an environmental perspective.

We do note the role that gas is playing in the transition, hence the imperative for this bill and planning ahead, noting – and I will put a further caveat – that the most important aspect of these new powers, that is, with regard to this bill, will be that they act as a measure of last resort. The government would prefer that the market provides a solution to the forecast shortfall. If we are talking about those planning elements that were raised just before, that would be the desirable way that we would like to see energy into the future. However, if the market fails to find a timely solution, the government must be empowered to act in the best interests of Victorians. That is probably a fundamental tenet of the orders and this legislation, because I think there was a bit of a taint on it that was not particularly positive, trying to infer that somehow the government was just capriciously floating along with something as significant and as important as the energy market. We can see that it is exactly the opposite, and I do want to emphasize the fundamental tenet of this bill.

Coming back to that transition, which is so very important for our state, I know Victorians themselves have seen the wisdom of transitioning to cleaner energy, even though the opposition hate renewables. For instance, with the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) scheme we are making it easier for Victorians to move off gas and slash their bills. This has been extraordinarily popular. More than 2.4 million households in Victoria think this is a good thing – even though the opposition cannot stand it, they see the wisdom in it – and 180,000 businesses. Even the market wants to go with this. My goodness, 180,000 businesses have taken advantage of the program since 2009. You do not just have to listen to

us as parliamentarians here, listen to Victorians. They are leading on this transition. Yes, we are providing mechanisms to help facilitate that change. We are backing them in, but they are going ahead full throttle, so good on them. In 2025 more than 147,000 homes – that is Victorian homes making these decisions; even if the opposition do not want them to, they are making these decisions – and 13,000 businesses received discounted energy-efficient products and services. They see the value in it. They see their bills every month. They can see the difference.

In 2025 alone the VEU program cut Victoria's emissions by 6.9 million tonnes. That is really important. If we are thinking about not only current Victorians but future generations of Victorians, these are really important and practical steps supporting them in transitioning the way that they use energy and the mechanisms for their households. In 2024–25 the program provided over \$590 million in discounts to businesses and households undertaking energy upgrades to buildings, appliances and equipment, so there is lots out there for Victorians to take advantage of, and we encourage them to do so.

Between 2021 and 2025 the VEU program has avoided \$3.8 billion in energy system costs. Even after accessing appliance discounts and getting real bill savings, every single Victorian is also avoiding energy costs they would have had to pay if the VEU did not exist to help drive down electricity demand. I am really excited that this fantastic program is going to continue, because we have passed legislation to extend the program out to 2045 in line with our net zero targets. We are always going to back in Victorian families and businesses to save on their energy bills, and we are proud to say that the VEU is here to stay. This is what is really important: when we are talking about transition, we are not just talking about it. We are actually helping Victorians to be part of the implementation, to be part of the change and to really embrace it.

The Solar Homes program is also being lapped up by Victorians. The \$1.3 billion Solar Homes program is helping hardworking Victorians slash their energy bills by getting solar on their roofs. It is nation leading. We have the largest household renewable energy program in the country. That is something to be really proud of, but I want to pat Victorians on the back because they are part of this transition – this revolution, if you like – in terms of our energy sector. Victorians are flocking to the program, with 435,000 installations supported. Yes, that is Victorians making these decisions. The program has surpassed an energy-generating capacity of 2 gigawatts – bigger than the Yallourn power station. That is a really important point as well, because when we are thinking about the transition, we are acknowledging the role that gas plays in the transition, but we are also acknowledging that coal-fired power is on its way out. And the market is part of that. It is not only the government; it is actually the market saying renewables are quicker and easier to set up and they do not have all the complexities and complications that you get with coal. We are charging forward with that as well. I am really pleased about this as well: over 7000 rental properties have received solar PV rebates. That is fantastic because we know that cost of living is a huge issue, so being able to assist those in rental properties to be able to mitigate their costs in terms of their energy bills is really, really important. We know that the program is helping them to slash their bills each and every day. Solar Homes will help Victorians save more than an estimated \$500 million a year on their electricity bills once the program is complete. In anyone's language, these are meaningful savings, and it is literally thousands and thousands of Victorians that are taking part.

The introduction of all-electric new homes – the Allan Labor government made the landmark decision to phase out gas in new homes from 1 January 2024. This has meant that new Victorian households will save up to \$1000 off their annual energy bills, while reducing household emissions, and this includes social and affordable housing. It is great to see, like at Barak Beacon, induction cookers are all-electric. This is fantastic – great insulation, double glazing. It means that we are actually futureproofing the lives of people who are going to move into those homes and the people that have moved into the ones that have already been delivered. This is really a gift to them, if you like, for their future, but it also means that they can really track their energy use into the future or mitigate their energy use into the future. On that note, I think that we concede that there are certain controls that are being put in place. They are designed to be a last resort should the market fail. They are planning into

the future, but meanwhile we are actively transitioning energy usage in Victoria and supporting Victorians on the way. They are lapping it up, and good on them.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (18:39): I also rise to speak on the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025. The Greens will not be voting against this bill in the Legislative Assembly, as we do support the idea of the government planning our energy transition. There are some risks, though, within the details of the bill, which I will go through, and so we will have to look at those before deciding our position in the Council, until we can talk to the government about some of those risks and some commonsense amendments that we are putting forward.

As we have heard today, the bill gives the Minister for Energy and Resources new powers in relation to Victoria's gas transmission pipeline network. Specifically, the minister would be able to make orders to direct the pipeline owner, the service provider and the Australian Energy Market Operator to make upgrades in order to maintain gas supply and gas quality. But really I want to talk about how much of a joke the gas situation is in Victoria.

Australia is one of the top gas exporters in the world. In fact we exported more gas in the past five years than our entire country uses in 20 years. It is the way the market was set up. The fact that politicians sold out our natural resources to mostly overseas-owned companies is the problem with gas, and it is really a joke. We are also blessed in this country with incredible solar, wind and hydro resources, and transitioning away from gas and onto renewables will not just be good for our climate, it will be good for our wallets and good for our health as well.

Right now gas is more expensive than ever. Gas prices in Victoria have tripled in the last decade. I think most people in this place remember when gas was cheap, but that is simply not the case anymore. The reason for that is because these companies, that politicians have essentially given our gas to for very little, export 80 per cent of that gas, pay next to nothing in tax and then sell what is left back to us at artificially inflated prices that are set on the global market. It is really no wonder that Victorians are ditching gas entirely for cheaper, cleaner electric products like split system air conditioners, heat pumps, electric hot water systems and induction cooktops.

In fact, for the first time ever, gas connections are actually falling across Australia. Over the last six months we saw more than 60,000 new electricity connections across the national energy market, but total gas connections fell by over 11,000. That is 60,000 new homes connecting to the electricity market. You would expect the same for gas, but no, they fell by 11,000. So the time of gas and needing to have gas is officially over. We have more than enough of it left to transition to cheap, clean, renewable energy, and any supply issues for gas – that the government often uses as justification for opening new gas fields and gas drilling – are down to one thing and one thing only: greedy, profit-driven fossil fuel companies who are selling our gas at incredibly high, inflated prices. These are companies that, as I said, take 80 per cent of our gas. They pay next to nothing in tax, they sell it back to us at artificially inflated prices – and still, after all of that, they will turn around to governments and say, boohooing, 'We need more supply,' and cry crocodile tears. It is a joke. They are taking us for an absolute ride, and they do not have the public's interest at heart.

The Greens support more public control over our gas network, like we support making coal and gas giants pay for the climate crisis that they are creating, but the problem in this bill is that it does not properly address the seismic changes Victoria is about to see in our gas network. Remember that our own climate laws here in Victoria mean the state needs to hit net zero emissions by 2045. That gives us less than 20 years to get off almost all fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas. That target was set by this government. Some processes will be harder to decarbonise than others – in things like transport, agriculture and industrial processes like steelmaking, which requires intense heat. That means that Victoria will need to seize low-hanging fruit faster than ever. We need to shut down our coal-fired power plants. We need to supercharge our solar and wind resources and electrify our homes and businesses.

The transition away from household gas is inevitable – in fact it is already happening – but we need to prepare much more quickly to rapidly increase that transition. Realistically, Victoria has just 20 years to equitably retire our household gas network, and it should be much faster than that. That is being conservative. In fact the ACT is planning for a phased decommissioning from 2035. Handing the minister the power to create new, expensive, polluting gas infrastructure does not fundamentally help that transition. We should not be building new gas infrastructure. As I mentioned, we do not need any new gas, and I am worried that the power could actually create the potential to be an accelerator for gas and gas infrastructure. What Victoria needs instead is a steering wheel to guide us away from the expensive, leaky gas networks of the past and towards a cheap, clean, renewable energy grid of the future, and the transition needs to be managed in a way that is good for communities, good for business and good for the climate – and it is possible – because the gas network in Victoria is headed towards a death spiral in the 2030s, if not sooner.

Think about the minor steps that we have already made to get off gas, and then think about what is coming. As more homes and businesses replace gas products with cheaper electric products, these products will become cheaper. We will see new and better electric options. More people will learn about those better, cheaper products, more workers will be trained to install them, and more and more Victorian homes and businesses will go all electric and that will accelerate. That is a very good thing for our climate and it is a good thing for homes and businesses saving money, but there is a catch to this death spiral, because as more Victorians go all electric the cost of maintaining the ageing, leaking gas network will fall to fewer and fewer Victorians. The Victorians who are the ones who cannot afford to get off gas, so renters, people in apartments, poorer households and regional communities, will be the ones left with the costs.

The government cannot let increasing network costs fall to those least able to afford them and certainly cannot let the market try and sort it out themselves, because they have shown that they will not do that, at least not equitably. As the gas companies experience this death spiral, they are going to see more and more stranded assets. Companies like Santos and Woodside gas companies exist for profit, not to help people and certainly not to help the planet. Right now these companies are lying to Victorians. They say gas will be around for decades. We have all seen the ads on our TVs. They say it is not bad for the climate, our hip pockets or our health, but they are deceiving wilfully the Victorian people, because the minute these companies cannot make money from something, they will cut and run, and they will leave the government and Victorian communities to pick up the pieces and the costs.

We saw the first concrete example of this last year, a canary in the coalmine. Back in August 2025, 10 regional towns found out they had until the end of 2026 before the gas networks would be forcibly retired, and that decision was purely financial. The gas company Solstice Energy said it had become too expensive to run their isolated gas networks. These networks are a uniquely terrible holdover from the former coalition government's Energy for the Regions program, launched in the 2010s. Basically, isolated gas networks required Solstice to compress the gas themselves, truck it into towns and then distribute it to homes and businesses through their own pipelines. At the time, communities were told it would be worth it because gas would be cheaper in the long run. Businesses were even paying to switch their systems over as recently as 2021 – just five years ago. The classic white elephant is estimated to have cost around \$85 million. Now, barely a decade after being told to go one way, over a thousand households are now being told they have to go the other, and they have just 16 months to do it. They either have to renovate their entire homes – go all electric in a matter of months – or convert back to bottled gas. Solstice made a financial decision, but they are not the ones that are having to live with the costs. For the people in those 10 towns – Marong, Heathcote, Swan Hill, Maldon, Robinvale, Kerang, Nathalia, Terang, Lakes Entrance and Orbost – the entire process has sounded like an absolute nightmare. It has been plagued by anger, confusion and anxiety about a transition none of those communities were consulted on or had time to prepare for. We need our government to make sure that these towns are not left to fend for themselves and that other regional communities are not left in the same position when gas companies inevitably start pulling out of the system.

Just like we need a just transition for coal communities, Victoria needs a just transition for our gas network, and this bill could be the chance to make sure what just happened with Solstice never happens again. That means planning in decades, not months or years. To that effect, the Greens have developed three common-sense amendments that futureproof the bill to prepare for these inevitable decisions of gas companies. I want to stress that they are very commonsense, because they are three positive changes that align with the government's existing climate targets and policy goals. These amendments would: (1) ensure that these new powers under the bill proactively align with Victoria's existing climate targets, (2) empower the minister to start pre-planning as companies inevitably transition away from gas assets and (3) empower the minister to demand geospatial data from gas networks to create transparency for communities and help the SEC do its job better. We will be circulating those amendments in the upper house. Each of these amendments has been developed in consultation with a group called the Victorian Energy Future Network. VEFN are a team of energy experts leading this conversation, including some with personal experience in the gas industry themselves, and I want to thank them for advocating on what may seem like a concern that might be a little bit off into the future but could really become catastrophic in about a decade if Victoria does not plan for it.

Our first amendment is what we call a climate guardrail, which ensures that any upgrades ordered under the bill's proposed power are at the very least consistent with Victoria's existing climate targets. As it stands, the current bill allows the minister to order expansions or 'specified improvements' to the network based on security of supply. This creates a real climate and economic risk of gold plating the network. The minister would be able to order gas assets that will become stranded in five to 10 years – for example, forcing a pipeline expansion that will not be paid off by 2045 – and neither the minister nor the company would need to examine perfectly good alternatives to an upgrade like electrification or energy efficiency. At a minimum, the bill needs to clearly require that any order actively demonstrate consistency with Victoria's climate targets, and it needs to demonstrate whether the objective of the order could be achieved through demand-side measures instead. This is a small but critical legislative change which would actively align the bill with Labor's existing climate targets.

Our second amendment would create a symmetrical power to the one proposed in the bill – the power to require gas transition plans under any order relating to a network improvement. As I explained earlier, the Greens' primary concern with this bill is it only gives the minister the power to order expansions or upgrades to the gas network. This creates a legislative imbalance when the minister also needs to be able to plan for companies inevitably retiring their assets – a retirement that will happen one way or another. As the VEFN puts it, if the minister has the power to turn the tap on they must also have the power to plan for turning it off. Gas transition plans would create that reasonable symmetrical planning power. They would also mean that as part of the orders made under the bill the minister would be able to demand things like timelines for the decommissioning of specified gas infrastructure, strategies to manage the costs of stranded assets and coordination with electricity network distributors to facilitate electrification of specific zones. Transition plans could also require that companies demonstrate how any upgrades made under the bill will reduce gas emissions for the purposes of the long-term emissions reduction target. Effectively, this power futureproofs the bill. It does not force a shutdown tomorrow, but it creates the legal mechanism for the government to order a planned and just retirement, something that companies like Solstice will do anyway, just in a not very planned and not very just way.

Finally, the Greens are seeking a transparency clause to force gas networks to share geospatial data with the State Electricity Commission and communities. This information is currently held privately by those monopoly networks. It includes things like the location of certain pipelines, their age, their capacity and their usage. Currently this bill would enable the minister to demand this kind of information as part of orders issued for network improvements, but the minister has explicitly said these orders would only be made as a last resort if and when a private company has screwed up so badly the government is forced to intervene. The Greens want the minister, the SEC and the general public to have this information well before things go south, not after the effect. Our transparency clause would explicitly allow the minister to demand that information as part of their deliberations ahead of

making an order and proactively share it with communities. That costs the government nothing – in fact it would actually help the government and communities. It would help the SEC by giving them the maps they need to do their job better, and it would help communities see what is coming and make choices themselves. Again, we cannot afford a repeat of what happened with Solstice, but the SEC and communities cannot plan for electrification if they do not have up-to-date information and data.

The Greens will circulate these amendments in the upper house this week in order to discuss them with the government. I look forward to those discussions, because these are really commonsense amendments that would help the government prepare for what is coming. There is nothing here that does not align with the government's existing targets or policy objectives. Looking further down the track, Victoria will need to be genuinely ambitious. We will need a legislative retirement end date of the reticulated gas network – 2045 at a minimum, or earlier. That deadline will help homes and businesses prepare and provide investment certainty to companies. We will need a gas transition authority to start properly coordinating those transition plans and managing the death spiral of networks, and ultimately the government will probably need to purchase our gas network itself, through either the SEC or the gas transition authority that we are suggesting, because once the majority of Victorians have gone all electric, we cannot trust private companies to support those homes and businesses still stuck on gas. Governments need to ensure the cost of the inevitable death spiral is not borne by those least able to afford it.

Even if the government does purchase the transmission and distribution systems, it will be bound by outdated national energy rules. Actively managing a dying gas network will require changes to those rules which will have to be done at the federal level. So there is much more work that needs to be done here, and the Greens amendments simply get the ball rolling. We are pre-planning for an inevitable retirement of the gas network, and our hope is that this bill creates the tools to manage that retirement fairly before gas companies like Solstice do it for themselves and leave all of us high and dry.

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (18:55): I am very happy. I was not sure if I was going to get up or not. I am very grateful that the member for Melbourne left me a couple of minutes. I rise today in strong support of this bill, and I want to take a few minutes to explain why it matters right now and why getting this right is so important for every Victorian.

**A member** interjected.

**Paul MERCURIO**: Yes. Listening to the debate today, it sounds like everyone is on board with supporting the phase-out of gas. We just all probably have very different ideas of when that might happen and certainly how that might happen. I stand today saying we need gas at the moment and will into the future, but I also stand and say it is a finite resource. I have heard in this chamber today and read in different things that we are going to run out of gas in eight years or 16 years; I think the Leader of the Nationals said we might have 28 years left. But the fact of the matter is it is a finite resource. The other truth that I have heard today in the chamber is that we need renewables. We are moving towards renewables, and that is inevitable. The thing about renewables is that they are an infinite resource. We will not be running out of that unless of course some madman presses the red button and blows the world up. I am a bit worried about how that is going at the moment, but we have to have faith, and as I said, we have to have hope as well. But renewables, obviously, we will rely on moving into the future.

This government, the Labor government, has been doing an enormous amount of work on maintaining and developing renewables. Of course I am very excited that in my area, the electorate of Hastings, we have the Victorian renewable energy terminal, which is certainly going to contribute a great deal to renewable energy within Victoria. That is really important. Things keep changing; technology changes. It was not that long ago that we really did not have battery technology. We had solar technology, and people were selling their excess energy and their excess electricity back into the energy grid. Now of course everyone is complaining that they cannot do that, but we have the ability to store our energy in moments when the power goes out or whatever. So I am also quite confident

about what is going to come over the years. When people say we will need gas into the future, I think our reliance on that will change as other technologies become available and people actually start to use them.

I do note that the SEC has partnered with various different organisations and companies, such as the Melbourne renewable energy hub. That is a partnership with a private company with 444 battery units, and that will provide a lot of energy into our system. It makes me feel, in terms of decommissioning coal and the fact that we are running out of gas, that there is absolutely a future for us, and I do not think we need to be overly concerned. But we certainly have got to work towards making sure that transition is safe and secure and that people understand that, and I think this bill does that. This is about making sure that people within the community can feel safe and secure in the transitioning process. Gas is not obviously our destination – we know that – but right now it plays a critical role in firming our electrical network. I do believe other things will come in and take the place of that, so I feel safe and confident. I am a little bit concerned about the lack of wok cooking, but I am sure I will get over that at the right time and right place.

### **Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

#### *Adjournment*

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

That the house now adjourns.

### **Mansfield-Woods Point Road, Woods Point**

**Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (19:00):** (1549) I have a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to ensure repairs are made to Mansfield-Woods Point Road at Woods Point. Essential repairs are required between the town and the Woods Point Gun Club and right downtown across the road from the hotel, where the shoulder of the road is downright dangerous. There was a half-baked effort to make repairs to the road between the town and the gun club, which left townfolk flabbergasted. Mansfield-Woods Point Road was fully closed to traffic on Tuesday 17 February from 6 am to 6 pm but only to repair one tiny strip of road less than 100 metres long. Potholes were left. I saw this firsthand when I visited Woods Point for their community meeting for the bushfires last week, and the half-patched job was most underwhelming. The deep potholes were not repaired, not even filled in. Someone painted a white circle around them, which seems to be commonplace. I would be happy to send photos to the minister if she requires them; they include the appalling condition of the road in the town precinct. Some of these potholes are full of muddy water, and you cannot see how deep they are from the car, causing drivers to avoid them by driving on the opposite side of the road.

Transport Victoria stated that the works would involve asphaltting, sealing and line marking as part of the 2025–26 maintenance season, but it has been very disappointing to see the final result of these half closures. The section of road across the road from the pub, which is in Scott Street, is very, very dangerous. The shoulder is completely worn away, and there have been recent incidents. I saw footage where vehicles turning around had actually been stuck there, and it required quite a bit of local operations to get those vehicles back on the road. Community users are pretty sick of this, and I have raised these matters in Parliament before. Whether it is Mansfield-Woods Point Road or Warburton-Woods Point Road, both of them are in need of repair. They are only small communities, but these are government roads and there are commuters in a number of the small towns between Woods Point and Mansfield that need to have these repairs made. I ask the minister to urgently have a look at what has been done and what the plans were, because I think the minister will be disappointed to see the half-baked result that we have and I know the townfolk in Woods Point are particularly unhappy about it.

### Chemist Care Now

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (19:03): (1550) My adjournment is for the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for the minister to visit a local chemist in my electorate of Albert Park to receive a firsthand update on the implementation and impact of the Chemist Care Now program. This program represents a practical reform in primary healthcare delivery by enabling trained pharmacists to treat a defined range of common conditions. It is intended to ease demand on general practitioners and emergency departments while providing faster and more affordable access to care for Victorians. With the cost of living a challenge for Victorians – from mortgages and rent to groceries, energy bills and insurance – healthcare costs are increasingly part of the challenge. For many households, securing a GP appointment can involve both long waits and significant gap payments. The chemist care program is directly addressing that burden. Local chemists in Albert Park are playing an expanded role in frontline care.

### Rail freight services

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (19:04): (1551) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure regarding this government's reckless plan to remove the regional rail link crossovers at Sunshine station. Will the minister stop all plans to remove these crossovers so the broad-gauge freight trains from northern Victoria can continue to access the Port of Melbourne via Sunshine, rather than being rerouted via the congested Geelong–Werribee line? The Geelong line is a mixture of standard-, dual- and broad-gauge lines. As part of the Australian Rail Track Corporation corridor, passenger rail services have priority over freight services, and this change will lead to more congestion on a rapidly growing passenger line. Northern Victoria's broad-gauge freight trains will have their travel time increased by at least 1.5 hours, increasing their train cycle times, fuel and crew costs. These crossovers provide operational flexibility, protect against service disruptions and, importantly, safeguard freight capacity moving between north-west Victoria and the Port of Melbourne.

Our region depends on rail to move grain, mineral sands and other goods efficiently and safely to the Port of Melbourne. When you increase travel times and reduce rail flexibility and resilience, you inevitably reduce confidence in the corridor, and when freight operators lose confidence in rail, they turn to trucks. This means more A-doubles and heavy vehicles travelling down the Murray Valley and Calder highways and the surrounding regional roads – roads already dangerously deteriorating due to this government's ongoing neglect. The Allan government cannot claim to support regional Victoria while actively making decisions which shift freight off rail and onto country roads. Every additional truck means higher road maintenance costs, greater accident risk, increased emissions and more pressure on local communities who had no say in this change. This proposal looks exactly like what it is: a city-centric cost-saving exercise dressed up as network reform, with regional communities paying the price again.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the member for Wendouree, I just say to the member for Murray Plains that your question, I think, was asked more as a constituency question. Are you able to clarify the action that you are requiring from the minister?

**Peter WALSH:** The action is to stop all plans to remove the crossovers on the broad-gauge freight system. I said that in the second sentence.

### Ballarat train station

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (19:06): (1552) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Wendouree and join me at the Ballarat train station to see firsthand the progress of our significant station upgrade. The Allan Labor government is delivering a major accessibility and connectivity upgrade at Ballarat station, focusing on making it easier and safer for passengers to move between platforms, the multilevel car park, the Goods Shed precinct and the Quest hotel. This investment is transforming the station precinct and removing longstanding barriers to access. A key feature of the upgrade is the

construction of a new pedestrian overpass, complete with lifts and stairs on both platforms. This will allow passengers to move between platforms without the need to use the Lydiard Street level crossing, improving safety and reducing delays.

I am proud that these works will provide improved access for people with disabilities, parents with prams and travellers with luggage. I am also pleased that we have upgraded the northern station entry, including a new ramp and steps as well as improved lighting and landscaping, further supporting accessibility and safety on the north side of our station. These upgrades are designed to remove accessibility barriers, reduce reliance on the level crossing and improve overall passenger flow throughout the station precinct. They will make the station significantly more accessible for people with mobility limitations, those impacted by illness or injury and anyone travelling with prams and heavy luggage.

I want to acknowledge the advocacy of Grampians DisAbility Advocacy and their campaign calling for improved accessibility at Ballarat train station, including the new pedestrian overpass, lifts and compliant northern entrance. Their work has been instrumental in highlighting the needs of people with disabilities in our community. The Ballarat station upgrade will deliver real benefits, saving time, improving safety and eliminating the need for passengers to cross the tracks at Lydiard Street. It will make travelling through our station easier, safer and more convenient for everyone. I look forward to welcoming the minister to Ballarat to see the progress of our important project.

#### **Warrnambool train services**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (19:08): (1553) I have a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently ensure appropriate passenger assistance and genuine safety support are provided on train services operating between Melbourne and Warrnambool. Since the Allan Labor government reduced regional train capacity, service standards have deteriorated significantly. The most alarming issue is safety. A growing number of passengers are telling me they no longer feel safe. Reports of individuals who appear to be substance-affected, aggressive and intimidating behaviour and volatile confrontations are becoming disturbingly common. They are regular complaints raised with my office. People are now telling me they are reconsidering whether they want to use the service at all. That should set alarm bells ringing. When regional Victorians begin avoiding public transport because they feel unsafe, the government has got something seriously wrong. Overcrowding is now routine. Passengers who have booked allocated seating are boarding to find their seats occupied and are sometimes forced to stand for hours. When they attempt to assert their booking, they risk confrontation. Young university students travelling describe feeling anxious and vulnerable. Parents are increasingly worried about their teenagers travelling alone, particularly on overcrowded services where there is no visible authority figure readily available.

They are asking a very simple question: if something goes wrong, who is there to help? Conductors are doing their best, but they have not been given the authority or backup required to manage serious behavioural issues. Why has the government failed to properly empower them? Why has it not considered the presence of protective services officers on these long regional routes? If visible safety supports can be provided in metropolitan areas, why are the regional passengers treated as an afterthought? Older passengers are being overlooked. One elderly woman travelling with a walker was forced to have it placed in an overhead rack because of inadequate storage areas. She then had to rely on strangers to retrieve it when she arrived at the station or needed to go to the toilet. That is not dignity, that is not accessibility; that is neglect.

Yes, cheaper fares have driven up patronage; that should be welcomed. But increasing demand without increasing capacity, staffing and safety provisions is irresponsible. You cannot promote regional rail while stripping back the support structures that make it functional and safe. The Allan Labor government has clearly failed. Our communities feel short-changed. They feel unsafe. The minister's response to last Friday's overcrowding demonstrates just how out of touch the Labor government is. It is no good advising 'Make a booking'. The message could not be clearer: the system just is not

working. The minister should listen to the voices of regional Victorians, restore confidence in this vital service and stop treating the South-West Coast as second best.

#### **Mount Rothwell**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (19:11): (1554) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit Mount Rothwell sanctuary and hear about the conservation work of the Odonata Foundation, including species recovery programs and their future plans. Mount Rothwell, managed by the Odonata Foundation, is a leading conservation reserve located in the electorate of Lara. Spanning 473 hectares, this predator-free sanctuary provides a vital refuge for some of Victoria's most endangered species, such as the eastern barred bandicoot, southern brush-tailed rock wallaby and eastern quoll. Through guided tours, hands-on volunteering and events, Odonata connects people with nature and empowers the community to actively contribute to the protection and recovery of local wildlife. The work they do is having a real impact on threatened species, and I look forward to visiting with the minister so he can hear about the great work they are doing at this site.

#### **Political donations**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (19:12): (1555) My adjournment tonight is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Victorian Labor government to ban all corporate donations to political parties. Here is how it works: big corporations – banks, coal and gas giants, gambling companies and supermarkets – make huge profits, often from digging up the earth or price gouging Victorians. Then they give a tiny amount of those profits to Labor and a tiny bit to the Liberals. In return these two parties make sure that nothing threatens those mega profits. Sometimes governments even make it easier for those companies to make the profits, like through fast-tracking new gas projects or blocking laws that would restrict poker machines. Meanwhile it is harder than ever for Victorians to pay their rent or to afford groceries, and young people wonder what the hell kind of future they are looking forward to. In 2025 the big four banks made \$30 billion in profit. Those same banks gave tens of millions of dollars to both the Labor and Liberal parties. When the Victorian Greens put up a bill to tax big banks so that we can pay for the things the Victorians all need, like funded public schools or working public hospitals, Labor and the Liberals knocked that down. Labor, Liberal, One Nation – they all take these corporate donations. So is it any wonder why politicians will not meaningfully act to fix the housing crisis or the climate crisis? It would cut into those same profits of those same companies, and the current system suits them just fine. It stinks. Good governments are supposed to work for people, not for profit-mongering corporations. People are rightly sick of it, and it is no wonder that they are looking for an alternative.

We have kept the receipts. In the past decade Labor accepted more than \$325,000 from Coles and Woolworths, more than \$1.4 million from fossil fuel giants and more than \$20 million from the big four banks. Companies do not just hand that money to their mates in Parliament for nothing. They do it so that when politicians set the rules to the game they rig it in their favour. That is why Coles and Woolies get to keep making billions of dollars in profits but governments will not tackle price gouging. It is why Victorians have to deal with fires and floods while Labor approves new gas drilling that makes these fires and floods worse. Labor and the Liberals do not answer to everyday Victorians, they answer to their corporate donors and the lobbyists and mates that run the companies. It is no coincidence that almost every single resources minister in Australia in the last 10 years has gone on to work for the coal and gas industry. That stinks, and everybody knows it. Unlike Labor and the Liberals, the Greens do not take these dirty corporate donations from developers or gambling or coal and gas companies. The Victorian public deserves politicians who work for people, not for corporate donors, but nothing will change if we keep electing the same two parties.

#### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (19:15): (1556) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the works at the

future Suburban Rail Loop stabling site as we prepare for the tunnelling to start this year. Major construction is ramping up on the city-shaping Suburban Rail Loop project, with crews building a massive tunnel-boring machine launch site in Heatherton. In December, with you, Deputy Speaker, we had the 78-tonne tunnel-boring machine cutterhead arrive at Heatherton ready for tunnelling to kick off this year. The cutterhead will be used to carve the southern section of the tunnel between Cheltenham and Glen Waverley. Four tunnel-boring machines will be launched from Clarinda to dig the tunnels between Cheltenham and Glen Waverley. Two will travel south to Cheltenham via the train stabling facility at Heatherton and two will head north to Glen Waverley. The Suburban Rail Loop East trains will take passengers in 2035, slashing travel times, easing congestion and making it easier for young Victorians to find and buy more homes within walking distance of services, jobs and new world-class stations. I thank the minister and look forward to her response.

### Construction industry

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (19:16): (1557) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is the immediate establishment of a royal commission into CFMEU corruption to investigate the worst corruption scandal in Victorian history. Here is what has happened. Following revelations that the corruption on government worksites allegedly cost taxpayers \$15 billion, the Premier said she referred the issue to IBAC, the integrity watchdog, so it looked like she was taking action. But the truth is the Premier knew IBAC did not have the power to investigate this corruption. IBAC even wrote back to the Premier saying, ‘No, we can’t investigate because we do not have the powers to,’ and the Premier knew that because IBAC had been asking for these powers to actually investigate allegations of corruption since 2017. Last week in Parliament every other party voted together to grant IBAC the powers it has been asking for since 2017, but Labor voted against it. Every single party then voted for a royal commission to investigate where \$15 billion of taxpayers money has gone, but Labor voted against it. Then this week in Parliament the coalition tried to give the Premier an out and introduced a bill giving IBAC the powers that it needs, because Victorians want to know and deserve to know where their \$15 billion has gone, and – surprise, surprise – Labor voted that one down too.

Actions speak louder than words. This begs the question: why is the Allan Labor government so afraid of this corruption scandal being investigated? Why are they so desperate to cover it up, and what is it that they have to hide? The Premier and her government have time and time again opposed a royal commission into the \$15 billion spent on corruption under her watch, all while those involved in the corruption are also the Labor Party’s biggest donors. Recent political donation figures have shown how Victorian Labor have taken \$1.5 million from some of those wrapped up in this corruption scandal. Talk about jobs for mates – they gave big and they got all the contracts, all while criminals in their ranks happily had \$15 billion poured into their hands while the Allan Labor government looked the other way. The Premier was the infrastructure minister overseeing the Big Build when Labor was happily accepting donations from these companies now charged with fraud, from firms employing thugs and from businesses linked to gangland figures like Mick Gatto. There are endless examples like this. That is why we need a comprehensive plan to enforce the law, find the money and stop the rot, and that is why we need a royal commission.

### Northcote electorate road safety

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (19:19): (1558) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I ask the minister to facilitate a meeting between her office, the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and local stakeholders to discuss traffic safety concerns in Thornbury raised through a parliamentary petition. I was pleased to sponsor petition 202522, which was tabled in the Assembly with the support of 720 local residents. It focuses on two key intersections: Darebin Road at Wilmoth Street and Station Street at Collins Street. These are not quiet backstreets; they are highly active, heavily used intersections that form part of the daily routine for students at Thornbury High School, their families and the many pedestrians, cyclists, bus users and motorists who move through this area each day. At peak times they carry a lot, and people have raised concerns about traffic

flows, turning movements, speed limits, safety around the bus stops and how it feels to cross. The petition reflects a strong community desire for careful, evidence-based assessments and practical recommendations to improve safety. Beyond that, residents want the opportunity to share local knowledge about how these areas are used and experienced.

Road safety is vitally important to us in the inner north. Our suburbs carry significant movement, with multiple tram and train lines, major arterial roads and growing density. We are doing some serious heavy lifting when it comes to moving people in and out of the city each day. We have seen the benefits of decisive road safety reforms like removing dangerous and congested level crossings in Preston. More recently we have reduced the speed limit from 70 to 60 kilometres an hour on a hazardous 3-kilometre stretch of St Georges Road between Northcote and Preston. Over a five-year period along this particular section of road there were 80 crashes and 22 people were seriously injured – that is, someone suffering a major injury every three months on a single stretch of road in our community, a crash every three to four weeks. That is not a status quo we should accept. Reducing the speed will undoubtedly reduce the likelihood and severity of collisions and make the whole area a lot safer, including for the many kinder and school families who have raised this with me.

That same evidence-based approach should guide future decisions about Darebin Road and Station Street. DTP have already proposed a 40-kilometre-per-hour school speed zone on Station Street during drop-off and pick-up times due to its proximity to Thornbury High School. This will be the most impactful road safety measure we can take, and it is certainly welcome. Facilitating a meeting between the department, the petition organiser Nina Collins, representatives of Thornbury High, Darebin council and my office would ensure that any future consideration of these intersections is informed by data and lived experience, and I look forward to the minister's response.

### Responses

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (19:23): I will start with the member for Lara. She is a fantastic member, and the community is lucky to have her as their representative. I would be very honoured to come and be with her and visit Mount Rothwell sanctuary to see what opportunities lie there.

In relation to the matter raised by the member for Eildon to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety – repairs at Woods Point – I will refer that to the minister. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the Minister for Health in relation to visiting a local chemist in Albert Park to look at how well the chemist care program is working. I will raise that with the Minister for Health. The member for Murray Plains raised for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure a matter in relation to the removal of crossovers at Sunshine station to leverage the opportunities that come from that infrastructure project. The member for Wendouree raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and that was to visit Ballarat station to see the progress of the upgrade works. The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and that was to give some assurance to passengers in relation to safety on train journeys to Melbourne and other matters, and the member for Melbourne raised a matter for the Premier in relation to donation reform. The member for Clarinda – an excellent member as well – raised a matter for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop to provide an update on progress of the works at the proposed stabling site. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Attorney-General in relation to establishing a royal commission, and the member for Northcote – again a fantastic member – raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety seeking a meeting with her local community to discuss road and traffic safety issues in her electorate.

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

**House adjourned 7:25 pm.**