

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 31 March 2026

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Tuesday 31 March 2026

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

Announcements

Victoria Police deaths

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (12:04): *(By leave)* I would like to acknowledge that the Premier is attending the national cabinet this morning and is unable to be in the house, and I make this statement on her behalf. Victoria Police yesterday concluded Taskforce Summit following the fatal shooting of a man during a police operation. This operation brought to an end an intensive six-month investigation following the murders of two police officers, Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, in Porepunkah in August last year and the serious injury of a third police officer.

The events of Tuesday 26 August 2025 will live on in the hearts of all Victorians, and we again express our deepest thanks to Vadim and Neal for the sacrifice they made to keep our community safe. Their courage continues to inspire us. We acknowledge Vadim and Neal's families, loved ones and colleagues, who continue to live with this profound loss. I will never forget the generosity and bravery they displayed in the days after this horrific tragedy and their grace every day since. It is inspiring beyond measure. We thank all police officers, including specialist units from crime command, the fugitive squad, the armed crime squad, the VIPER Taskforce, the special operations group, search and rescue and local police for their tireless work under difficult and often uncertain conditions to bring this investigation to a conclusion. I echo the comments of Chief Commissioner of Police Mike Bush, who described these officers as persistent, professional and diligent. That is Victoria Police at its best, and it is to be commended. We thank other emergency services workers, the specialist units provided from policing jurisdictions across the nation and New Zealand, who have also worked tirelessly to assist Victoria Police with the investigation. I also want to recognise the cooperation and patience of the Porepunkah community and surrounding areas in north-east Victoria, who have lived with the impacts of this crime and provided vital assistance to police.

No outcome can ever undo the tragedy or replace the police officers who should be safely at home with their families. As Police Association Victoria secretary Wayne Gatt said yesterday, the memory of cowards fades quickly, but with heroes it lives on forever. Vadim and Neal will always be remembered for the sacrifices they made, for their service to our community and, most importantly, for the joy they brought to their families and colleagues. 178 Victoria Police officers have lost their lives in the line of duty, and we acknowledge their sacrifice and the sacrifice of their families today. Police are so often the doers. They are on the front line every day in all weather, often putting themselves in harm's way to keep our community safe. And still they come every fortnight at the academy, new constables living their values to serve and protect Victorians, and it is inspiring.

The government, the Parliament, the people of Victoria remember the loss of our police officers. We stand by Victoria Police members and their families. We see you, and we thank you for your service. Vale, Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, and vale, Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (12:08): *(By leave)* I rise today on behalf of the Liberal and Nationals coalition to offer our heartfelt support to Victoria Police in the wake of yesterday's successful operation near Walwa. The operation marked the end of a long and difficult chapter for Victoria Police. For more than six months a man accused of murdering two police officers and seriously injuring another has been on the run. This is a cloud that has hung heavy over all of Victoria during this time, but it is the men and women of Victoria Police who have pushed on, who

have worked tirelessly to bring this matter to a close. The Liberals and Nationals commend the extraordinary skill, determination and persistence of Victoria Police in this regard.

The murder of a police officer is an especially grievous crime because it targets those who we entrust with the protection of our community and upholding the rule of law. Police officers accept unique and significant risks in the course of their duties, often placing themselves in harm's way to keep others safe, so an attack on them represents a profound breach of the social contract that binds us together as a community. That is why the loss of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson VP26182 and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart VP44954 resonates with us. Their murder is not just a personal tragedy but a serious affront to the community as a whole. There will be a sense of relief across the force now but also deep and lasting grief. I acknowledge this grief as members of Victoria Police are again reminded of the risk they face as part of their service to our state.

Our thoughts remain with the families and loved ones of Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart. Nothing can undo their loss, but I hope that the operation yesterday may now help them to move forward. Our thoughts also go out to the community of Porepunkah and surrounds, who have been deeply affected by these events.

Every day, Victorian police officers put themselves in harm's way to protect our community. They run towards danger when others are told to stay away, and they do it without hesitation. That bravery is uncommon and deserving of recognition in this place. To the families who are grieving, know that all Victorians stand with you. To every police officer across our state, we see your courage, we respect your sacrifice and we thank you for your incredible service.

Bills

Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (12:10):
I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to regulate the transport of dangerous goods by vessel on inland waters, by road or by rail, to promote public safety, to protect property and the environment from harm, to repeal the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (12:11): I ask the minister for a brief explanation.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (12:11): The Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 creates a new standalone Dangerous Goods Act to regulate the transport of goods on inland waters, by road or by rail, and to strengthen WorkSafe's powers to take action to address serious risks and to share information around transporting of dangerous goods. The bill will also align transport of dangerous goods with most other jurisdictions around Australia, supporting national consistency and enabling safer outcomes for the dangerous goods transport industry, emergency services and the Victorian public.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026*Introduction and first reading*

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (12:12):
I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 to regulate the handling, and activities involving the handling, of dangerous goods including security-sensitive ammonium nitrate and explosives at workplaces and other places and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (12:12): I request that we also have a brief explanation of this bill.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (12:13): The Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 modernises the regulation of dangerous goods by incorporating them into the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, strengthens the enforcement of dangerous goods duties and strengthens WorkSafe’s powers to address serious risks from dangerous goods. The bill also delivers on the Victorian government’s commitment to improving the regulation of dangerous goods in Victoria by implementing accepted recommendations and associated regulations from the independent review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985.

Read first time.**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.***Petitions***Mornington Peninsula planning**

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) presented a petition bearing 957 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the proposal from the Mornington Peninsula Shire, requested by the State Government’s Minister for Planning, that the Minister urgently introduce an interim erosion management overlay (EMO), following the McCrae Landslide Inquiry, over all land on the Peninsula that is highly susceptible to landslides, but not already covered by an EMO. This proposed overlay is based on Landslide Susceptibility Assessment, Stage 2, Mornington Peninsula Shire (Cardno Lane Piper, 2012). It would apply to 33,000 Mornington Peninsula properties, including many with minimal to no landslide risk.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly ask the Minister for Planning, and the State Government, to: reject the proposed erosion management overlay as it stands; consult further with the community regarding the risk and impacts of landslides; direct the Council to assess the risks and consequences of landslides on the Mornington Peninsula; direct the Council to produce a revised overlay proposal which only covers land that is actually highly susceptible to landslides.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.*Committees***Public Accounts and Estimates Committee***Report on the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes*

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:14): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on the inquiry into the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes, together with extracts from proceedings and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and extracts from proceedings be published.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee*Alert Digest No. 5*

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:15): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 5 of 2026, on the following bills and subordinate legislation, together with their appendices:

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026
 Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026
 Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026
 Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026
 SR No. 118 – Corrections Amendment Regulations 2025

Ordered to be published.

Documents**Documents**

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Results of 2024–25 Audits: Local Government – released on 30 March 2026
 Health, Department of – Report 2024–25 under s 32 of the *Safe Drinking Water Act 2003*
Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 – Register of Interests – Returns submitted by Members of the Legislative Assembly – Ordinary Returns 1 July 2025 to 31 January 2026 (two volumes) – Ordered to be published
 Parliamentary Budget Office – Operational Plan 2026–27
Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes
 Banyule – C172
 Glen Eira – C278
 Melbourne – C494
 Victoria Planning Provisions – VC300, VC304
 Statutory Rules under the following Acts:
 Bail Act 1977 – SR 18
 Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 – SR 19
 Wildlife Act 1975 – SR 20
Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 16, 18.

Bills**Electoral Amendment Bill 2025***Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (12:17): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 61 –
***61A Indicative two candidate preferred distribution of preferences**
 (1) In section 116 of the Principal Act, for “If the” **substitute** “Subject to subsection (2), if the”.

- (2) At the end of section 116 of the Principal Act **insert** –
- “(2) In the case of an Assembly election –
- (a) the Commission must direct the election manager to proceed with the scrutiny referred to in subsection (1) for each district; and
 - (b) the election manager must comply with that direction within 3 months after receiving it.”.

2. Clause 92, page 53, lines 1 to 12, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

‘(d) for the definition of *political expenditure substitute* –

“*political expenditure* –

 - (a) means any expenditure for the dominant purpose of directing how a person should vote at an election, by promoting or opposing –
 - (i) the election of any candidate at the election; or
 - (ii) a registered political party; or
 - (iii) an elected member; but
 - (b) does not include –
 - (i) expenditure incurred by an associated entity or third party campaigner or any material that is published, aired or otherwise disseminated outside of the election campaigning period, unless the material refers to –
 - (A) a candidate or a registered political party; and
 - (B) how a person should vote at an election; or
 - (ii) expenditure for which a registered political party, elected member, group or candidate is entitled to any credit, rebate, refund, reimbursement or other kind of reduction in tax liability under any law;”.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (12:18): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The Electoral Amendment Bill 2025 will ensure that key parts of the Electoral Act 2002 are fit for purpose, given the scale and complexity of modern state elections. The bill also clarifies requirements for the conduct of state elections to ensure they can continue to be delivered in an efficient, transparent and organised manner.

The bill was passed in the other place with amendments on 19 March 2026. The government had an amendment to clause 92(1)(d) of the bill relating to the definition of ‘political expenditure’. This is a technical amendment, only necessary because house amendments were made to the bill when it passed the Assembly on 5 March 2026. The definition was intended to operate in conjunction with a clause which has been removed from the bill following the house amendments. This meant that the definition in the bill was unworkable and a new definition was necessary. This was only picked up after the bill passed the Assembly. The amendment returned the definition of ‘political expenditure’ as it is in the Electoral Act now, while adding that ‘political expenditure’ does not include any rebate, refund, reimbursement or other kind of reduction in tax liability under any law, such as GST. This was always part of the bill and avoids parties double-claiming GST credits.

The government carefully considered the amendments that were circulated by the opposition and the Greens in the other place. The government supported one of the Liberals’ amendments concerning the requirement of a two-candidate-preferred count to be done in every seat, and we thank the opposition for working constructively with the government on this amendment.

The government did not support the other Liberal amendments to the bill, which included removing a clause in the bill providing that certain electoral material not require the name and address of the authoriser and printers of the material. The amendment would have retained the current requirements of the Electoral Act. We did not support this, because our changes simply bring the materials into line

with modern requirements for electoral materials. Besides Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory are the only other Australian jurisdictions that currently require the name and address of printers to be disclosed on electoral materials. South Australia removed the requirement, effective from January 2026.

We also did not support removing a clause to allow the Electoral Commissioner to delegate to the Deputy Electoral Commissioner in a number of circumstances.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members, there is too much audible conversation in the chamber. I am having trouble hearing the Leader of the House. If members wish to have conversations, they can go outside the chamber.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: For example, the clause would permit the commissioner to delegate the power to the deputy commissioner to allow or disallow a ballot paper on a recount if the number of ballot papers reserved under the relevant section of the act for the decision of the commission may determine whether a particular candidate is declared elected. We considered that allowing the commissioner to delegate is reasonable and not uncommon for statutory office holders. This delegation may be important if the commissioner faces illness or sudden absence or if there are multiple close counts in the state which require the commissioner to determine whether ballots should be allowed or disallowed.

The government did not support the Greens amendment to ban political donations from certain people and entities, including property developers, building and construction industry entities and fossil fuel entities. As the Leader of the Government said in the debate in the other place, we consider the amendments unnecessary because of the 2018 donations changes we introduced. In 2018 we introduced the toughest political donation laws in Australia to ensure that Victorians know who makes political donations and when. The electoral review panel reviewed Victoria's donation laws, and to quote its report from November 2023 tabled in Parliament:

... considered that Victoria's disclosure requirements and low general cap on political donations make it unnecessary to introduce bans on donations from particular industries.

Thus the low general cap is a crucial factor which made the Greens amendment unnecessary.

In conclusion, the bill contains sensible measures to ensure our elections run more smoothly, many of which have been requested by the Victorian Electoral Commission, and we thank all members who engaged constructively with the government throughout the bill's development and passage. I commend the amendments to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:22): I rise to speak on behalf of the coalition on the amendments before the house as they have returned from the Council: one in relation to the political expenditure definitional change and one relating to two-candidate preferred distribution. The Leader of the House did raise a number of other matters, but those matters were discussed in debate in the Council, so I will leave those discussions there. A number of those issues were also raised in this chamber when the bill was originally here.

I note the Leader of the House's background to the political expenditure definitional change that she referred to but also that of the Treasurer in the other place, and if I may, I will put into *Hansard* her comments there.

I do want to put on record that in seeking a copy of *Hansard* from the Council I learned that the Council *Hansard* is not printed, which I hope is an issue that never occurs in this place, because some of us refer to physical copies of *Hansard* quite regularly. So I will, in an uncouth way, be forced to read

from my computer the comments of the Treasurer in the other place. The comments of the Treasurer in the other place in relation to the amendment were:

It is a technical amendment only and is necessary because of house amendments that were made to the bill when it passed the Assembly on 5 March. The definition was intended to operate in conjunction with a clause which has been removed from the bill following those house amendments, which means that the definition in the bill currently is unworkable and a new definition is necessary.

I take both at face value but also in detail the fact that that is what it is – a non-controversial technical amendment. So the coalition does not have an issue with it.

In relation to the two-candidate preferred distribution of preferences, we very much thank the government for working with the coalition on the amendment that we proposed. We felt that it was more than passing strange the volume of electorates that did not have full two-party preference counts done. And when the amendment was considered, when debate occurred both in this place and the other place, I know that the Electoral Commission was consulted and – I do not want to put words in their mouth and suggest that they did not support it, because that would not be fair – I do think that they had some concerns as to the full need to do a two-preference count. The Electoral Commission on their website suggests that now some 20 electorates did not reach a full two-party preference count, which I think is wrong. I am not aware of any other state where those counts are not fully completed. I think it is only reasonable in a preference system – setting aside whether a preference system is good, bad or otherwise – that the community knows how their preferences were distributed. I mean, if we have a preference system, it is only reasonable that that occurs. And to see that at the last election that did not occur – I felt very strongly about this, because this occurred in Brighton, my electorate, and it has been a bugbear of mine ever since. So I thank the government and the Premier's office specifically for working with me, on behalf of the coalition, on this amendment. We will certainly be supporting an amendment which we proposed, and as I said earlier, in relation to the other amendment, we have no issue with that either.

Motion agreed to.

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

Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (12:27): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Assembly's and Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (12:27): I have received a message from the Legislative Council not insisting on their amendments 18, 25 and 26 and agreeing to further amendments made by the Legislative Assembly to the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025.

Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025

National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025

Royal assent

The SPEAKER (12:27): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025 and the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025.

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026**Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026***Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (12:28): I have received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 and the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026.

*Business of the house***Program**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (12:28): I move:

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

Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026

Restoring TAFE in Victoria – motion

Big Housing Build – motion

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026.

Can I begin by acknowledging and thanking the Minister for Police, on behalf of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, for their words, and can I add, in my capacity as Leader of the House, the condolences that we all extend to the families of the slain and incredibly courageous members of Victoria Police. It is a solemn day, but we hope also that for those families, as we have said, a chapter can close now, understanding of course that it will never take away their feelings of grief and loss.

The theme for this week is all about housing and getting on with it, building the homes that Victorians need and deserve and, of course, taking the opportunity to remind the house that it is only a Labor government that has a real plan for tackling what is the most significant challenge of our time.

This is being done through the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. We want to ensure that Victorians get the strong protections that they need when building or renovating their homes, because for most Victorians this will be the largest single financial investment that they ever make. Victorians deserve confidence that their builder and their plumber will be doing the right thing. The bill strengthens enforcement against dodgy operators and poor workmanship. Our government are absolutely committed to strengthening the protections that are available to Victorian families, and we are doing this by strengthening the regulator responsible for protecting Victorian home owners and enforcing building standards. It is all about ensuring that Victorians have confidence in our construction sector. Of course this bill, as I have already indicated, is significant in the way in which it addresses one of our key priorities, which is ensuring that we are building more houses and making it easier for Victorians to access the homes that they need and deserve.

The Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 is, as it says, all about repealing the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 that was in place. We can only bring this bill to this place because we have now successfully completed our world-leading cladding rectification program. Cladding Safety Victoria has helped address dangerous combustible cladding on hundreds of buildings right across the state, and now, as I have said, with this work largely complete, the legislation finalises the program and removes the cladding levy – and that means of course lower costs for building projects while maintaining strong safety standards for Victorians. I was reflecting on this work and again thought about how quickly our government responded to a crisis that we saw unfold in the most dreadful and tragic circumstances in the UK. We took pre-emptive steps here in Victoria, to ensure that we would not see a tragedy of such a scale occur here in Victoria, by proactively working to remove this combustible cladding.

Finally, we have two motions that are on the program this week, the Big Housing Build motion and the restoring TAFE in Victoria motion. I look forward to the Manager of Opposition Business' comments that he will undoubtedly make on these motions. But I want to say this: we believe that it is absolutely vital that we use our time in this place to outline our priorities to the people of Victoria so they can clearly see the difference between the priorities of our strong, united Allan Labor government and those on the other side, who are, quite frankly, yet to detail in any way, shape or form what their priorities are. We are waiting to see some policy. I commend this government business program to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:33): I rise to speak on the government business program, and I will start in the same way that the Leader of the House did in relation to the comments that both the Minister for Police and the Leader of the Opposition made further to the motion this house considered last year following the tragedy in Porepunkah. If I may just mention it, at that time the widow of one of the slain officers, murdered officers, spoke at the funeral of the officer and said that they looked to the sky and the weather of the day to feel whether or not their partner was still with us, and yesterday, on a beautiful sunny Melbourne day, we learned the news of the events that occurred yesterday. When first hearing an update from police, I immediately looked to the sky and remembered that reflection that she made at that time, and what a beautiful day it was to know that perhaps he was with us, all Victorians, yesterday as that news came in.

Again, on behalf of the coalition, we send our thoughts to all of those who have been touched by the tragedy but also to the emergency services personnel who never stopped working every single day – every single day – to ensure that justice was achieved. On behalf of the coalition, I pass on those comments.

In relation to the government business program, I do note, as I started to say last week on the government business program debate, my concern is that the government is so lacking in ideas that it is clear we are not seeing a full government business program and our Parliament used for politics rather than dealing with substantive legislation. That does not mean there is no legislation on the program. What I am saying is that a large part of Parliament's time is now used for government base politics. Considering we are in a final year of a term, usually what happens is governments have so much legislation for background to the house and more broadly that governments start to prioritise the legislation that is forthcoming and they start to work through how they can get enough bills through the Parliament, through the lower house and the upper house, before the end of the session. As someone who when we were in government managed this process, I can see this government does not have a legislative program. They do not have a legislative program anywhere near justifying what you would expect from a sitting government. We are seeing a very light-on program by this government, a government that is leaning into base politics over legislative reform, which I think quite clearly shows why Victorians more broadly have lost trust in this government. They have lost trust in this government and –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Narre Warren North, you are not in your place. Interjections are disorderly.

James NEWBURY: I would say my observation, which I began last week but now have the opportunity to put on the record more fully, on looking at the government business program is that the government is spending a lot of time on politics. You can see it in the program this week. We will not support a program which is about base politics. That is not a reflection on the program or some of the bills that are in the program each week, it is a reflection on the government using probably half of our parliamentary time now for base politics. The coalition not only does not support the program in that form but is calling it out. Not only do I suspect will we maybe consider the two motions on the program, but I am sure the government will afford time on another sledge motion this week. I do not think anyone would be surprised by it. The government is spending more time on sledge motions in

this chamber than on legislative reform, which is just wrong, so we cannot support that. We certainly cannot support a program of that nature. I think Victorians will see over coming months how light on this legislative program is and how the government has not got the priorities that Victorians expect to be dealt with. Again, on this program, we certainly will not be supporting it.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (12:39): It is a pleasure to rise and make a contribution to the government business program debate and follow my colleague, the Leader of the House, in her contribution. It has been a busy week away from this place. My colleagues and I have been in our communities talking about everything that this government is doing to help Victorian families. I note this week we are talking about housing, something we on this side are incredibly passionate about. The Leader of the House's passion comes through in every debate, and I know she is passionate about housing, as we all are on this side.

My colleagues and I have been speaking about the things that matter to Victorians, and the increasing cost of petrol is something we have all been talking about in our electorates. While we cannot control the war in the Middle East, there is plenty that we can do and we are doing.

From today public transport in Victoria is free until the end of April. You can leave your Myki at home. Whether you are jumping on the train, tram or bus right across Victoria, you will not have to tap on and you will not have to pay. That is the kind of thing that this government prioritises – real support for hardworking Victorian families. We have also had the much welcome news this week that the federal government has halved the fuel excise tax to 26 cents per litre. When they need to fill up the car, Victorians can use the Victorian government Servo Saver app to check for the lowest fuel costs in their area.

We know that while we have been busy in our community, those opposite have also been busy with their own. They have had some business of their own to attend to, with a number of very, very, very hard fought preselection battles that we have seen play out across the media this week.

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

The SPEAKER: Member for Lara, you have digressed significantly from the government business program, and I will ask you to come back to the government business program. I do not want to have to remind you again.

Ella GEORGE: Back to the government business program in what is shaping up to be a very, very busy week in this place. We on this side are focused on delivering what matters most to Victorians, and this week, as the Leader of the House mentioned in her contribution, we are focusing on housing. What a shock to see that those opposite are not supporting it. I do not think they have supported a single government business program in this session of Parliament, which is very disappointing but probably something we should not be surprised by at this point.

This week we have the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 on the notice paper. I am actually quite shocked that those opposite are not supporting this, given the role that former Premier Ted Baillieu played in setting up Cladding Safety Victoria. I believe he was formerly the co-chair of a cladding safety body that was set up by a Labor government. I know he had a real passion about making sure that Victorians were kept safe from faulty cladding and potentially flammable cladding, so I am actually quite surprised that those opposite are not getting behind this bill, which one of their colleagues I am sure would be supporting. This bill is something truly to celebrate. In Victoria we have led cladding rectification work. It has been a world-leading reform that has seen buildings across the state made so much safer with the removal of potentially combustible cladding. It is no shock to anyone in this place that it was a Labor government that established and funded Cladding Safety Victoria to protect Victorians from combustible cladding related harm. Cladding Safety Victoria has then gone on to identify buildings which put Victorians most at risk, fronted half the cost of removal and made tens of thousands of homes safe from combustible cladding. This is the real reform that we are talking about on this side of the house when we say we are backing in Victorians who want to get

into safe homes. It is a program of which Victorians can be very proud, and I am very, very proud that the state Labor government has delivered that and has completed this program, and I look forward to hearing my colleagues make contributions on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill as we progress this week.

Also on the notice paper we have the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026, another incredibly important bill for Victorians. I hope those opposite will take a look at it and decide that they can back it too. It is a bill that only a Labor government would bring before this house, because Labor fights for working people who are making the biggest investment of their entire lives when they are buying or building a home. The Liberals leave Victorians on their own when they have the chance to come to the table and help us help working Victorian homebuyers. They try and stop these reforms even being debated and vote against our reforms – we have seen that time and time again from those opposite. I do commend the government business program.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (12:44): Once again here we are discussing a government business program light in actual legislative reform that could help improve the lives of everyday Victorians and in fact, in some cases, could make them more costly. If we want to talk about housing and solving a housing crisis, and clearly the government does – for what reason I am not quite sure – and if we want to talk about providing housing and incentivising private landlords again, or builders, the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 that is on the program this week certainly will not do that. In fact it will add to the pressure that builders in this state are under, and we know that they are under a lot. That is one of the main issues that we have in the regions. I know that it is hard for this government to think outside of the Melbourne city limits, but one of the hardest things we have in regional Victoria right now is finding tradies to actually build more houses, to the point where we have some entrepreneurial businesspeople finding themselves creating side hustles, if you will, in very quick to construct housing to backfill small towns or provide housing where it is actually needed out in the regions.

That all seemed like a good idea until the last couple of weeks. I do not want to be alarmist or make alarmist claims; however, there is an issue we have now with finding not only the people to construct new housing but the materials that are used in relation to anything that uses petrochemicals – PVC piping, any of the conduit stuff, pretty much anything – the costs for which have gone up at least 36 per cent overnight. It again contributes to an increased cost of building a house, an increased cost of buying a house, of getting into housing, and an increased cost of rentals. Then you add on 62 new or increased taxes and you add on the rest of the waste from this government – \$15 billion into the pockets of criminals on Big Build sites. I mean, this is a government –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the member on her feet is required to be truthful. I ask that you bring her back to debating the narrow procedural –

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will resume her seat. There is a requirement that all members, when they are on their feet, be truthful. Member for Mildura, I ask you to come back to the government business program.

Jade BENHAM: I mean, the fact that the Leader of the House thinks that that is not truthful is quite perplexing, to be fair. If this government cared about Victorians, who are going through not just a cost-of-living crisis but a housing crisis, a crime crisis and now a fuel crisis – farmers are facing a fertiliser crisis. This is a government that has created a crisis in just about every sector of this state, and to present a government business program with two bills and two sledge motions is an absolute insult to every single Victorian when we have a plethora of crises that have been created by poor policy by this government. And now they ask us to be truthful – this is the truth, this is reality and this is why this government will not be able to make life easier for Victorians in the foreseeable future. It is that simple. When they are presenting a government business program like this, how can we even consider supporting it? Honestly, we are coming up to the last sitting week leading into the Easter break, and the next sitting will be when we return for the 2026–27 budget. We have another motion that the

government could choose to finish debating, the take-note motion of the 2025–26 budget, and I know that colleagues on this side of the house would love to debate that. The government will not go anywhere near that because they understand how horrific it has been for Victorians, particularly over the last 12 months, and it is getting worse. That is fact. That is the truth. I know that is very hard for this government to swallow.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:48): I am really proud to rise to speak in support of the government business program. It is absolutely no surprise that those opposite are not supporting it. You could hear it in each of their statements so far, because all that those opposite have come here with today is alarm and no solutions – no practical solutions for Victorians. Our government business program is focused squarely on the work we are doing to provide practical support. Protecting people from fire in their buildings was something really practical we did to support over 150,000 Victorians. Making sure that dodgy builders get out of the sector so that people who spend their hard-earned money to build their home can know that it is going to be somewhere they can house and grow their family, and they are opposing it – practical support for Victorians. I am also not –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a government business program debate, not a bill debate. The member is reflecting on what the opposition may or may not do in a bill debate. This is a government business program debate.

The SPEAKER: Some members have digressed significantly from the government business program already. Member for Yan Yean, come back to the government business program.

Lauren KATHAGE: On the government business program is our housing motion as well as our building bill. Those opposite are opposing the government business program for the week. It is not a surprise to me as someone from the outer suburbs, because we saw their housing policy when it stuck its head above the parapet and it has disappeared ever since. Their policy was to rush development in the outer suburbs.

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

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the member on her feet is being relevant to the government business program, which also countenances two motions that will be taken to the guillotine this week.

The SPEAKER: I do not mind some comparison, member for Yan Yean, but I do remind you that this is a very tight debate on the government business program.

Lauren KATHAGE: It is really important to me and my community that this government business program goes ahead this week. We have estates being built in the outer suburbs where the quality of people's lives for years to come depends on making sure and having confidence that the people that build their homes do it properly – that they can trust that the result of their hard-earned money, their hard-earned savings, is not going to fall down around their head and they can rely on that. In doing that, we do not have a good guy and a bad guy in this in terms of tradies. We love proud tradies. They should be proud of their work, and they are. That is why this government business program is working to make sure that we can get the dodgy builders out of the way, so people can have confidence in the money that they are spending and proud tradies can continue to be proud of the work that they are doing and rightly receive the thanks of people whose homes are built by them.

As we heard from the member for Lara, these practical steps that we are taking are what we are hearing from our communities that they want to see from us. Our communities want this government business program to be focused on them – not on ourselves, not on alarmist claims and not on drama but on practical, everyday help that means that Victorians can achieve the type of life that they aspire to achieve and that our community can move forward, united without division and reaching the best of our abilities. That is why I stand so strongly in support of this government business program.

On the government business program is the free TAFE motion. People in the communities that I represent have built their livelihoods on TAFE and, I am proud to say, are increasingly building their livelihoods on free TAFE. The types of people, if I can say it like that, who are building these lives are increasingly diverse. Women, people with disabilities and people who live in regional Victoria are increasingly receiving a free TAFE education and setting up themselves and their families for the future. So this government business program focused squarely and solely on the people of Victoria is something that I believe we should be debating this week.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (12:54): This week's government business program tells us everything we need to know about this Allan Labor government. As raised by the member for Brighton and the member for Mildura, this government business program is not one that we will support. What is this government business program about and what does it contain? First, in this government business program we are asked to deal with two building bills that exist because Victoria's building system has been plagued by defects, weak oversight and declining confidence, such as in Culcairn Drive in Frankston South, which I have been raising since 2018. Then, after that, this Labor government asks this chamber to sit through two basically self-congratulatory motions so it can applaud itself for both TAFE and housing. That is the pattern of this government in a nutshell – failure first and spin second.

This TAFE motion is basically one that my colleagues will talk about with respect to the fact that no-one on this side of the house doubts the value of vocational education. Victoria indeed needs apprentices, tradies, nurses, carers, technicians and skilled workers, so TAFE does matter. But this motion is not really about supporting students, it is about this government patting itself on the back. This motion boasts of more than \$16 billion in investment and it talks about more than \$777 million in saved tuition fees, yet the very amendment before the house points to a much less flattering reality. Labor's own Silver review found duplication across the TAFE network was hurting service delivery and the student experience, and it recommended shared service reform and even consideration of mergers or a single entity. That is not the language of a system in good health. This Labor government cannot seriously come in here and demand a standing ovation for restoring TAFE, as per this motion while its own commission review is pointing to inefficiency, duplication and structural problems. When the amendment moved by the member for Evelyn notes that 'real recurrent expenditure per annual hour in Victoria is the lowest in the nation', that should trouble every member of this place. Victorian students deserve more than a slogan; they deserve a system that is properly run, properly resourced and focused on outcomes, not headlines.

Then under this government business program we come to the so-called Big Housing Build motion. Again, this government wants praise for the branding, but Victorians are not living in a slogan, they are living in a housing and homelessness crisis. The government's own housing statement set a target of 800,000 homes over 10 years. Its own housing material says that the Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund are delivering over 13,000 social and affordable homes and that the broader combined programs deliver over 16,000 homes, with parts of the pipeline running through to 2051. Those figures do not justify a victory lap; they show just how large the challenge is and how far we still have to go to get there. The latest ABS figures should be setting off alarm bells. Victoria's total dwelling approvals fell 32.2 per cent in December 2025 and then fell another 11 per cent in January of this year. I note we have over 65,000 on the public housing waitlist and over 30,000 on the priority waitlist, and on the peninsula public housing has hardly moved forward at all. We have the highest amount of rough sleeping in the state, and in three weeks we will have the closure of what is basically our one and only crisis accommodation. You do not solve a housing crisis by issuing press releases or self-congratulatory motions, as we see today. Zoning does not pour concrete, and targets do not build homes. We need actual solutions and actual funding.

Next we have the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. This house should be clear-eyed about what is actually happening. Cladding Safety Victoria was always intended to be a temporary body, and its functions, assets and liabilities are now being folded back into the broader regulatory architecture. Let us not pretend that this marks some triumphant conclusion to a problem that this

government helped oversee. Serious questions remain about residual risks, future responsibilities and the use of remaining funds.

Last we have the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026, which raises even more serious concerns. We have a government that has totally failed in this space. They have not enforced existing laws properly. What is to make us think they will do this any better?

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Home, 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, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Qaim Foundation Iftar dinner

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (13:05): I rise today to reflect on a very special event that took place a few weeks ago, and that is of course the Kororoit annual iftar dinner, which I hosted as part of Ramadan celebrations. This was the fourth Kororoit annual iftar dinner which I proudly hosted with the Qaim Foundation, and it is one that brings together many people from many different faiths in our community. The evening brought together so many different people, and it has grown from strength to strength on other years. We were able to share a meal and celebrate the values that unite our community: respect, compassion and understanding. Events like this truly reflect the spirit of Melbourne's west, where diversity is not only embraced but celebrated.

During the holy month of Ramadan iftar holds deep significance. It is the moment when families and communities gather to break their fast after a day of reflection, prayer and service to others. What makes the Kororoit iftar dinner particularly meaningful is that it opens up the important tradition to the wider community, creating an opportunity for people of all faiths and all backgrounds to come together in friendship. The Qaim Foundation Australia has played a remarkable role in fostering connection and interfaith harmony across the community through their ongoing work to create a space where people can learn from, build, understand and strengthen the bond that holds our communities together. Beyond hosting events like the iftar dinner, the Qaim Foundation contributes to the community through youth engagement and other programs. I want to thank the Qaim Foundation, our multicultural community leaders and everyone who attended the evening, and I look very much forward to the annual Kororoit iftar dinner next year.

Victoria Police deaths

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (13:06): Our men and women of Victoria Police do an amazing job in very difficult circumstances, and finally the families of the late Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart and members of Victoria Police have closure after a six-month manhunt for cop killer

Dezi Freeman. We thank Victoria Police for the great work that they have done to bring him to justice and for the great work they do each and every day to keep us safe.

Community safety

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (13:06): When it comes to safety, particularly members of my community, the Jewish community, are seeing an unprecedented increase in antisemitism. A report just released by the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and Community Security Group Victoria shows an alarming increase of 564 incidents in 12 months. Each and every day we are seeing another antisemitic attack, and enough is enough. We saw a horrific attack just over the weekend in Ripponlea, when a group of teenagers in a stolen car went out targeting Jews in our community, throwing eggs at them and screaming out profanities. This is absolutely hateful and shameful. And when talking to Victoria Police on the weekend, they reminded me that it will just be catch and release – these individuals will be caught and they will be back on the streets again with no consequences. There must be consequences. We cannot just keep seeing report after report, with police being stretched in resources, our courts not doing their job and no consequences in Victoria. This needs to change. These reports need to flow into action, and the government needs to finally do its job.

Ballarat train station

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (13:08): The new pedestrian overpass at Ballarat station is now officially open, making our station safer and more accessible. I was delighted to join with community members to take the opportunity to use the new overpass for the very first time, especially people with a disability, who campaigned tirelessly for the overpass. This important upgrade delivers stair and lift access to each platform, ensuring people with disability, parents with prams and travellers with luggage can cross the rail line safely without leaving the station precinct. The 28-metre overpass has been designed for accessibility and is wide enough for two wheelchairs or mobility scooters to comfortably pass each other. This follows last year's improvements at the station's northern entrance, including a new ramp, stairs, handrails and an automatic swing door, further strengthening accessibility for all passengers.

Ballarat Central Uniting Church

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (13:08): I also was honoured to attend the Ballarat Central Uniting Church to unveil the new peace pole, one of several now installed across Ballarat. Each peace pole stands as a quiet but powerful reminder of our shared humanity and our universal message: may peace prevail on earth. My heartfelt thanks to Adri Stickland, BCUC chair; Bron James, social justice group convenor; Madonna Quixley, co-convenor of Let's Talk Peace Ballarat; and Reverend Lauleti Tu'inauvai. A peace pole is more than a marker; it is a promise that we will keep building a community where everyone, regardless of background, culture, language or faith, feels safe, respected and valued.

Economic policy

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (13:09): I want to highlight a crisis the Victorian Labor government seems determined to ignore: a slow, grinding economic exodus across northern Victoria. Businesses which have supported local jobs for generations are being pushed to the brink, not by market forces, not by lack of demand, but by a tax regime so suffocating that survival itself is becoming impossible. Let us be absolutely clear: these are not hypothetical concerns; they are real employers, real families and real communities. People are telling me that they are now packing up and crossing the Murray River into New South Wales because they simply cannot afford to stay in Victoria any longer. Why – because in New South Wales they are not treated like a bottomless ATM.

They are not buried under layers and layers of tax, levies and compliance costs, making it even harder to employ people, harder to expand and harder to breathe. Meanwhile, here in Victoria this government continues to squeeze – payroll tax, land tax, emergency services tax. Every year it is something new, something higher, something harsher. And the result is businesses are not just struggling, they are leaving. What does this mean for towns in my electorate such as Echuca, Swan Hill, Koondrook and

Kerang? It means empty shopfronts. It means lost jobs. It means young people forced to leave their communities because the opportunities have dried up. It means the economic hollowing out of entire regions while the government pats itself on the back. This is not just bad policy, this is economic vandalism. The message from northern Victoria is loud and clear: stop punishing businesses and start supporting those who actually drive our economies.

Geelong sports infrastructure

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (13:11): At the 2022 state election I made an election commitment of \$2 million to build female-friendly facilities at the North Shore sports club. This community club had a growing netball division but nowhere for women and girls to get changed before and after their games and training. Fast-forward a few years later: netball participation is still growing, and these facilities are just about complete and ready to be handed over to the netballers. I had a sneak peek of the new change rooms, and they look amazing – bright and clean new spaces for home and away teams, toilets and showers, an umpire’s room, a first-aid room and an office. The football facilities have also been refurbished, and footballers have new change room facilities too. The \$2 million commitment has kicked off a massive upgrade at Windsor Park in Norlane, with \$500,000 from council and \$4 million from the federal government. This community sports club is turning into a world-class facility that will help boost participation in sport in Geelong’s north.

North Geelong Warriors

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (13:12): Last weekend I attended the North Geelong Warriors annual Fešta celebration. It was another fantastic celebration, bringing the community together to celebrate the Croatian heritage of so many in Geelong’s north, and what better way to celebrate than with football, food, music and culture. A special thankyou to the North Geelong Warriors and their dedicated team of volunteers, who worked so hard to make the 2026 Fešta such a success. They are an amazing community club, and I wish them all the all the very best for the season ahead.

Archie McKay

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (13:12): I would like to acknowledge Archie McKay, a wonderful young man in the Sandringham community, who was selected recently to represent our community at the National Youth Parliament. I was thrilled to support Archie’s application for this, and as a former participant in that program myself, I think that Archie will do very, very well there. He is a great young fella. He has been recognised as a 2024 lifesaver of the year, which emphasises, in my view, his dedication, character and belief in our community. Go get ’em, Archie.

Bay Road, Sandringham

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (13:13): Bay Road is a dangerous road in my community. I recently wrote to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in relation to this, and it is only getting worse. Unfortunately, very recently there was another crash close to my office on Bay Road in Sandringham, in which a car collided with a traffic pole. Thankfully, no-one was hurt, but it is only a matter of time before, I believe, someone is seriously hurt on Bay Road. I encourage the minister and the government to address this matter urgently.

Beaumaris North Primary School

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (13:13): It is school fete season, and Beaumaris North Primary School recently celebrated their fate. I would like to thank all those incredibly wonderful parents and volunteers who contributed to the success of that day, especially to Natalie Northey, the fete convenor, and her team for putting on an excellent day.

Easter

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (13:13): I acknowledge for those Christians within our community that this week is Holy Week. In anticipation of Easter Sunday, I say happy Sunday,

hallelujah, he is risen! It is a time for those who remember Holy Week to reflect and to improve their lives.

Cultural Diversity Week

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (13:14): Last week was Cultural Diversity Week, a great opportunity to come together to celebrate our state's diverse and powerful multicultural community. It was my great pleasure to have the Premier out in the Clarinda electorate to celebrate with the Zee Cheng Khor Moral Uplifting Society together with so many different multicultural and multifaith organisations from across the electorate and across the south-east. As the member for Clarinda, I am incredibly proud to represent one of the most diverse and vibrant communities in Victoria, a place where people from many cultures, languages and backgrounds live, work and thrive together. Victoria is one of the most successful multicultural societies in the world, and last week was another great opportunity to celebrate this and to reflect on the amazing contribution of our multicultural and multifaith communities in Victoria.

I am extremely proud to be part of a government that values and supports a multicultural and inclusive society where opportunity is open to all and diversity is celebrated. I would like to acknowledge and thank Stephen Chew, the president of Zee Cheng Khor Moral Uplifting Society, and all our community leaders and volunteers for the amazing work that they do to support our vibrant community. Finally, congratulations to the Vietnamese Museum Australia on practical completion – an exciting milestone. I cannot wait for the official opening later this year.

Farm World

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (13:15): I would like to take this opportunity to give a big shout-out to Craig Debnam and the entire team at Farm World 2026. It was the 59th year of Farm World, with more than 450 exhibitors and over 750 brands. It was an absolutely fantastic three days out there. This year they had something a little bit different. We had the inaugural Pollie Tractor Challenge out there this year, and it was a great pleasure to take part in this. The Nationals and the Liberals turned up to it. We did not see Labor there, but that is not unusual in regional Victoria – they generally go missing in regional Victoria. We hardly saw them at all for the whole weekend. I will say we had a small win there, the Liberal Party: I managed to beat the Leader of the Nationals, the member for Gippsland South, in the tractor challenge, and I was very, very happy with myself.

While I was out there I spoke to hundreds and hundreds of people over the weekend, and what was the biggest issue they brought up with me: 'Where did the \$15 billion go? Where has the \$15 billion gone?' While we struggle in regional Victoria, nobody can tell us where the \$15 billion has gone. We have got farmers struggling, our roads have gone to absolute ruin and they just want answers. Victorians deserve it.

Working from home

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (13:17): The option to work from home is making a humungous difference to families right across my electorate of Tarneit. Working from home is all about providing flexibility and building a modern system that reflects how families live today. That is why the work being done by the Allan Labor government is so important. Supporting flexible work is a genuine option, not just a temporary change. What we are seeing as a result of this increased flexibility is families getting back time lost to commuting. Even an hour's commute each way is 10 hours a week. That is 10 hours you do not get to spend with your kids, that is 10 hours you do not get to rest, that is 10 hours that you do not get back. Working from home gives that time straight back to people. Commuting costs also add up – fuel, public transport, parking and food on the go. For many families that is thousands of dollars each and every year. Working from home reduces those costs, providing real savings right away. This policy is also beneficial to the many small businesses in my community of Tarneit. Tarneit is one of the fastest growing small business communities in the state, and when people work closer to home, they spend closer to home. They are buying coffee locally, they are using

local services and they are backing local jobs. That means money in our community. That helps small business grow. At its core this is simple: working from home, when done properly, means more time for families, less pressure on household budgets and stronger local economies. In communities like Tarneit, families are seeing these benefits in real time.

Morwell electorate schools

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (13:18): I have had the privilege of visiting several local schools this term and meeting their outstanding student leaders. I say a huge thankyou to Stockdale Road Primary School, Morwell Park Primary School, Hazelwood North Primary School, Traralgon South Primary School, Kurnai College, St Vincent's Primary School in Morwell and Lumen Christi Primary School in Churchill. Thank you so much for welcoming me into your leadership ceremonies and classrooms. It has been fantastic. To all this year's school students, congratulations. Being elected to a leadership position is both an honour and a responsibility. Your peers have placed their trust in you, and I have every confidence you will approach your role with dedication, integrity and enthusiasm. I look forward to seeing the positive impact you will have on your school community.

This week I also had the privilege of attending Lavalla Catholic College in Traralgon. It is my former secondary school. The member for Gippsland South, the member for Hawthorn and the member for Frankston on the other side of the chamber also attended Lavalla Catholic College, and I was pleased to show the principal a photo of us former students here in Parliament.

In closing, I do have an Easter presentation coming up, with over 700 students doing a colouring competition, and I will award our winners shortly.

Lina Hassan

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (13:20): I rise to pay tribute to Lina Hassan, a resident of the Thomastown electorate who has just celebrated 30 years of service with Your Community Health. However, this is not Lina's only story. Lina lives and breathes community and is a strong advocate for social justice and empowerment and a genuine humanitarian. She practises these values in all aspects of her life and volunteers much of her own time as well. In fact it is sometimes hard to know where Lina's paid work starts and her volunteering ends. I first worked with Lina as a new MP to organise an exhibition in Queen's Hall. While we did not know each other well, she helped enormously, organising exhibits for the Victorian Arabic Social Service and traditional dress exhibits and providing advice and much, much more. I see her regularly at events, celebrations and community awareness programs. All of her work is driven by care and concern for others.

No-one can really tell where their life will lead. Lina grew up in Tripoli, Lebanon, and started her working life as an actor after her studies in performing arts. She then went on to study soil testing and chemical science, but this was interrupted by the civil war. Lina migrated to Australia and has worked in many fields, but her passion is community service. Sadly, as I give this statement, Lebanon again is embroiled in war. My heart and thoughts go out to those affected by the Israeli attacks on sovereign nations. Not only do I think of those affected in Lebanon but also of those Australians for whom this triggers the memories of past traumas. Lina's experience has led her to her passion to support and work with refugee women and families, guiding them through the system, encouraging them to believe in themselves and showing them how to make their way in a new country. I was honoured to attend Lina's celebration.

Ringwood electorate

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (13:21): I rise today to highlight the priorities of my community in Ringwood. Recently I put out a call asking locals to nominate the issues they wanted raised in this place and received some great responses. People spoke about graffiti in their streets and the impact it has on community pride. They raised smoke and air quality and what that means for their health and wellbeing. They demanded action on the Maroondah Hospital rebuild and shared the importance of protecting crucial health services close to home. They shared their views about teachers and making

sure they are properly supported and valued. They sounded the alarm about the environment and the kind of future we are building for the next generation. These issues are different, but the message is consistent: people want to be heard, they want practical action and they want follow-through, and they expect a government that is responsive to their concerns, responsible in its decisions and focused on what matters most. My community deserves nothing less.

Heathmont train station

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (13:22): I am thrilled today to highlight a wonderful local milestone. 2026 marks 100 years of the Heathmont train station, an important part of daily life for so many in our community. The celebrations start on Friday 1 May with commuters and continue to Sunday 3 May, with an afternoon concert featuring Tintern Grammar musicians, the Heathmont Sing Australia Choir and a 1926 re-enactment. It is a great opportunity to come together, celebrate local history and connect as a community. My thanks to Gerry Robinson and the Heathmont History Group for their incredible work on this celebration. I encourage everyone to join in the fun on Sunday 3 May.

Sean Butler

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:23): I rise on behalf of myself and the member for Northcote to recognise the contribution to our communities of Dr Sean Butler, who was appointed as the inaugural principal of Preston High in April 2018 and who led the school for the first seven years of its operation. Creating a new school on the old Preston Girls Secondary College site was something that Sean knew came with a great deal of opportunity but also a great deal of pressure. Many of our school leaders will acknowledge that they get through the year relying on the regular progression of established events, but Sean and his young team had none of that. Every decision was made from scratch, and every decision was a step into the unknown. In making those decisions they were guided right from the start by three core values: excellence, inclusion and community.

I was lucky enough to know Sean many years ago as an East Timor activist on the Melbourne University campus. While he has clearly gathered much wisdom and educational experience in the years since then, I think it is his personal, lifelong progressive values that have particularly shaped Preston High and, in drawing so many families to our area, also shaped the broader Preston community. We wish Sean and his family the best of luck with their next steps. We are very pleased to see he will be continuing to contribute to our great public education system, and we hope that in appointing a new principal the Department of Education recognise the importance of building upon the progressive culture that he and his inaugural team – including Jessica James, Rohan McCarthy, Sarah Blanchard and Laura Mitchell – have so successfully created at Preston High.

Urban Camp

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (13:24): I rise to recognise a remarkable community asset in our region. Urban Camp in Parkville has been enabling young people to thrive through urban experiences for 40 years. It is tucked into parkland near Melbourne Zoo and housed in a heritage-listed building dating back to 1941. Urban Camp offers affordable school camps and group accommodation for just \$58 per child per day. What began in 1984 as a grassroots initiative by Kensington community schoolteachers has grown into a thriving community-owned enterprise. Entirely self-funded, Urban Camp welcomes over 12,000 guests annually. More than 70 per cent of its visitors are from regional schools, many of whom would not otherwise have access to a city experience. Each child visiting spends an estimated additional \$50 in our local economy but, more importantly, has a priceless experience that helps bring country and city closer together.

Demand has well and truly outgrown capacity. Urban Camp is turning away 158 schools every year. I was pleased to meet CEO Elizabeth Compton and hear directly about the camp's vision for expansion, including 66 additional beds and a multipurpose learning space and improved accessibility. This is exactly the kind of community-owned initiative that deserves to be heard. The member for

Mornington and I both visited at the same time, and we are actively exploring every avenue to support Urban Camp's case. I call on this government to back them.

Anthea Loucas Bosha

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (13:26): I would also like to acknowledge Anthea Loucas Bosha for her excellent work at the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival.

1000 Generations

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (13:26): I would like to highlight the outstanding work of 1000 Generations in Melbourne's north-west. Across communities in Brimbank, Wyndham and Melton, 1000 Generations has established a vital youth community hub through its safe spaces program. These welcoming drop-in centres provide our young people with a place where they feel safe, supported and truly heard. Every week at places like Sydenham Library, young people gather to share a free sausage and a cupcake, and through this interaction they find mentorship, lifelong skills training, job readiness programs and positive connections with police, educators and community leaders, and from time to time they even get a free haircut there. These are not just spaces, they are lifelines. They are reducing youth crime, rebuilding trust and giving young people at risk a real pathway to a brighter future. As the organisation so powerfully puts it, if one person can change a life, then a village can change 1000 generations. It is so important that this organisation receives the funding it needs to keep these doors open and continue transforming lives across the north-west. Without it, hundreds of vulnerable young people will lose the opportunity for support and safe spaces. That is why giving them the resources they need to continue and expand their work is absolutely vital. It ensures that young people and our communities continue to benefit from the vital work of 1000 Generations.

Glenferrie festival

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (13:27): Last Sunday I was pleased to once again host a stall at the annual Glenferrie Road festival, joining tens of thousands of Victorians in the heart of the Hawthorn electorate to celebrate what makes our area so special: a vibrant community with flavours from around the world, entertainment and family activities. I would like to sincerely thank and congratulate the Glenferrie Traders Association, led by the amazing president Rajna Jollie, along with the many community groups, businesses and schools whose contributions made this event such a success.

The festival also provides an important opportunity to listen to local residents. Many people took the time to speak with me about the issues that matter most to them: cost of living pressures, community safety, access to healthcare planning, housing affordability. While the day was joyful, many constituents expressed such deep frustration about these issues, and I will continue to actively advocate on their behalf.

Hawthorn Historical Society

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (13:28): This week, in a celebration of Hawthorn's great history, I take this opportunity to congratulate the Hawthorn Historical Society, particularly its president Penny Underwood and Elizabeth Love and Elizabeth Yewers, for curating the *Women of Influence* exhibition, which is being undertaken at the Camberwell Library. This outstanding display highlights the remarkable contributions of Hawthorn women in medicine, education, literature, art and music and recognises their lasting impact on our community. What a wonderful celebration of Hawthorn.

Frankston graffiti management

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (13:29): Frankston community members have long taken pride in our identity as the gateway to the Mornington Peninsula, a vibrant seaside destination known for its natural beauty, pristine beaches and thriving arts and entertainment culture. A standout example of this is the Frankston street art festival, which has just been held and which I was proud to help to bring to our city nearly a decade ago.

However, our city's image is undermined by graffiti at several locations, such as the Beach Street overpass along the Frankston Freeway. This structure currently presents an unwelcoming first impression. It does not reflect the quality, character or vibrancy of our beautiful community. At a time when Frankston is one of the fastest growing real estate markets in the country, it is essential that our key entry points align with the energy and appeal of our city.

I have been advocating consistently with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety the Honourable Melissa Horne for an entranceway that better represents our thriving city centre and strong seaside tourism appeal. I am pleased to share that the Department of Transport and Planning is currently developing a targeted graffiti management program focused on key corridors and priority locations, with the Frankston community identified as a major area of focus. With work set to commence in the coming weeks along the Monash corridor, I am encouraged that upon completion attention will turn to the Frankston electorate. As many of my local constituents have shown concern through my office for the state of the bridge, I know they would appreciate any opportunity to bring an entranceway that reflects our vibrant and welcoming culture in Frankston.

Vietnamese Museum Australia

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (13:30): It was great to be down in Sunshine last week to see the almost finished works on Australia's first ever Vietnamese museum. This has been a project long in the making, and construction is almost complete. As many in this place would know, Melbourne's inner west, from Footscray to Sunshine to St Albans, has a proud, proud history of Vietnamese migration. More than 120,000 Victorians have Vietnamese heritage, including many in my electorate of Laverton, and this includes so many who came here as refugees more than 50 years ago and have chosen to call our community in Melbourne's west home. Now, for the first time anywhere in Australia, their stories will be told and celebrated at this museum right in the heart of Sunshine. Of course I am so thrilled that our Labor government has played an incredible role in helping get this set up, investing more than \$10 million towards the construction of this facility.

I want to acknowledge Tammy Nguyen and her incredible team at the VMA, who have worked tirelessly to make this museum a reality – we are almost there. It has not been without its challenges, its hurdles and its speed bumps, but now construction is almost complete. Situated very close to Sunshine station, this museum is within easy walking distance of our future superhub, and I have no doubt it will bring in major tourism to the Sunshine area. It is an incredible achievement. I just feel so proud as a local member, and I cannot wait to see this museum fully open to the public later this year.

Fuel supply and prices

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:32): The Allan Labor government is showing leadership in delivering real, practical cost-of-living relief for families in my electorate. I know the rising cost of fuel is affecting so many locals. With our Servo Saver and fair fuel plan we are making sure that servos across Victoria are capping and locking their prices for 24 hours, getting that certainty for drivers, and now, as our country tackles the global fuel shock caused by outside powers, we have made public transport free for everyone for a whole month. It means more people who can leave their car at home to get to work or study have even more of a reason to do so. This morning I caught the bus and train to work here today, and it was very efficient. Free PT also means that people who already catch public transport will save money on their fares for a whole month.

Education system

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:32): I want to continue by acknowledging a few things closer to home. Firstly, I want to thank all the local teachers and educators who have written and spoken to me recently. The Allan Labor government recognises that our public school teachers and staff deserve a pay rise, and I encourage all parties to keep negotiating in good faith.

Corpus Christi Primary School

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:33): Finally, a huge shout-out to my old school, Corpus Christi Primary, for giving me the opportunity to sponsor their fete last weekend. I was very happy to get dunked for a good cause. Congratulations on an amazing day.

Easter

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:33): Also, I would just like to wish all Christian communities in my electorate a happy Easter.

Coburg High School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (13:33): As Coburg High students kicked off the 2026 year, I was very pleased to have recently presented my annual Endeavour awards at the recent years 7–9 assembly to Quinn and Eden, recognising their efforts for fostering a vibrant, inclusive school environment. We are providing Coburg High’s secondary instrumental music program with an increase in funding from \$178,000 in 2025 to \$206,000 in 2026 – an almost \$30,000 increase from last year and \$150,000 more than in 2022. This of course responds directly to the school’s petition presented to Parliament in February 2025 bearing almost 400 signatures calling for more funding to support their burgeoning instrumental music program, which is one of the biggest in the northern suburbs and indeed Victoria.

Kastoria Club

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (13:34): On 29 March I was happy to have visited the Kastoria Club in Elizabeth Street, North Coburg, for traditional bakaliaros and skordalia in honour of their 25 March Independence Day. Commendations to Eleftheria ‘Effie’ Lalopoulos, the 80-year-old dynamo who spearheaded the campaign to save the Kastoria Club, officially naming the adjoining laneway Kastoria Lane, a beautiful laneway with murals and depictions paying homage to the many Kastorians who have contributed to our community. Commendations to the entire Australian Association of Kastorians, the leaders, volunteers and community members, and John Pandazopoulos, who was there as well.

Kastoria in northern Greece is a picturesque lakeside city known for its stunning Lake Orestiada, historic Byzantine churches, traditional stonemasons and a long heritage in the fur trade. Nestled among the mountains, it beautifully blends natural beauty with rich cultural history on the other side of the world. We are honoured to have the Kastoria Club and Kastoria Lane nestled in North Coburg to maintain this cultural connection to our community that Effie has nurtured.

Lighthouse Christian College

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (13:35): The students of Lighthouse Christian College are the best in the state.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the Clerk, I just reiterate that I do not like breaking into members statements, because it is an important part of the day, but the use of props is disorderly, and I also encourage members to use correct titles at all times.

Bills

Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Council’s amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 2, lines 32 to 34 and page 3, lines 1 to 8, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
2. Part heading preceding clause 76A, omit this heading.
3. Clause 76A, omit this clause.

4. Clause 76B, omit this clause.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (13:35): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

I rise to support this amendment. This amendment is very straightforward. It removes part 8A from the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025, which relates to how serious vilification offences are prosecuted. The government supports this amendment because it removes a provision of the bill that has in fact already passed Parliament on 5 March 2026 and has already come into effect on 12 March 2026.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (13:36): This is a very important amendment. In fact it is something that we have been advocating for for a long period to ensure that we take away the DPP referral so we can get a prosecution and have the police powers to deal with some of the issues around the hate laws. I am glad that we are here now, but it is a pity that we were not here a lot earlier. We do support this amendment, but I say that if the government had done their work right from the beginning when this bill was first before the house, we would not be here today. I think about the many hateful attacks that have happened in the community in the timeframe that it has taken for the government to actually get their act together to bring this amendment, finally, before the house so that we can move on. I think of how many people have had to deal with hurtful and hateful attacks since then. Hopefully we can see a change and give the police the powers that they have been asking for for a long time and not have the independent umpire in the DPP having to intervene and can ensure the intended consequences of the police being able to do their job. That has not been the case, because this provision has been in there and has been the reason why we have seen such a low prosecution rate when it comes to the hate laws that the government have put forward.

Motion agreed to.

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

Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:

That the bill be now read a second time.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (13:38): It is a pleasure to rise on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026, and I say from the outset that the opposition will not be opposing this bill. The bill comes as the government winds down Cladding Safety Victoria, an established body that was formed in December of 2020 to deal with some of the issues around the widespread combustible cladding crisis following the Lacrosse and Grenfell Tower fires. Cladding Safety Victoria was created as a temporary body to deal with and coordinate the rectification of these unsafe buildings and to ensure that affected residents would have a vehicle to be able to take their issues to and that those buildings could be appropriately rectified. We were told in the bill briefing that we had that since Cladding Safety Victoria was established, over 80 per cent of the rectification processes have been done and that therefore Cladding Safety Victoria is no longer required. A lot of the functions of Cladding Safety Victoria will be folded into the BPC, or the Building and Plumbing Commission.

I thank the government for the briefing. But I do want to say at the outset that there were a number of questions that we put to the government in this briefing, so there are still details that are outstanding and questions that we still have. I would have appreciated having some of that information. I will go through that information as I go through this bill, because the devil is in the detail and we can only take the briefing at face value. Certainly our members who were present at that briefing had some really important questions on just how much we are talking about in terms of the dollars and what is

left in terms of the fund that will be wound in to deal with the rectification processes for the 20 per cent that are left over and the money which goes from the cladding rectification fund into now an additional fund which is attached to the building permit scheme. The government suggests that will be less overall in terms of the cost imposed on builders. Again, we just want to understand some of the figures and numbers which we do not have information on but which we did ask for.

As I stated, the bill repeals the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020, abolishes Cladding Safety Victoria, transfers remaining functions and assets and liabilities to the Victorian Building Authority framework and a lot of the functions to the Building and Plumbing Commission. I will talk a little bit more about the Building and Plumbing Commission a little bit later. One of the things that I found really interesting when we heard the government business program being debated – when you debate a government business program, you talk about the bills that are before the Parliament – was that a number of members from the government stood on their feet and said this bill is about dealing with and cleaning up dodgy builders. Can I just pull the government up on this? I think it is really important for the government not to be using Parliament to attack the very builders that they are expecting to build the homes that they say are needed as part of the housing targets, because you do not build 80,000 homes a year or 800,000 homes without builders. If you want to ridicule the very builders that are doing that and call them dodgy as a lump sum, then I think that is highly inappropriate, particularly when you are talking about cladding, because this was not a builder problem, this was a materials problem.

In fact when this was first developed the builders went in good faith and said, ‘Great, we can use these materials.’ They were not using dodgy materials deliberately. They were using the cladding because it was a legitimate product that was authorised and approved and met all the regulations and had all the stamps to say they could use this material, only to find out after those fires that the material was not safe and was not viable and should not have been used. Well, that is on the government and their regulatory authority and the checks and balances and all the ticks of approval that consumers rely on. You cannot blame builders for it; you have got to blame the actual government and their regulations in terms of how it is being done. So the process has been shoddy at best – not from the builders’ perspective but from the actual regulatory environment, which this government manages. We will have another bill before the Parliament shortly, which will talk again about so-called consumer protection. But all the government will do again is talk about shoddy and dodgy builders; they will not talk about the red tape, the cost to builders and those costs being passed on to the industry and to mums and dads that want to build their first home. Why aren’t we getting houses built in Victoria? Because there is no confidence in the industry.

Katie Hall interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: There was an interjection from the member for Footscray, who said, ‘We are.’ We are 55,000 homes short on the two-year target, so the government is not building the targeted homes that were promised – 80,000 homes a year. In two years, we are 55,000 short on that target. That is nowhere near a big stamp or a tick of approval. That is a fail. The reason why we are not is because the cost of construction is too expensive. Too many builders are going to the wall. Yes, we need to clean up the industry – absolutely we do – but at the same time we have got to give confidence to people for them to be able to say, ‘Yes, we’re going to support the industry’; for builders to say, ‘Yes, we’re going to go out there and actually run a small business’; and for those young people that want to be tradies and work as builders, carpenters, bricklayers, electricians or plumbers to have confidence in that industry. That is what we have got to do – we have got to back the industry. But you cannot back the industry when you attack them, and that is what we are seeing from this government. You cannot have your cake and eat it too.

Back on cladding, the reason why we are not opposing this bill is because there was Cladding Safety Victoria, which was set up as a body to deal with the dodgy materials and the buildings that needed rectification, and as part of dealing with those dodgy materials and rectification there was a fund that was set up, and that fund was to be able to rectify them. As I said, 80 per cent of those have been taken care of. So the purpose of this bill is to wind up Cladding Safety Victoria. It is to transfer the residual

functions and liabilities to the BPC and to repeal the cladding rectification levy and those works, replacing the funding through the revised building permit scheme and level structure.

It is important to understand that this bill will not affect smaller traditional homes, regional buildings and certain classes of buildings. It is for particular buildings, and it is particularly also for a number of government buildings – hospitals and the like. We were told in the briefing that the government said the apartment developments affected by the new levy adjustment would still see an overall reduction in the levy costs because the replacement amount would be much smaller than the cladding replacement levy; that is meant to be a saving of between 47 per cent and 67 per cent. I would like to see the numbers and I would like to see the details, but that is a claim made by the government – that overall there will be less cost to the industry. We are seeing everywhere else an increase in taxation and cost. We can only take the government on their word about this.

The questions that were raised that have not been answered and I put again to the house, and I hope the minister will respond accordingly, are: if the cladding program is truly complete – and they are saying it is 81 per cent at the moment or thereabouts – when will the remainder be complete? Are there still outstanding buildings or liabilities? Has enough money been collected to finish the work in the scope? How much money remains in the fund? And what happens to the remaining funds on the repeal? The government say they have got plenty of money left over to be able to deal with the 19 per cent or whatever it might be that is left. Well, how much money is left over? And once that has been done, what does the modelling suggest will be left, and where does it go? Does it go into consolidated revenue? Does it go back to the very builders that put in the money in the first place? Where does the money go? It would be very interesting to be able to understand all of that.

Just looking at some of the issues, one of the things that we need to understand, coming back to my earlier point, is that some of these builders, who have been working in good faith, run small businesses and are the backbone of our economy, our industry, jobs and houses, have been unfortunately targeted by the government and ridiculed in many cases – it has all been, I do not know, called dodgy. I think we have got to be careful, as I said, about that language. I want to give an example, and it may be the member for Brighton's example that I am about to use, but certainly this was the feedback that we got from Master Builders Victoria, who suggested that small builders are being punished by the rules that the government has put in place. It is really interesting, because we have got Labor, who on one hand have given \$15 billion away to the CFMEU, yet they expect builders who followed the government's advice on what materials were safe to then have to pay to clean up the government's mess, and retrospectively, even more importantly – so not as it happened but years later, thinking that they were doing the right thing, only to get a big fat bill years later and be told, 'Well, actually, the materials that we told you were okay are not okay, and because you've used them under our advice but now we're giving you different advice, you're going to have to pay for them.' How bad is that?

Let me give you the example.

The government had a particular builder, and this particular builder had about a million dollars of product that was outstanding, and he retired. He finished his business and said, 'Right, well, I'm done,' after years of working in the industry. And then all of a sudden he got a bill for about a million dollars, 10 years later, which he had to find. With no insurance, no way of being able to find this back, he had had to somehow try and work out how he was going to deal with a cladding issue that was not his issue. He followed everything by the book and did what he thought was the right thing. They are ones that are not caught up in this legislation, but they are caught up in the process – a bad process that this government has allowed to happen. So what about them? How are we going to look after them? How is this poor person, who spent all their life employing people, working and contributing to the economy, now, in his retirement, going to find a million dollars? That is just completely unfair, and I would be very interested in the government providing some assurance on how we actually deal with this.

James Newbury interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Zero. When we look at the overall industry and we look at what has been happening in terms of how significant this issue is, we have got over 1300 residential buildings, we have got 123,000-plus Victorians across 65,000 homes, we have got 409 high-risk buildings that have been completed and we have got 275,000 square metres of cladding removed. That is 13½ MCG fields worth. That is a lot of materials, a lot of dodgy stock. I would suggest that if we had things right in the first place, we would not have had to deal with all of this. You have got 130 government buildings that have been remediated. You have got 50,000-plus metres of cladding removed. You have got 1038 publicly used buildings that have been assessed – schools, hospitals and the like. You have got 80,000-plus private apartments that have been supported and 133 government buildings that have been made safer from the rectification process.

What does this all mean? Does this mean the government have finally found a problem, which was theirs, and set up an agency, done a review and had some people – and I want to acknowledge the former Premier Ted Baillieu, who has been very instrumental in working through some of the government’s issues on this and coming up with a really good path forward to try and help the industry. Former Premier Ted Baillieu has been instrumental in that. As a former architect, he knows a thing or two about buildings and architecture and design, and he has certainly been instrumental in setting a path forward. But it is very interesting because I think once you recognise the problem, you would then hope that things are sorted and we no longer have an issue. But an article just recently, from 1 March 2025 – when I say recently, just over a year ago – said ‘Victorian apartment buildings failing fire safety standards, new research reveals’. This was in 2025. The cladding rectification program and cladding safety fund were set up in 2020. Five years on we have got a report from Victoria University that says:

Almost 90 per cent of apartment buildings across Victoria have failed fire safety standards ...

according to new research. Ninety per cent have failed safety standards. It continues:

The Victoria University study comes amid a push to build more multi-storey developments, to help fix the state’s housing woes.

Victoria University researcher Dr Stephen Scimonello found of the almost 964 buildings inspected across the state, only 13 per cent had been maintained and continued to comply with fire safety standards.

Thirteen per cent. That is five years on from the cladding issue, and you have got a report to say we have still got buildings with issues at a time when the government has got this whole creation of activity centres, building sky towers right throughout Melbourne. Yet only 13 per cent passed the actual fire safety standards.

You would hope that the government actually get their act together, because this is a huge warning. We have had a warning already with buildings catching fire. We have had the whole cladding report. We have had 13 and a half MCGs full of cladding rectification to actually take the flammable cladding, the government’s product, off the buildings. Now what we have got is a report five years on to say, ‘Maybe you haven’t dealt with the problem and we’ve still got fire risk issues with tall towers.’ I put that on notice to the government. When they are off on these activity centres and building high towers throughout our neighbourhoods, can they give a guarantee that we do not have issues with fire and other faulty products as we go forward? The government is very, very quick to blame other people. Well, this is in the government’s wheelhouse. They are the regulators. They are the ones that ensure that they set things up, and I hope they have not set the industry up to fail, because this is a very important report. I do not know what the minister has to say about this report. I am just trying to see if there was any response. The article says:

The Allan government last month announced it would expedite the approval of new buildings including duplexes, townhouses and low-rise apartments ... to make Victoria the “townhouse capital”.

Well, the only response is actually ‘build more’. It does not say how, and it does not say whether they are fit for purpose. So that is the government’s response to something that might be a fire hazard. We hope that they have got their act together when it comes to this. These things are really, really

important. There is no question that when a government has been part of a massive problem, like the cladding issues and buildings catching on fire under their watch, the rectification, the cost, the outcomes and the management is on them. It is really important that we understand how that process works. I know that we will be breaking shortly for question time, and I will come back and touch on this. But it is the BPC, the Building and Plumbing Commission, that will be responsible for the management of the 19 per cent that still have cladding rectification issues. It could be more than that, but that is what the government is telling us.

The consumer feedback on the Building and Plumbing Commission, according to Google, gives them a 1-star rating on feedback, rectification and response. This is the body that needs to continue to clean up the mess and be the regulator. I think it is really important for us to understand what resources the government is actually putting into the regulator to make sure that we get swift responses and that we can be confident in the new regulator coming forward, because you cannot just handball over to somebody else and say 'It's now your responsibility' if they do not have the resources to fix this. We know on 1 July that the regulator is meant to come into play and deal with a lot of these issues in the new regulation and also deal with cladding and other issues. We want to make sure the government is not setting the regulator up to fail. This is really important. When you are talking about safety issues, you need to ensure that those safety issues are properly managed. I put again on notice to the government that when we have got these new regulators, we certainly do not want to have an overly bureaucratic system, but when we streamline and we get rid of Cladding Safety Victoria, moving it into the BPC, we want to make sure that we have the safety mechanisms in place to deal with that. So that would be another question that I would put on notice to the government. Are they making sure that all of the safety mechanisms are in place to deal with that?

As we as we head into question time, which we will shortly, there are a lot of issues with all of this. Yes, we want to streamline the process. Yes, we want to make sure that the cladding removal on those buildings that are still exposed is done with due process with those smaller builders in how they rectify and manage those situations. We know there are currently issues between insurance companies and some of the big companies in dealing with the remedy, the costs and the rectifications. That all needs to be worked out. But we also need to understand when builders are left high and dry, they must have the support necessary and the confidence necessary to support the industry, because without the building industry there is not the confidence to build more homes. The government cannot be going out and talking up building more homes when the building industry is running a mile because this government is not supporting them.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

The SPEAKER: Before we commence question time today, I acknowledge in the gallery the Ambassador of Italy to Australia His Excellency Nicola Lener and the Consul General of Italy in Melbourne Chiara Mauri. I also acknowledge from the Indian Parliament Yaduveer KC Wadiyar. Welcome.

Colin Brooks: Speaker, I raise a point of order in relation to *Rulings from the Chair*, chapter 20, on the main principles of points of order. Point (2) is 'Points of order must not be used to deliberately disrupt the proceedings or to respond to debate.' Point (7) is 'Spurious and frivolous matters cannot be raised.' Over the four sitting weeks this year, 12 question times, by my count, during answers to questions, the opposition have raised 119 points of order. That is nearly 10 points or order every question time. Of those, only 23 have been upheld – 96 have not been upheld – so eight in 10 points of order are fraudulent points of order, I would put to you, to deliberately disrupt the proceedings of the house, which is in direct contradiction of the guiding principles of points of order. Speaker, my point of order is to ask you: if that pattern continues, do not hear points of order from the opposition.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Speaker, I only have one number to rebut the minister's point of order: the government is yet to respond to one single question put by the opposition – zero

answers to questions in this Parliament. We would not need to take points of order had the government ever responded to a question.

The SPEAKER: There are a number of rulings from the Chair in relation to points of order that members should familiarise themselves with. It is not for me to determine whether a point of order can be had or not had, and I cannot determine what that point of order is until I have heard it. This of course is a matter for the Standing Orders Committee, and perhaps members might like to reflect on how that can be addressed.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Police resources

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): My question is to the Premier. Jack, a 64-year-old grandfather from Mooroolbark, had his home targeted twice in one night by a gang armed with machetes and was left with serious injuries requiring multiple surgeries. Jack lives just 2 minutes from Mooroolbark police station, but it was closed at the time. Why was it closed?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): At the outset of my answer, can I acknowledge Jack and the incredibly traumatic experience he has had, as relayed in that question. It is because of listening to the experiences of victims of crime like Jack – and I do acknowledge there are too many victims of crime – that we have acted strongly. Just yesterday the Attorney-General was speaking to the fact that our bail reforms are now in full effect and they are working.

Matthew Guy: Really?

Jacinta ALLAN: They are, and I am delighted that the member for Bulleen has given me the opportunity to say that there has been a 70 per cent increase in the number of people on remand – not out, on remand.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question was about a closed police station. I would ask you to bring the Premier to deal with the substance of the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. As the Manager of Opposition Business should well know, the preamble to the question forms part of the question. The Premier was being entirely relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to be mindful of the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am pointing to the fact that we are listening to victims and putting community safety first. Whether it is strengthening the bail laws that are working, the introduction of adult time for violent crime ensuring that there will be serious consequences for the pattern of behaviour that is seeing these violent offences cause such harm and concern in the community or the introduction of the violence reduction unit, which is about preventing crime, these are important initiatives to work in communities to prevent crime. I will also say that when it comes to Victoria Police –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, you have directed the Premier to be mindful of her response in relation to the question. The Premier has not dealt with the question at all. This is a farce. It is happening every single day.

The SPEAKER: That is not the way to raise a point of order, member for Brighton. The Premier still has 1 minute and 32 seconds to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, here in Victoria we have the largest police force in the nation. Also, further to that, we back the work of the Chief Commissioner of Police, who is working hard to ensure that there are more police out on the streets responding to and preventing crime. The best way to prevent crime is to stop it, and the best way to do that is to have police out on the streets. What is clear from this question is that it is only our Labor government that backs the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I am concerned about the relevance rule. Clearly all the government is able to do is pick a topic from the question and completely avoid the substance of the question.

Matthew Guy interjected.

James Newbury: Misrepresent the question – that is right, member for Bulleen. The Premier has not dealt with the substance of the question. It is happening on every single question in question time.

The SPEAKER: As the member for Brighton knows and as I have said many, many times, I cannot tell the minister or the Premier on their feet how to answer a question. If the minister or the Premier is being relevant, then they are being relevant. The Premier has concluded her answer to that question.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): Nearby Croydon police station was also closed, and police –

Members interjecting.

Jess WILSON: Nearby Croydon police station was also closed, and police confirmed they could not attend because they were already dealing with another serious assault. Why are police so under-resourced –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.

Jess WILSON: I will start again. Nearby Croydon police station was also closed, and police confirmed they could not attend because they were already dealing with another serious assault. Why are police so under-resourced that they cannot turn up even when a senior Victorian is attacked twice in one night by a machete-wielding gang?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): The Leader of the Opposition has clearly not done her homework. Victoria has the largest police force in the nation. To claim otherwise is not correct. We are backing Victoria Police. We are backing the work of the chief commissioner, who is working hard to get more police out on the street to prevent crime and to respond to crime. What this –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, I ask you to cease interjecting across the chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, on both the substantive and the supplementary the Premier has not said the words ‘police station’ once – on either question. What is the point of relevance?

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I remind you about raising points of order in the correct fashion. If members have concerns about rulings, they are invited to come and see me after question time or, if they wish the rules to be changed, to take these matters to the Standing Orders Committee. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: We are backing the work of the chief commissioner. If you want an example of where getting more police out onto the streets is working, look at Operation Pulse, getting police and PSOs in shopping centres. Retail theft is down; community safety is up. That is what happens when you back Victoria Police with tools and resources. It is very clear that the Liberal Party would undermine the work of the chief commissioner and Victoria Police at every turn.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, how are cheap sledges relevant?

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Brighton.

Ministers statements: public transport fares

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): The war in the Middle East is being felt in households across our state, and we are seeing, as those global oil prices rise, Victorians feeling even more pressure in their household budgets. As Premier, I am determined to do everything in my control to help ease that pressure for families in every corner of the state, and that is why our Labor government has made public transport free for a month, starting from today.

This morning, along with the Minister for Public and Active Transport and the member for Sunbury – who, yes, caught the train from Sunbury this morning – I caught a train into Parliament, and we spoke to passengers who told us directly what a difference this support is making. There was a university student travelling to Monash Caulfield who told us how every dollar counts for her and this will mean more money for her at the end of the week, particularly for groceries and meeting the rent. There were two family members from Rockbank who told us how they would normally drive into the city but because public transport was free they caught the train. They used the Metro Tunnel for the very first time, saving on fuel. I spoke to dozens of people this morning who told me the same thing: it is a little bit of help but is making a big difference to families and households. That is what this support is about: putting money back into people’s pockets, easing the pressure too at the pump and helping those who need to drive by getting more cars off the road.

We know in this global oil crisis this will not fix every problem, but we know there is also more to do. It is a real and meaningful step that we have taken to help Victorians, and Victorians deserve to know that they have got a government that listens and stands with them and will support them every day, helping and looking at ways to make life easier and more affordable for working people.

Police resources

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:15): My question is to the Premier. There are over 1500 vacancies on police rosters, and more than 40 police stations are closed or operating on reduced hours. A survey of Victoria Police members shows officers do not have the resources they need. With record crime being committed in the state, why has the government failed to listen to police and give them the resources they need?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:15): I firmly reject the question that has been put by the member for Berwick, and I will outline the reasons why. We have resourced Victoria Police. We have the largest police force in the nation. We are backing the work of the Chief Commissioner of Police to get those resources out onto the streets to respond to crime and to prevent crime. We are backing the work of the chief commissioner to get more recruits into the academy by having double squads moving through the academy right now.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, this was not a question about the chief commissioner; this was about the members who are out on the beat each and every day, who are putting their foot forward. Can the Premier answer the question for those members?

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick, I remind you of the correct way to raise a point of order. It is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The member for Berwick should have been listening to the Premier. He would have heard at the outset that the Premier rejected the premise of the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I was responding to the question, which went to vacancies, and I was referring to how we are backing the work of the chief commissioner by putting additional squads through the academy. The Made for More campaign is seeing more applications before Victoria Police than ever

before. We are also backing the work of Victoria Police with new initiatives like Operation Pulse, which is getting PSOs and police into shopping centres. And, you know what, this is also working. It is working because we have seen retail theft halve during the period of Operation Pulse and community safety go up as well.

We are continuing to back the work of Victoria Police through tougher new bail laws, through the introduction of adult time for violent crime and also, most importantly, through the crucial work of the violence reduction unit. This is critical work to addressing longer term changes and patterns in criminal behaviour, particularly amongst young people. We are getting in there, doing the work in communities and in families. There is the initiative that the Deputy Premier announced just last week putting more community safety officers into schools to work directly with police. These are the additional resources we are putting in to support the work of Victoria Police.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the men and women of Victoria Police for the work they do every single day. We saw yesterday just how important it is to back the work of Victoria Police – the work they have done in the north-east to see the conclusion of one of the most traumatic experiences the men and women of Victoria Police have had in a very, very long time. It is a reminder of the risks and the danger they put themselves in every single day to keep our community safe. That is why in my Labor government we will always back the chief commissioner and always back the men and women of Victoria Police with the resources and the tools and the powers that they need to continue to keep us safe.

Roma Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast is warned.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:19): Premier, a crime is committed every 50 seconds in this state. Can the Premier rule out closing or reducing the hours at any more police stations?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:19): I am going to call out what is behind this question from the get-go. What we know is behind this question is a social media clip that is designed to put more misinformation into the community.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier is deliberately evading the question by sledging –

Members interjecting.

James Newbury: On relevance – because you do not want to answer the question.

The SPEAKER: That is not the correct way to raise a point of order, nor is it appropriate to yell across the table. I ask the Premier to actually come back to this question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The member for Berwick is often fond of reminding us of his two years in Victoria Police as a police officer. He would know well –

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, I hate to call out the Premier for being factual, but this is not the first time. Members of Victoria Police who do 5 minutes in the job should be thanked and congratulated as much as anyone who does more. For the Premier and the Minister for Health to continuously downgrade me or the member for Bayswater, who did a remarkable job in Victoria Police, is nothing short of a disgrace. It is about time you start to respect those that go into the police force to serve the community. You have never had to face what we have had to face on the street, yet you get in here and say it.

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick, I have reminded you repeatedly about making points of order and how to do them appropriately. You continue to defy my rulings. It is not an opportunity to make a statement to the chamber. I also remind members that when I am on my feet the house will be silent and members will be in their places.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 118, this is not the first time the member for Berwick has been reflected on for his service as a police officer. It is outrageous. It has happened repeatedly. It is on the *Hansard* record, and it is wrong.

The SPEAKER: I did not hear the Premier applying an imputation on the member for Berwick, but I do remind members – I remind members that when I am on my feet they will be silent – that disrespect in this chamber will not be tolerated.

Jacinta ALLAN: I want to be absolutely clear for the benefit of the member for Berwick and the house. I will not be misrepresented in this way. I absolutely respect the work of Victoria Police, and I do apologise if I got the length of service wrong for the member for Berwick. The point I was making is that as a serving member of Victoria Police the member for Berwick would know well –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen will leave the chamber for half an hour.

Brad Battin interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Berwick will leave the chamber for an hour and a half.

Members for Bulleen and Berwick withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again on standing order 118, the member for Berwick has been reflected on multiple times, and he has now been asked to leave the chamber.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, the member for Berwick did not ask for a withdrawal.

Jacinta ALLAN: The point I was making is that serving police officers of any type know those operational decisions are made by the chief commissioner.

Ministers statements: public transport fares

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:24): With rising fuel prices, household budgets are under pressure, and while we cannot in this place influence global conflicts or global oil prices, we are firmly focused on what it is we can do to help Victorian families when they need it most. That is why Labor has made public transport free for the month of April. That is every train, every tram, every bus – metro and regional – for everyone. For those who use public transport regularly, it will save over \$220 throughout the month of April. For those who do need to drive, though, which includes of course Victorian farmers and those working in trades, it will reduce pressure on fuel availability and also reduce congestion.

This builds on Labor’s introduction of free public transport for kids under the age of 18, saving parents up to \$755 per year per child and in some cases even more than that, and it builds on Labor’s regional fare cap, which has collectively now saved Victorian passengers millions and of course encouraged Victorians to get out there and explore our beautiful regions too.

The reason we can introduce initiatives like this is thanks to the thousands of extra services that we have introduced across our network – 24,000 extra bus services, over 3500 extra train services, hundreds of extra tram services. That enables us to ensure that we can introduce initiatives like this which help Victorian families, and there are even more services being added in the middle of the year.

Free public transport during this time has been supported by Liberal parties across the nation. It has been backed by the New South Wales Liberal opposition, the South Australian Liberal opposition and the Tasmanian Liberal government. It has even been championed by the champion of cuts himself Jeff Kennett. But there is one notable exception. The Victorian Liberal opposition, yet again, are selling Victorians out, too focused on themselves and out of touch with Victorian families.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, as I have raised repeatedly, the government are misusing their ministers statements to sledge the opposition repeatedly, which is outside the entitlement of what they are able to do with their ministers statements.

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded her ministers statement. I do remind ministers about attacking the opposition, even past oppositions, even though that is okay if you are comparing and contrasting.

Police resources

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:27): My question is to the Premier. Serious offences on the public transport network have increased by 33 per cent in three years. Why is the government recklessly stripping PSOs from 120 train stations?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): The Leader of the Opposition is not correct in the question that she has just put to the house, and I will detail to you the reasons why. Through the work that we are doing in supporting the chief commissioner, the largest police force in the nation and also the 1400 PSOs who keep us safe, there is work that is being undertaken by the chief commissioner to ensure that those resources are out on the streets preventing and responding to crime. Also, importantly, the work they are doing is using data and intelligence to ensure that the resource is where the crime is. That is why the work that the chief commissioner is doing to get police and PSOs across the train network is vitally important. That is why we back the work of Victoria Police and we back the work of the chief commissioner, and we do that through providing them with those resources they need.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, the Premier has not dealt with the actual substance of the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier rejected at the outset the question, and that is an answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:28): Why is the Premier refusing to release the hit list of 120 stations that her government –

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Jess WILSON: Why is the Premier refusing to release the hit list of 120 stations that her government recklessly plans to strip of PSOs during a crime crisis?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:29): The questions that have been put by the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Berwick go to the importance of why operational policing decisions are best made by the men and women of Victoria Police, not by politicians. These questions from the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Berwick expose that they want to bring politics to community safety, that they do not believe in backing the work of the chief commissioner.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Malvern is warned.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, the Premier is evading the substance of the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: That is why, in respecting the work of the chief commissioner and the men and women of Victoria Police, we give them the tools, the powers and the resources. They are the largest

police force in the nation, and they are out there putting those resources, based on data and intelligence, where the crime is. The best decisions are those made on data and intelligence, not by politicians.

Ministers statements: fuel supply and prices

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:30): Today I rise to update the house on how we are supporting farmers and rural communities during these uncertain times. We know that we have world-class primary producers in Victoria, with the value of our food and fibre exports now at a record \$22.2 billion, well and truly leading the nation. That is why the Allan Labor government is working to reduce pressure and provide certainty.

We know that high fuel prices and localised shortages are causing concerns for farming communities nationwide, and that is why we are taking steps to ensure there is enough fuel to keep our farmers growing. The Victorian Farmers Federation has made it clear that reducing demand on fuel where possible is part of the solution. They have advocated for measures like increased public transport use to help prioritise fuel for agriculture and freight. We are supporting this approach by providing free public transport for all Victorians throughout April, encouraging those who can to leave the car at home and help ease pressure on fuel supply. This is a practical step that has been welcomed by the VFF, with president Brett Hosking saying:

If Victorians make the switch, it can make a real difference. Every commuter who leaves their car at home frees up fuel for the essential, time-critical work that keeps Victorians fed, whether that's ensuring livestock are fed and cared for, or getting crops in the ground.

We will continue to listen to industry and work with stakeholders because we know the situation is complex and constantly changing. There is no single solution. It will require all levels of government working to support our farmers and regional Victorians. We want to make sure our farmers can focus on what they do so well, leading the country in producing and exporting the finest produce. This is an uncertain and dynamic environment. Whether it be drought, biosecurity threats, recovery post bushfires or the current impacts from the conflicts in the Middle East, the Allan Labor government will always support our farmers and regional Victoria.

Rental reform

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:32): My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. This year we have seen rental properties advertised for a certain price, but only when you look at the fine print do you see that there is a subsequent rent increase of often up to 30 per cent a few months later. This seems to be designed to lure renters into a trap. Will the minister crack down on this sneaky practice?

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:33): I thank the member for his question. On this side of the house we are proud that, in all of Australia, the fairest place in which to be a renter is Victoria. It is not happenstance; it is because Labor has ensured that Victoria is the fairest place in which to be a renter. That has resulted in 150 rental reforms, including around rents, and it is because of this government that rent increases are limited to one per year. As of today we are even broadening the scope of rent reviews. It is as of today that Consumer Affairs Victoria and Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria can take into consideration a broader range of factors when it comes to rent reviews. It means that, if you are one of the nearly one-third of Victorians who are renters and you receive a notice for a rent increase and you feel that it is an unfair rent increase, you can refer that matter to Consumer Affairs Victoria or to Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria and, for the first time ever, both those agencies can take into consideration both the scale of the rent increase as well as how it compares to the current rate of inflation. It is easier than it has ever been to challenge an unfair rent increase in this state, because it was our government that started –

Tim Read: On a point of order, Speaker, at the risk of being included in Minister Brooks's statistics, on relevance, I think we are a long way from the question.

The SPEAKER: I think the minister was being relevant.

Nick STAIKOS: The question was around rent increases, and I am taking the member through exactly how in this state, thanks to the Allan Labor government, renters can challenge an unfair rent increase. We formed Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria. It launched last year. It is a free, fast and fair service. Since it launched in June last year, more than 10,000 rental disputes have been resolved for free, and because it is free more and more renters are raising these rental disputes than ever before. One of the four key disputes raised with Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria is around unfair rent increases. We have made it easier for renters to challenge unfair rent increases – easier than it has ever been before.

Not only that, but we have increased notice periods from 60 to 90 days for rent increases. We have ended no-fault evictions. We have ended rental bidding. And we are not going to rest on our laurels; we are going to do even more. Very, very soon we will be launching the nation-leading portable rental bond scheme – a game changer. It will mean that renters will no longer need to be out of pocket for two bonds when moving homes. Every step of the way, we are making renting fairer and more affordable in this state. This is the fairest jurisdiction in which to rent. It is not because of the Greens political party or the Liberal Party or the National Party or One Nation; it is because of Labor.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:36): The minister may not have appreciated that this practice appears to be legal. The Residential Tenancies Act only allows rent increases every 12 months, but another clause in the act, the preceding clause, allows for additional rent increases if they or the method by which they are calculated are specified in the contract. This kind of defeats the purpose of limiting rent increases to once per 12 months. Does the minister see a problem here?

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:37): I thank the member for his supplementary question. Again, it is because of our government that we have limited rent increases to one every 12 months. I repeat that fact for the Greens political party. The Greens political party do like to take credit – they and their three members – for everything that we and our 54 members have managed to get done in this house. But I will put this to you: I did say earlier that we are the fairest jurisdiction in which to rent, but we are also the most affordable. I have the most recent *Rental Affordability Report* here, and I will quote from it –

Tim Read: On a point of order, Speaker, surely this cannot be relevant.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come back to the question.

Nick STAIKOS: I addressed the question at the outset, but I will just quote from the *Rental Affordability Report*:

Victoria stands out as the most affordable state to rent in by some margin. This is a relatively recent development as Victoria was the second-least affordable state for renters as recently as 2016–17.

So when this government – (*Time expired*)

Ministers statements: energy policy

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:38): We know that the cost of living is biting Victorians, and with fuel prices increasing due to the conflict in the Middle East, we can see that that is adding to their burden. That is why it is more important than ever that we continue to back Victorians with real, immediate cost-of-living relief, which is why of course we are making public transport free during April, powered by the SEC, helping those Victorians who can use public transport to leave the car at home and reduce their fuel costs. Whether it is on the brand new Metro Tunnel, the increased services across the state that the tunnel enables or one of the electric buses out of the new Preston electric bus depot, every free trip is powered by the SEC with 100 per cent renewable electricity – homegrown renewable electricity from Victorian projects that creates thousands of jobs for Victorians,

homegrown renewable electricity that does not need to be shipped in from overseas. This is why we are accelerating the shift to cheap, reliable and locally made renewable electricity.

Every dollar counts. Whether it is free public transport for the month of April, powering public transport with renewables through the SEC, powering our homes with the sun that shines for free, providing discounts on energy-efficient appliances through the Victorian energy upgrades program or the \$100 power saving bonus that has supported almost 300,000 Victorians so far, only an Allan Labor government puts Victorians first when it comes to the cost of living. While those opposite are fighting amongst themselves for the spoils of opposition, Victorians can take this announcement as a character reference. Only an Allan Labor government will provide the new solutions that make life easier and more affordable for every Victorian.

Police resources

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:40): My question is to the Premier. In one large region of my electorate where there should be 12 officers, there will be just seven police over the coming weeks due to staff vacancies. As is the case in most areas of Victoria, due to the fuel crisis farmers in this region are reporting a rise in fuel theft on farms. How many of the 1500 police vacancies are in regional Victoria?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:41): In acknowledging the question from the member for Lowan, can I firstly go to the matter she has raised regarding the increase in fuel theft that is being experienced by farmers. We are also seeing a rise in the incidence of drive-offs at service stations. It is an illegal practice. It needs to be prosecuted. But it also does come at a time when there is a lot of pressure in the community. That is why we have backed Victoria Police with additional resources, the largest police force in the nation. We have acknowledged that Victoria Police, like many policing forces around the country and also many industries, are not immune from those challenges of workforce shortages, which is why there are two initiatives. The Made for More campaign, which is seeing more applications come to Victoria Police than any other jurisdiction, is one way to address those vacancies that the member referred to. The work that is being done to have double shifts go through the academy is also to address those worker –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The question was about 1500 police vacancies. How many of those are in regional Victoria?

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, on the point of order, the Premier was being entirely relevant to the question that was asked, and she was outlining the initiatives that the government has put in place to continue to grow the police service here in Victoria.

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

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member actually took a point of order on debating the question, not on relevance.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was not debating the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: That is the action that is being taken to address the challenge that is there, I acknowledge, around the vacancies in Victoria Police that are being experienced and, as I said, by jurisdictions around the nation. In terms of how the chief commissioner, through his role, is managing those vacancies, he is managing that in a way that is deploying resources based on data and intelligence to be out to prevent crime and respond to crime in communities right across the state.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:44): Sarah and Ross Thomson survived the bushfire at Ruffy in January but last week had over 500 litres of fuel stolen from farm tanks. Given the surge in fuel theft from farms, will the minister immediately bolster the resources of the farm crime unit and establish a dedicated operation to prevent fuel theft and protect farmers' supplies of diesel?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:44): I am concerned to hear that a family who have had the devastating impact of the fires that came through the state in January of this year have been further impacted by fuel theft from their property. As I said in my earlier answer, we have seen an increase in the theft of fuel in farming and rural communities and also, as I said, in drive-offs at service stations. This is something that Victoria Police is closely monitoring. I will share that example that the member for Lowan has provided with Victoria Police, who are looking at ways to respond to this. It is coming at a time too when there is a lot of pressure. It remains illegal to steal fuel, and there is work there from Victoria Police to respond to this challenge.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question was in relation to the farm crime unit.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: public transport fares

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:45): I rise to update the house on how Victorians can make the most of the free public transport for a month commitment. Thanks to the Premier, some of the best parts of Victoria are now easier to get to. We all know on this side of the house that free public transport both eases the pressure on the pump but also benefits tourism in regional Victoria. In April you do not need a plane ticket to London, Paris, New York or anywhere else. You do not even need a train ticket either to get to a world-class exhibition at the NGV for the exhibition we have got on now, *Westwood–Kawakubo*, or to roam the exhibition at the Melbourne Museum. In fact if you want to go and see some penguins, you can see them for free because of our government’s investment in St Kilda Pier. If you want a free guided tour at Royal Botanic Gardens, again you catch a train, you catch a tram and you are there. Kids under 16 can go to all four campuses of the zoo for free – Kyabram, Healesville. While we are on regional Victoria, because of our government, for the Rip Curl Pro, which starts tomorrow at Bells Beach, you can go to Geelong, catch a V/Line coach to Torquay and you are there. You can get to Macedon station for the Macedon Ranges autumn festival. You can go to Bendigo station for the 100,000 Easter egg hunt for the Bendigo Easter Festival. You can go to the French Film Festival in Geelong. Again, because of our government, you can catch a train to Geelong for free. You can even go to Benalla station to go and see the Benalla Street Art Festival. As we heard from the Minister for Public and Active Transport, when you care about public investment in public goods, whether that be schools, hospitals or transport, and then you add your infrastructure investment and you add train services, you can then do things like help people through free public transport when there is a global fuel crisis.

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge former MP for Burwood Graham Watt in the gallery.

Constituency questions

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:48): (1588) My constituency question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier reveal how many builders and former builders the state government has sent letters of demand to for cladding rectification because of retrospective legislation? A retired builder in my community received a letter of demand from the state government in late 2025 in relation to cladding rectification for work he completed 10 years ago. The letter demanded nearly \$1 million. As a retired builder, he no longer has insurance. The demand came with no prior notice and was issued just before Christmas. For background, retrospective legislation in the last parliamentary term, which set out new standards, has required the recladding work. Despite raising the case with multiple ministers, none will respond. In consultation with various peak bodies, I have been advised that at least 100 other builders have received such letters. In many of those cases the builders have insurance and the state government is seeking reimbursement through insurers. Premier, how is it right to threaten to bankrupt a retired builder for work he did a decade ago?

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:49): (1589) My question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. When can we expect to see the upgraded Angliss Hospital complete this year? The upgraded Angliss Hospital is a remarkable feat. It is adding more beds, more operating surgery suites and a new central sterilisation services department as well as new facilities for allied health services and some additional parking. I know the member for Monbulk is absolutely stoked to see the expanded Angliss Hospital. It is a metro hospital. It feels like a community hospital. It is the home of the birth of thousands and thousands of babies over its over 80 years of service to the Upper Ferntree Gully and broader outer-eastern community. I look forward to the minister's response.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:50): (1590) My question is to the Minister for Water in the other place. The question I ask is on behalf of Andrew Fleming. When will the minister cease sending 'Dear John' letters to Mr Fleming that continue to blame him for the erosion that is occurring on the banks of the King River in Wangaratta on Crown land that sits adjacent to Mr Fleming's property? The erosion is caused by the King River, not because of any contribution by Mr Fleming. This bank needs to be secured and remodelled by the Victorian government through the North East Catchment Management Authority. They cannot just keep telling Mr Fleming that they have no money and that Mr Fleming should invest \$100,000 dollars to fix the CMA's problem.

Eureka electorate

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (14:50): (1591) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I was delighted to work with the school community of Caledonian Primary School to advocate for flashing school crossing signs on Water Street, which would make it safer for families and children to cross to their wonderful school. Can the minister please advise when these lights will be installed?

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:51): (1592) The Coldstream community is still waiting for this government to upgrade the dangerous Maroondah Highway and Killara Road intersection. I will never give up fighting for my community to get this dangerous road and intersection fixed. The traffic is only getting busier, and it is scary for young families and for older residents dodging trucks and cars to get to the shops or the Warburton trail. My question to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety is: why are you refusing to prioritise a start date for this project when the Labor government has had funding allocated for seven years now? Coldstream residents, the Coldstream fire brigade, the shops and people from Gruyere, Yering and right across the Yarra Valley are fed up with the Allan Labor government's refusal to get on with the job of fixing the dangerous Killara Road intersection. Frankly, it should have been fixed by now. Since our commitment to getting it done in 2018 the Labor government has shown contempt to the community by refusing to spend the \$20 million in funding announced by Tony Smith and me back in 2019. The Australian government's website shows an expected start date in mid-2026, so it is squarely with the state government to get on with fixing this road.

Footscray electorate

Katie HALL (Footscray) (14:52): (1593) My constituency question is for the Minister for Climate Action, and I ask her on behalf of Greta from Yarraville West Primary School, who gave me a letter at the Yarraville Festival with her ideas around climate action. Greta suggested we could have regular clothes swaps, we could reward people making sustainable fashion and we could have replacement kitchenware swaps and random bin checks with prizes for the best sorting. She has also suggested that at the container deposit spot we have a charity option for endangered animals, and she is keen to see more sustainable fashion shows. On behalf of Greta at Yarraville West Primary School, I would love to have a response from the minister to her queries.

The SPEAKER: Sorry, member for Footscray, what is your question?

Katie HALL: My question is whether the minister could please respond to Greta's proposal in writing.

The SPEAKER: Member for Footscray, that is an action. I need a question.

Katie HALL: My question is that the Minister for Climate Action provides me with a letter outlining information on ways that young people can get involved in climate action.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:53): (1594) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Every renter in Victoria knows that a landlord cannot increase the rent in the first year of a lease, right? Well, it seems that real estate agents have actually found a way to sneak in rent increases before then. A constituent found one property advertised by Ray White at \$460 a week, but the fine print said that the rent would increase to \$600 a week within a few months. Another listing said that rent would increase in line with market conditions just four months in. It appears that real estate agents are exploiting a loophole in section 44 of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to lure renters in and then trap them into unaffordable leases. Minister, is this deceptive practice legal?

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:54): (1595) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. My question is: prior to the level crossing removal projects in Preston and Reservoir, roughly how many vehicles per day crossed the Mernda line on the following roads: Normanby Road, Hutton Street, Oakover Road, Bell Street, Cramer Street, Murray Road, Regent Street, High Street, Reservoir, and Keon Parade? I ask that question because the level crossing removals and the associated train station upgrades were very important projects in our community. We continue to get a lot of questions about them, including about how the projects were prioritised. We do sometimes get those questions from people who live near Regent Street, which of course sits between the Preston, Bell and Reservoir project areas. I do understand their perspective. I often use Regent Street myself, as many people locally do. I am hoping to use it on Friday in fact to get up to Sardinas to get some of their great hot cross buns that Adam Racina and Brooke Mora up there make as an Easter tradition, but any information that the minister can provide on those traffic volumes would be helpful in explaining the approach to these important projects to the Preston and Reservoir communities.

Morwell electorate

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:55): (1596) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and my question is: why is the Allan Labor government reducing the speed limit on Hazelwood Road instead of fixing the road itself? Hazelwood Road is a major arterial route and has been littered with 'Rough surface' signs for more than a decade, yet no attempt has been made to repair the road. I have written to the minister, raising motorists' concerns about the pothole-ridden surface, broken edges and dangerous sections where water actually pools on the road, and the response was telling. Instead of acknowledging the dangers, the minister dismissed the concerns and said the condition of Hazelwood Road is generally comparable to other similar roads in Gippsland. Well, Minister, as Gippsland is home to some of the worst roads in the state, this is a very little comfort. The minister must get serious about ensuring the safety of regional Victorians. Minister, again, why do you insist on cutting the speed limits on Hazelwood Road instead of repairing the road itself?

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:56): (1597) My question is for the Minister for Education. The question I have is: Minister, how is the Labor government supporting our hardworking teachers, educators, principals and support staff across the Bellarine? We are fortunate to have exceptional teachers across all schools and across the Bellarine, and since my time in the classroom, expectations and responsibilities placed on teachers have grown significantly. It is more important than ever that

we as a government continue to support our teachers and the vital work that they do. So I look forward to hearing from the minister about how we can continue to strengthen support for our schoolteachers and our staff into the future for both our school communities and parents and the Bellarine community.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, there are a number of questions that are overdue for being answered for which I would like you to request responses for my constituents, please. For the Treasurer these are questions on notice 2421, 2777, 2853, 2854, 2855, 2856, 2857, 2858, 2859, 2860, 2861 and 2862. Questions that are overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Skills and TAFE are questions on notice 3140, 3141 and 3142. Questions that are overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Government Services are questions on notice 2763, 2764, 2765 and 2776. A question that is overdue and unanswered by the Premier is constituency question 1442. A question overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Police is constituency question 1488. A constituency question that is overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Public and Active Transport is constituency question 1512. A number of these questions go back six or more months. I would be grateful if you could get responses for my constituents, and I will hand the list to the clerks.

Martin Cameron: On a point of order, Speaker, I also have overdue questions: questions 1259 to the Premier, question 1445 to the Minister for Police, question 1527 for the Minister for Health and the Minister for Mental Health and question 3144 for the Minister for Emergency Services. I ask you to follow these up, please.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, may I raise with you questions to the Premier 1408, 1450 and 1498, which are all overdue.

Bills

Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:00): I understand the government is very eager to speak on this bill, and we look forward to their contributions. As I did say at the outset, this has been a really important issue for many, many residents – Victorians – who have had to experience and undergo issues with cladding on their buildings. This started as very much a huge safety issue, and we saw that with the introduction of Cladding Safety Victoria. We have also seen a lot of people being very, very much financially impacted by this. I have had a number of constituents locally that fit in the sub-three-storey building category that are affected by cladding, but because they do not fit into the Cladding Safety Victoria scheme, they still have to go about repairing their building and undergoing the changes and rectification works of their building. Many of them are being hit with special levies that insurance companies do not cover. I have had a number of retirees and those that are on pensions and living in these buildings approach my office over recent years who are really struggling to determine how they go about paying for these rectification works.

The problem is certainly not one size fits all, and I think it is really important to recognise those smaller buildings and the many Victorians that have been impacted. As I say, insurance does not cover them, and even in some instances where it did cover them, the retrospectivity of this bill means that now that insurance period has run out. So even in some of the buildings where it was covered, because the actual time period has run out, there is a negotiation now between a lot of the buildings that are covered with Cladding Safety Victoria and the insurance companies. I know that is a case-by-case scenario, and I know a lot of that is being done with insurance companies and the buildings themselves. I think it is really important to put on record that we should not have individuals that are out of pocket as a result of this, particularly when this situation was not of their own cause. That goes to many, many owners and certainly many builders that all went in with the best of intent. This does not cover people that have deliberately done the wrong thing, because they have not done the wrong thing. These are faulty materials – make no mistake – that the government said at one point in time were fit for purpose,

and we know now these cladding materials were not fit for purpose. People are left in the middle – Victorians are left in the middle – to pick up the pieces. We want to make sure that does not happen and those are minimised.

I did put on record the many small businesses and builders that are really experiencing cost-of-living increases being imposed on them. We have even seen situations at the moment with the war in the Middle East. Part of the war in the Middle East affects fuel costs, building material costs and even plastic piping and the like. I was told yesterday by a number of builders that they will not go and do jobs beyond the 30-kilometre region because of the cost of fuel. A lot of those contractors and builders are now having to limit the kind of work that they are doing. This all adds to the cost of construction. It all adds to the cost of building. It means that when we do see a halt in the building industry and not the construction that we have seen in the past, it all comes down to two things – confidence and cost, the two Cs. These are both issues that fairly and squarely remain with the government. There is a lack of confidence in Victoria in the building industry because of the regulation, because of the red tape, because of the system failure, because of taxation and because it is just too hard to do business. We have heard builders and we have heard investors say, ‘Anywhere but Melbourne. Anywhere but Victoria.’ That is a confidence issue that we need to turn around. In terms of that, we would hope that changes as well. That confidence piece is a really, really important thing, and also what links very closely with confidence is cost. We have got to get costs down. Whether it be materials, whether it be labour or whether it be taxation, we have got to get all of that down to ensure builders can continue to grow, that we get tradies coming through the industry and that we get more homes built. The government has a target to build more homes. We will only build more homes if we have got more builders to build those homes. To do that, we need confidence in the industry. That is why I say to the government, in finishing up: let us get that right, let us get these things fixed and let us ensure that builders can build more homes, Victorians can get into more homes and we do not make it cost prohibitive so that they cannot afford these new homes.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (15:05): I am delighted to make a contribution to the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026, and I would like to begin my contribution by reflecting on the impact that this cladding had on a number of my constituents. One of the first meetings I had when I was elected as a member of Parliament was with a Vietnam veteran who came to my office quite distressed, having discovered that his apartment building in Maribyrnong had flammable cladding on it. He expressed to me that he had saved up for a long time to pay a deposit on this property and that he was very concerned about the financial implications for him and for his neighbours, and he asked that I follow this matter up with the then planning minister, Richard Wynne. I remember raising this matter with Minister Wynne’s office, and Minister Wynne acted really quickly on this issue. There were a number of properties in Footscray that were impacted, and there was a lot of fear, particularly in the apartment market in the inner west, around what would happen in terms of funding the cladding removal.

Cladding Safety Victoria is now approaching the conclusion of the cladding rectification program that was put in place, which has successfully made the built environment in Victoria safer for everyone through the removal of high-risk combustible external cladding. Of course we all remember the fire that happened at an apartment building in Docklands and how scary that was for everyone concerned. Cladding Safety Victoria had a really important task, and the legislation governing Cladding Safety Victoria’s activities is now thankfully no longer required and can be repealed. Any remaining cladding safety related activities will be completed by the Victorian Building Authority (VBA), and Cladding Safety Victoria will be abolished.

The Victorian government released its building statement in 2025 and in doing so set out its commitment for a safer, more trusted building system for Victoria. As part of these reforms, the VBA is evolving into the state’s more powerful building watchdog, the Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC), with stronger oversight over the building and plumbing industries in Victoria. To effectively regulate these industries, the Building and Plumbing Commission requires long-term and sustainable funding. With the cladding safety program concluding, the funding provided to Cladding Safety

Victoria through the cladding rectification program is no longer required and can be repealed. It will be replaced with a new lower component of the building permit levy, to be used to provide funding to the Building and Plumbing Commission.

This bill will repeal the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 and abolish Cladding Safety Victoria as an agency, including abolishing the CSV board and the role of the CEO. It will transfer CSV's property, rights and liabilities to the VBA. It will amend the Building Act 1993 to confer upon the VBA cladding safety related functions to enable the VBA to complete any outstanding cladding safety related activities after the CSV is abolished.

It will transfer any remaining employees of the CSV to the VBA, and it will repeal the cladding rectification levy component of the building permit levy and introduce a new lower element to the building permit levy to be applied to building work carried out on class 2 to 8 buildings in non-regional Victoria with a cost of \$1.5 million or more up to and including on 30 June 2029. It will make technical amendments to the Building Act to provide clarity for the operation of the building permit levy.

With the completion of the cladding rectification program in sight, this bill enables the repeal of the Cladding Safety Victoria Act and the abolition of Cladding Safety Victoria as an agency. When Cladding Safety Victoria was established under the Cladding Safety Victoria Act as a standalone agency in January 2020, it was always intended that it would be wound down once it had achieved its objectives. Cladding Safety Victoria is on track to have comprehensively improved building safety for all Victorians. As Cladding Safety Victoria will no longer exist, the act will be repealed. When Cladding Safety Victoria is abolished, its property rights and liabilities will be transferred to the VBA and any actions or proceedings underway when Cladding Safety Victoria is abolished will become actions and proceedings of the VBA. The state will retain its rights under the Building Act for any payments made by Cladding Safety Victoria and subsequently any payments made by the VBA for cladding rectification, meaning the state can continue to pursue builders for cost recovery. Any staff remaining at Cladding Safety Victoria on commencement of the repeal bill will integrate into the VBA to complete important cladding safety related activities and finalise CSV's business obligations. This means that the expert knowledge and skills that have been developed through this agency and built up over the last six years will not be lost and will enable the VBA to continue supporting communities with respect to cladding safety.

The Building Act will be amended to confer cladding safety related functions to the BPC. These functions will allow the VBA to complete any cladding safety related activities still in progress while CSV is wound down. The VBA will be able to monitor and finalise the remaining few cladding rectification works still underway after Cladding Safety Victoria's abolishment. The VBA will continue to provide support to owners and owners corporations in relation to cladding safety risk, make final payments under funding agreements and advise the Minister for Housing and Building on its performance in relation to its cladding safety functions. Providing the VBA with these functions should mean that no-one is left disadvantaged, unpaid or with incomplete works.

The conclusion of the cladding rectification program means that the cladding rectification levy is no longer needed and can be repealed. A new lower component of the building permit levy will be introduced, with a reduction in the amount due on applicable building permits meaning cost savings for industry and consumers. Funds collected from this new component of the levy will be used to provide long-term financial stability to the Building and Plumbing Commission, allowing for strong and robust oversight of the building and plumbing industries.

The cladding rectification levy was introduced in 2020 to provide approximately half of the initial \$600 million of funding committed to Cladding Safety Victoria by the government. The cladding rectification levy is currently applied at varying rates to building works on class 2 to 8 buildings that are not in regional Victoria with a build cost of \$800,000 or more. The new component of the building permit levy will also apply only to class 2 to 8 buildings in non-regional Victoria, but with a higher cost threshold of \$1.5 million or more. It will apply only to building work carried out on these non-

regional buildings between the commencement of the bill and on or before 30 June 2029. This will enable a reduction in levy costs of between 47 and 66 per cent for affected building classes.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of Cladding Safety Victoria, particularly for the help extended to my constituents in Footscray. It was an incredibly stressful time for many of those residents, and I know that their important work made a huge difference to their lives.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (15:15): I rise to talk on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. I have been immersed in the building game for quite some time. At the very onset of when buildings started to change with different cladding material becoming available, it actually changed the way architects and also developers could change the facade and the look of a building, whether it be a new build or whether it be works to pretty up older buildings. It was an easier, quicker way to be able to do that using these products. It was not just in inner-city Melbourne; it spread right throughout regional Victoria. With some of the builds and designs that could be achieved by using the cladding, it was no wonder builders and other people in the building game decided that they needed to use these products. They were easy to use once you learned how to install them.

These products that we are talking about were legal. They were fine at that stage. We could use these particular materials to clad our buildings, and they looked smart and they looked good. There were builders using them right across regional Victoria, and without a doubt there were more builders using these products than not using these products. But then of course we saw the issues, as the previous member just spoke about, with what happened when there was a fire in a building and the devastation and loss that that did cause. It caused grief right throughout the building industry. I am only talking about my time with it with workers in regional Victoria, down throughout Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley, that had used these products, and then all of a sudden, they were a hazard. I think everybody collectively took a deep breath and thought, ‘How do we fix this? What are going to be the outcomes? Is it all the products that are to blame, or is it only certain products?’

This is why we had to, collectively right across the state, have things in place so that buildings could be checked off on what materials were used and whether they complied or did not comply. I am not sure at the end of the day whether there are bits and pieces on buildings throughout Victoria that have not been changed – I hope they all have been – because we just will not know. That is how popular the products seemed to be at particular stages.

This bill repeals the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020, and it abolishes Cladding Safety Victoria, transferring the remaining functions, assets and liabilities to the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) framework and its practice into the broader Building and Plumbing Commission reform architecture. In winding back and closing off the Cladding Safety Victoria Act and Cladding Safety Victoria itself and moving it on, we need to make sure that we are vigilant moving forward and that we do capture all the inferior products that were used. As I said, it is not going to be easy to make sure that we can do it. I know there are builders right around the state. We heard from, I think, the member for Brighton before about a particular builder that 10 years on has been handed a notice from the government about issues from during his time as a builder. So it affects people right across the board.

Nowadays we know what the minimum standard is when we do a build. We are using products that are fire-resistant. Back in the day when it first came out, we needed to make sure that this was the case, but because it was so popular and we did not know – hindsight is a wonderful thing – we unfortunately are in this situation at the moment.

The member for Caulfield went through and spoke about the new set-up and what it is going to entail. He also said, and I am happy about it, that we are not opposing the bill here because it is doing good. We need to make sure that as we morph into and transform into another entity, we are doing the work that needs to happen not only here in Melbourne, because we do see a lot of high-rise buildings that have cladding on them, but also around regional Victoria, so that we are capturing every building that these products were used on.

As I said, we are not opposing the bill, as it relates to more administrative changes across the board. We need to make sure that in doing that we are not putting unjust pressure on our smaller builders who have been innocently caught up in this whole procedure and project, because when they were actually doing the builds and using the cladding, as I said, it was a legal product that they could use. It had all the stamps on it when it came in. So we need to make sure that on one hand, yes, we are moving through and removing it and that rectification works are happening on the buildings that have this product but also that we are not putting undue pressure and stress on small builders, who probably to this day are wondering as buildings get audited, ‘Does my building comply or does it not comply?’ Sometimes there is that pressure on builders, especially if they have retired and stopped building. I think the member for Brighton said there was a million-dollar bill sent to one former builder who had retired. Where do they get the money from? Their insurance has probably stopped. I know that coming into this place I had to wind up my own plumbing business and the procedures we needed to go through. I had to keep it running for a couple of years because I needed to have that insurance in place – run-out insurance for any works that I had done on either domestic homes or commercial buildings. There would be a lot of older people, and I will talk about regional Victoria, that had used these products and have now retired and have the pressure of not being covered by their insurance. We are putting more and more doubt and pressure on them, and it is not easy in the building game at the moment.

We talk about the need – and I think every member in this place knows the need – for more housing, whether it be our standard house-and-land packages or inner-city living in high-rises. We need to be able to make sure that we have the workforce to build these much-needed houses. At the moment it is nearly easier for builders and plumbers and trades in general to think twice about whether they need to stay in the game, especially as they get older and they are within that five- to eight-year period from being able to retire. We need to make sure that we look after them as well.

Many of the small businesses, as I said, that were using the products relied on information about how safe they were, probably via regulatory procedures that the government was in charge of. We talk about the VBA and so forth. They probably needed that comfort and had that comfort that these products were legal. So as we do move through and rectify and get rid of all these dangerous products that clad so many buildings in Melbourne and regional Victoria, we need to also not forget the mum-and-dad business that has to carry so much these days and is always putting money out, whether it be to have insurance or to be licensed properly. We need to make sure that we do not put extra stress on them as we move through rectifying all of these works. As we said, we are not opposing, and we look to the future to see how we go.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (15:25): I also rise to speak in favour of the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. I will talk a little bit about the origin of the bill that is being repealed, even though of course previous speakers have done so as well. Just to give the context, this arose when it was discovered that there was unsafe and flammable cladding being put into buildings, particularly apartment buildings, and removal was required. It was unsafe. Internationally, there had been the most horrific fires. Of course it was really something that was so dangerous that it needed removal immediately and replacement. This devastated many home owners of apartments in particular, because they did not have the money to reclad their buildings, the apartment blocks that they were living in, and a number of builders were talking about closing down or moving assets so that they were not required to rectify the work and could avoid their obligations. Also there was concern, even for builders that were doing the right thing, that this could cause a major collapse of the industry. So when we are listening to some of the opposition speakers on this bill talking about how we have got to look after the builders, this actually was legislation that was there to protect the industry and ensure that there was not a big collapse of companies as a result of this cladding problem.

The government responded to this major problem and stepped in with regulatory requirements and also financial support, some of which of course was funded by a cladding rectification levy on industry, which again is included and will be repealed as part of this bill. The cladding on all of these buildings

has been removed and replaced, and therefore the legislation that was for that very specific issue – the issue is finished; the work is now complete – is no longer required. I understand it was a massive job, and it required great work from the organisation that was responsible for overseeing this work. But something like over 1600 buildings, which account for something like 83,000 homes, have now been made safe. That gives a bit of an example of the extent of this problem, how massive it was and how important it was for the government – that is, a Labor government – to step in and support and help those home owners, as well as the building industry itself.

This legislation is repealing the cladding legislation and the levy that was collected to provide some financial support for the replacement, but we have also got to adjust the building permit levy. This is a levy to provide funding to the Building and Plumbing Commission, which is a newly established organisation, to protect consumers in the building industry. But when you look overall at the cladding levy and this, there is something like a 66 per cent reduction in total levy costs, so it is actually a reduction rather than an increase. It is just really replacing one levy with another smaller levy. The Allan Labor government has introduced a suite of legislative reform and regulation to provide stronger oversight and regulation in the building industry going forward, and this also includes further legislation that we will be considering later this week in this sitting of Parliament.

The Liberal–National opposition always criticise and complain about any sort of regulation, particularly, it seems, in the building industry. Of course this is one of the mantras of the free-marketeering zealots that we have over in the opposition, but by allowing the free market, you are not supporting the consumers in this space.

I know, as we have heard from the previous speaker and others, there is a lot of concern for the builder. But if we are concerned and worried about the builder, does that mean we are not going to worry about the consumer? When you look at the investment in a house, it is one of the biggest investments, if not the biggest, that a person or a family will ever make – that is, to buy their own home. Not only is it the largest investment, it probably takes the longest time for them to pay off that investment over many, many, many years of their life in order to eventually – hopefully before they retire – own their own home and know that they have got the security and stability of a long-term place in which their family and they can live. Because of this, it is so important to make sure that there are really strong and enforceable regulations, legislation and penalties to ensure that consumers and home owners are protected with this huge investment in their life. We want to make sure that those investments are strong and sound, and in order to do this, we really need to make sure the legislation protects, because the building industry can be an unsafe industry. It is an industry where there are a lot of businesses that come and go very quickly. While we know there are some great companies out there that really have a real commitment to building homes for people and building quality homes, it is also an industry where there are a lot of smaller businesses – and larger – that are able to game the system and use the system to make an excessive profit at the expense of those who are buying their own home.

There are a few examples where even legislation that has been designed to protect the consumer has often been used by a builder against the rights of a consumer. I will give an example: the sunset clauses in some of the building contracts of the past. This is another piece of legislation that the Allan Labor government had to reform in order to again protect consumers. In this case, what was happening was that if you purchased a land and house package, for example – it was not built or anything like that – there was a certain amount of time after which, if the builder did not build that house or start the house, you were able to claim your deposit back and go elsewhere. What was happening, because of the massively rising prices of land – particularly in places like Wollert, for example, and Thomastown – was that builders were securing that deposit and then allowing the sunset clause period to lapse, giving the deposit back to the home owner and then reselling that land at a far higher price to somebody else, leaving the home owner with nothing and priced out of the market because they could no longer afford the property that they originally had a contract for. Again, as I said, the Labor government had to rectify that legislation in order to stop that happening.

Here are some of the examples where governments are reacting to problems in the building industry and having to introduce piecemeal or individual circumstance legislation in order to protect consumers. Why I am talking about that now is getting on to the BPC, the Building and Plumbing Commission, which is a really comprehensive suite of pieces of legislation that are now being introduced – some have been, and there will be further reform. The idea of this is that, rather than being reactive with single pieces of legislation, we have a body that is going to be a very strong and sound protector of the consumer – of those home owners – to make sure that, going forward, these protections stay and hopefully address all the issues that may come along.

It is also legislation and reform that has really taken into account a lot of the housing strategy that the government has as well as the changing nature of housing. What I mean by that is, for example, high density – coming legislation, and legislation that we have already introduced, is all about also protecting and filling gaps. Where previously there were very few people in apartments, now that is becoming more and more predominant as land prices go up as well as different lifestyles being required. This is legislation that is also going to make sure that those who purchase apartments are also protected in what they have and ensuring that if there are defects and if things are not going according to plan, they have a place to go as a first resort, not a last resort, in order to have those issues rectified and be properly compensated for them.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:35): I am pleased to rise today to speak on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. Right from the start, the opposition has said we do not oppose this bill. I do congratulate my colleague the member for Caulfield, the shadow minister in this space, for the work he has done on it and for informing our side of the house what this bill is about.

I think when we talk about Cladding Safety Victoria particularly, we have to go back a little bit in time to figure out why this all came about in the first place and why this really ended up being an issue in the construction industry. Cladding was actually a concern back in the 1990s – it goes back a lot further than people realise. The problem we had back then was with the claddings and the way they were represented, particularly through the Building Code of Australia, there was actually quite a lot of confusion about them and how to rate them with fire ratings. That is where a lot of these problems started.

I have heard members of this chamber talk about dodgy builders in regard to cladding. I am not going to dispute that there are dodgy builders out there, but just be a little bit mindful of your language on this one, because what happened here was what generally happens, which is, when you are tendering a project, whatever project it is, whether it be a house or a commercial building or a school or a hospital, whatever, you get given a list of specifications. The architect will specify what products you use. The builder in accordance with the specifications will price up those products, and if he wins the job he will install those products. Then you have got the building surveyors at the end of the day, who write off that job and give that job the certificate of occupancy. The problem we had with cladding – not just in Victoria, in Australia – was there was quite a bit of confusion, or you could interpret things in different ways. The regulations were quite ambiguous, and this is where the problem came in. It was around the regulation around particularly the fire rating associated with the cladding. This is why we ended up with the problem we had. Obviously it all came to a head with the Lacrosse building fire in November 2014. That was when this topic really came to a head. It probably should have been dealt with earlier.

As I said, there was always this ambiguity about how things were, and part of it stemmed from – and this came out of the audit out of New South Wales – confusion about whether the cladding was part of the wall or whether it was separate, like a lining or a pretty finish on a wall, for want of better terminology. What happened there was, if it got interpreted a different way, the fire rating was less on that wall construction, and that is where the problems came in. Hence it was, if my memory serves, about 2017 when Ted Baillieu and, I think, Brumby worked together on getting Cladding Safety Victoria up and operational, which needed to be done. It actually needed to be done because there

were a lot of buildings throughout Melbourne and Victoria that were clad in flammable materials, and it puts people at risk.

The reason we do not oppose this bill, obviously, is because it is streamlining this process back to the Building and Plumbing Commission, but we do need to know the history about why we ended up in this situation. Even though we do not oppose this, I do have some concerns myself, obviously, coming out of the industry, on how this is going to look going forward. Part of me feels as though I had some comfort that we had a separate authority looking after this cladding component. I know the old Victorian Building Authority (VBA), now the BPC, historically has probably not performed that well. My concern is: if this now goes through the BPC, which is what this bill essentially does, are we going to keep the performance up? Are we going to capture all the cladding that needs to be captured and replaced?

I think from the figures being tossed around there is about 19 per cent of work left to do. That figure could be subjective, but that is the figure I have heard, so I will run with 19 per cent. My concern is that if it comes through the BPC will they capture and complete all the works that need to be done? There are various figures floating around. I have heard a figure from one stakeholder that told me there were 82 buildings still left to finish, which is significant. I am not sure if that figure is correct or not. I have actually found nothing else to substantiate that figure, but whatever buildings are out there, I hope they do get captured and they do get recladded. I think the original figure was about \$600 million and that is what the money was for: to fix these problems with the cladding on buildings in this state. Obviously I know they have gone out and they have done schools and hospitals and all the rest of it, but in this whole sector there is a part that is missing in this.

Again, this is no fault of the builder, the building surveyor or the architect. They put materials on that were deemed to be fit for purpose and deemed to comply when those buildings were built, but we are missing a large section of this and that is at the smaller level. You heard the story today of a builder that has been out of the industry for 10 years and gets hit with a million-dollar bill. The builder did nothing wrong. He installed what was specified. As a builder, if you do not install what was specified, you actually have to fix it. You actually have to go back and reclad it and do it as per the specifications. So how can a smaller builder that has done exactly what was specified get hit with a million-dollar bill? This is where I am a little bit concerned that we have missed a large portion of this. There could be buildings out there that I built, that I have put this cladding on, that I am not even aware is flammable. I would not know, I honestly would not know. Now, my registrations have lapsed. I am out of construction. My licences have been suspended. I did not renew them when I got into Parliament. I just suspended my licences, hoping that I could retire one day from this beautiful place, but you never know, politics is a funny thing. But this is my concern: how many builders are going to get hit up retrospectively on these cladding issues and get bills from the government? I think we need to do more work around this area to make sure that people that have done the right thing, have built the job in good faith, have built the job as per specification, have built the job as per the architect's design, and it has been signed off by a registered building surveyor and has got the certificate of occupancy – when does this become their fault when all they have done is follow the letter of the law and the regulation at the time that these cladding issues were around? To me it does not seem fair, and to me we have to be very, very careful that builders that have been retired for 10 years do not get hit with million-dollar bills – that is not right. It is just not right, and it is not fair on the builder and it is not fair on the architect or the building surveyor.

We need our builders going into the future, and our building industry at the moment is getting belted from pillar to post. Every time they turn another direction there is another change of regulation, there is another whack to the industry. I am a little bit concerned about this. This could be the sceptic in me, but maybe it was part of the Silver review to streamline Cladding Safety Victoria into the Building and Plumbing Commission. I personally do not have a problem with it, providing the Building and Plumbing Commission do their job. That is the main part that I have a concern about, because as

history has told me the old VBA, which we literally rebranded the Building and Plumbing Commission, has not showered itself with glory of late.

As I said, also I am just worried about the buildings or the dwellings we do not know about, because I think it is fairly reasonable to say there are more out there, but we just do not know. Will this, through the Building and Plumbing Commission, capture those properties as well?

But what we definitely should not be doing is billing people retrospectively from a certain timeline as if they are liable for this, because, as I have stated, if they have followed all the documentation, the specifications that were supplied and installed it correctly and it has been signed off by a building surveyor, it is not fair or reasonable for them to assume the cost of the rectification. Maybe the government might want to think about reviewing that some time in the future. As we said, we do not oppose the bill, but they are my comments.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:45): It is a pleasure to rise today in support of the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. I thank the minister for her work in bringing this legislation to the Parliament and congratulate her on a job well done. I say this because today's legislation represents a welcome end to a serious and sensible reform delivered over the course of many years and several staunch progressive Labor governments. This is a strong example of government stepping in to address a serious issue, delivering results and then responsibly concluding the program once the job is done. At its core the bill will wind up Cladding Safety Victoria, which was always intended to be a temporary agency, and transfer its remaining responsibilities to the Victorian Building Authority, now operating as the Building and Plumbing Commission. It will also ensure that any outstanding work, staff assets and obligations are smoothly transitioned so that nothing is left unfinished.

This reform marks a successful conclusion of a world-leading program established by the Victorian government in response to the risks posed by combustible cladding, particularly following the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in 2017. Those who followed that story will share my recollections of that horrific event, a horrible and tragic event which was made even more so because it was so remarkably preventable. The 72 lives lost that night were needless victims of unenforced and nonetheless outdated regulations which put lives at risk. It was a matter of time, unfortunately, until something like the horrific images of a towering inferno came closer to home – that is of course unless government intervened and stopped that from happening.

Through Cladding Safety Victoria, Victoria became a global leader in identifying and fixing unsafe cladding. The agency worked closely with building owners, residents and fire authorities to assess risk and carry out remediation. The results speak for themselves. More than 99 per cent of the highest risk residential buildings have now been made safer, with the remaining works nearing completion. Hundreds of government and community buildings, including schools and hospitals, have also been remediated. In addition, over a thousand lower risk buildings have been given clear pathways to reducing their risk.

This work has not only improved safety but saved Victorians from facing enormous personal costs to fix these issues themselves. Let us take a step back and consider what this represents. In response to a horrific event thousands of kilometres away community leaders recognised the status quo was not up to scratch and set out to change that. What followed was a serious examination of our regulatory structures and a wholesale reform of the way Victoria administers its inspection and enforcement procedures. Across several ministers, governments and terms of Parliament, the Victorian government has delivered a quantifiable improvement to the community and the standards we can expect from construction and the houses we live in. At a time when trust in government is low globally, I am proud to point to reforms like this that prove that this government is one of delivery. The benefit of long-term governments is that we get to introduce reforms, shepherd them through conception, administration and delivery and then, as we do today, resolve them once the job is done.

Only Labor governments stand up for working families and support them in the biggest purchase they will make in their lifetime, and CSV has done a spectacular job at keeping Victorians safe. At the conclusion of the program CSV will have rectified around 450 private residential apartment buildings, assessed over 21,000 buildings for cladding risk, worked with government to improve the safety of users of 133 government buildings, funded remediation works and produced cladding risk information for more than 80,000 privately owned apartments – certainly a job well done.

It is also worth putting on the record some of the other improvements this bill implements. Importantly, the bill ensures that the expertise built up over recent years is not lost. The Building and Plumbing Commission will take on the remaining functions along with experienced staff so that any outstanding matters are completed properly and that knowledge continues to inform the system. The changes to the building permit levy are also significant. By replacing the cladding levy with a lower charge the overall levy will drop substantially, by around half in many cases. These changes will apply only to larger developments in metropolitan areas, meaning most home owners and regional projects will not be affected. This strikes a sensible balance, reducing costs while maintaining funding for ongoing building reforms and supporting the delivery of more housing.

The bill also updates the way we fund building system reforms. It removes the cladding rectification levy and replaces it with a lower, more targeted component within the building permit levy. This change will reduce costs for builders and consumers while still supporting ongoing improvement to the system. The bill also includes some technical amendments to ensure the Building Act 1993 operates as intended.

This means a lot for Victorian families and Victorian residents, because we know the risk – we saw the risk firsthand back in 2017 – of what combustible cladding can do, with the horrific consequence that we all saw on our TV screens those years ago. CSV have done their job and are near finishing, and we thank them for the work that they have done. I want to acknowledge the hard work of CSV's board, leadership and staff. Their efforts over the past six years have made a real difference to Victorians, and we have set an example for others to follow. I commend this bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (15:52): We have a bill before us that is about repealing Cladding Safety Victoria, and the bill is named the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. I want to start by talking about cladding, how it is used and what has brought about this problem. Cladding is not something that was just a trend at the time. It had actually been used since the 1970s and particularly used on medium- to high-risk developments, although it was not used exclusively on these larger buildings; it was used on some of the lower rise buildings as well. We heard the members for Morwell and Narracan, both of whom were in the building industry, say that the cladding materials were used because they were easy to use. I will talk about aluminium: it is a light metal, it is strong, it is resistant to corrosion and it is malleable and durable, but it is highly conductive. It has a lot of positive elements, and being light, it was ideal for some of these purposes. Polyethylene, a plastic, is a petrochemical, and it is moisture-resistant. So combining the moisture resistance of the polyethylene and aluminium created what was a pretty easy to use product to clad buildings. Polyethylene, whilst I am not particularly big on plastics, is a plastic that is used in a lot of toys and bottles, tubes, packaging and things that have everyday use. So we cannot just demonise this, although, as I said, I am not a big plastic user at all. It looks smart and it looks good, so this was used very extensively since the 1970s, 40-odd years before there were real problems.

We saw in November 2014 in the Docklands the Lacrosse building, and the fire spread rapidly up the building at that time. I remember there were 137 owners who were really caught short, because this has not happened before. There were issues with the building and its safety and what it meant with the rectification and repairs, and it was really difficult for the owners of those buildings at the time.

But what it did for us is highlight flammable cladding. At the time, because this was recognised, there was an audit to have a look at how Victoria was placed here.

In 2017 in June we did see the Grenfell Tower fire. The world watched on in horror as 72 people died and as many people were injured – and we still have the memories. As a result there was a taskforce established in Victoria, led by former Premier Ted Baillieu and former Deputy Premier John Thwaites. They spent a couple of years and handed down a report in July 2019. But in 2017 it was reported that there were perhaps some 1400 buildings in Victoria at risk, and the VBA, the Victorian Building Authority, were directed to audit 10 per cent of Victoria's buildings every year, up from 2 per cent annually. I do not know the status of this, and I would be quite keen to understand where that is at now. Cladding Safety Victoria (CSV) was an outcome of that taskforce, and it was established in December 2020.

Now, the member for Mulgrave talked about the job being done. Well, the job is not done. We are not exactly sure how much is done. The government's figures were a bit rubbery on that, but there is still work that needs to be done. There were certainly the high-risk areas that were identified and dealt with first and the lower medium-risk areas. There are a number of areas that are actually really important here – design and construction, regulation and compliance, quality assurance and consumer protection. There is still probably some work that needs to be done there. I have a property, an apartment in a building in Southbank, which is subject to these cladding issues. For a while we thought we were not in it, then we were in it, then we were not in it. In the second-reading speech, it says that CSV have:

... protected Victorians from the debilitating debts which would have been incurred had they been forced to self-fund the rectification of combustible cladding-related building work.

Well, let me tell you, the 500 people in my building have all just been hit with a couple of thousand dollars as the first of three tranches to pay for these remediation works on our building. So there are certainly people that are paying for this, and the job is not done because we have only just been hit with this bill within the last month.

Through this process a lot of the high-rise buildings are in the City of Melbourne, and we are very familiar with where all of these are. The City of Melbourne in conjunction with Cladding Safety Victoria have been overseeing the identification and removal of high-risk materials, particularly aluminium composite panels, which I outlined before and talked a little bit about the features of. They have been working with different owners corporations, and that certainly happened in our situation. There are issues too around how this is happening, the process, the safety, the funding and assistance, risk mitigation, reporting and consenting and looking at those affected areas in Melbourne, Docklands, Brunswick and Southbank.

Through these processes there have been changes made to building specs, for example. I know that there were schools – in fact I visited a school in regional Victoria – that had the problematic cladding. Now the Victorian School Building Authority website actually outlines the changes to the technical specs, and the roofing in schools must be selected from and satisfy roof materials that meet requirements including being free from aluminium composite panels with a polyethylene core or expanded polystyrene. We are seeing that in the roofs, but not only the roofs. The specs around the external walls and cladding also mention compliance with the Australian standards and with some of what we have picked up through the works here. Hospitals also were identified. In fact there were eight hospitals in Victoria that had problematic cladding, and these were the Royal Women's, Werribee Mercy, Monash Medical Centre, Sunshine, Frankston, the north wing of the Royal Melbourne Hospital and two buildings at the Casey Hospital.

These were probably higher risk, where we needed to make sure. Because they are hospitals and are there to deal with ill and very unwell people, it was a higher risk and a higher priority.

One of the things that others have talked about here is the issue with small builders and builders being made responsible for materials, which the government at the time said were safe, and if they would be required to pay for rectification. It is pretty easy for the government to give away or blow \$15 billion on CFMEU construction sites, but they want builders here, who followed the government's advice on what materials were safe, to clean up that mess. I do not think that is fair, and we need to make sure

that we are not targeting some of these small builders and sending them broke, sometimes years after they may have exited that industry.

The government have not been clear about how much remains in the cladding fund or how they will address outstanding cladding risks. Now, through this process – through the taskforce and Cladding Safety Victoria – there has been some expertise, and that is going to be rolled into the Building and Plumbing Commission. As with a lot of these things, it gets transferred and can be diluted. If we have very specific expertise in this area, as the cladding rectification processes are winding up, we need to make sure that is properly documented and those skills are absolutely transferred, because what can happen is that people and knowledge can get transferred and move on, and then there is a vacuum of information because the knowledge stayed with the person. We need to make sure that the expertise is not lost and that there are the appropriate mechanisms and the appropriate processes in place to make sure it does not rest with people but instead rests with the organisation and is properly documented. I cannot stress how important that is, because too often you see these processes rolled into a new authority or into a different area and lost, and we all suffer from that. We need to make sure that what we have learned is indeed learned and not forgotten about in five or 10 years when we may have other issues arise that are unexpected. As I said at the outset, these materials were used since the 70s, so they were not a fad. These were things that had been there and had not posed a problem until they did. We could still have some issues like that coming up.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:02): I will start off by just acquitting one of the concerns raised. Cladding Safety Victoria has documented its findings and processes to assist in any future cladding rectification programs. Documents such as *Minister's Guideline 15* and the *Cladding Risk Mitigation Framework*, which provide an approach to consistently and systematically addressing the risks posed by combustible cladding on class 2 and class 3 buildings, will remain publicly available to use on relevant buildings. There is more I will say on that, but it is just to say that we are respecting, yes, that there needs to be a continuation of publicly available information, in light of how extensive and serious these matters have been, which led in the first place to the time-bound – and I will emphasize that – Cladding Safety Victoria (CSV). What has been well transacted, for good reason, in the chamber today is what the triggers were that led ultimately to the establishment of Cladding Safety Victoria – namely, the combustible cladding related fires, which had indeed catastrophic consequences, the 2014 fire at the Lacrosse apartment building in Melbourne and the Grenfell Tower fire in London.

I know when I was apartment shopping – I should say, when I was moving from being a renter to an owner, which was not so long ago – the thoughts in my head, being the consumer, were about cladding: ‘Had cladding rectification works been undertaken or factored in appropriately? Were they high risk or otherwise?’ I do live in a high-rise tower, but you do not need to live in a high-rise tower to have empathy for fellow Victorians. Of course a fire can happen anywhere. It can be in a one-storey home, so let me put that caveat. Nevertheless, the impacts can be exponential when you have flammable or combustible cladding that has not been attended to. But of course the Victorian government very much tackled the problem head-on with the establishment of the Victorian Cladding Taskforce to examine the rather substantial extent of noncompliant external wall cladding on buildings throughout Victoria.

I would say, though, with that caveat, it was time-bound, because there are very specific purposes. One of them, obviously, is rectification matters, noting that this is not a practice that anyone would want to see or would want to allow into the future, and hence a curtailment of that practice certainly should be or would be understood to be an inherent part of this whole implementation in terms of the taskforce's work.

I should say that the recommendations of the taskforce led to the Victorian government committing initial funding packages totalling \$600 million to establish a private residential cladding rectification program and \$150 million to complete the statewide cladding audit and government buildings cladding rectification program. That was back in July 2019. The cladding rectification levy, a subcomponent of the building permit levy (BPL), was introduced to provide 50 per cent of the \$600 million CRP funding. I am just going to come back to that original point. For good purpose, CSV

was established in 2020 as a time-bound agency to oversee the CRP and the GBCRP and work closely with building owners to rectify the high-risk cladding on class 2 private, residential and government-owned buildings to make these buildings safer for Victorians – because obviously, fundamentally, we are talking about people’s homes and often their life savings or a substantial amount of their life savings and of course safety, at the end of the day.

In terms of what has transpired with Cladding Safety Victoria, I will say that at the conclusion of the program CSV will have rectified around 450 private residential apartment buildings – I know there were concerns raised about clarity regarding exactly what Cladding Safety Victoria has acquitted; assessed over 21,000 buildings for cladding risk – I am not making these statements in any way to make it seem like this is a grand gesture or otherwise, but it has been a very methodical and diligent approach because it is about the safety of Victorians; worked with government to improve the safety of users of 133 government buildings; funded remediation works; and produced cladding risk information for more than 80,000 privately owned apartments. The point of listing those elements is to appreciate the extent of the work that has been undertaken, noting the sheer seriousness of the matters at hand. I will also say that with the repeal of the cladding rectification levy component of the building permit levy, this bill will introduce a new lower levy component to be applied to building work carried out on class 2 to 8 buildings in non-regional Victoria with a cost of building work of \$1.5 million or more on or before 30 June 2029. There are a number of other elements to this bill, I should say, but when we are talking about the levy component and the sustainability component, it will make technical amendments to the Building Act 1993 to provide clarity for the operation of the BPL.

I can also provide some further clarity about Cladding Safety Victoria and matters acquitted. As of 28 February, 442 of the 448 private residential buildings approved for rectification works funding had been completed. The remaining six buildings are in the construction phase. Two further private residential buildings have been addressed, without any cladding works required. There is no smoke or mirrors around that. That is just numbers and facts. But at the end of the day, fundamentally it is about people’s homes, just to be very clear about the matters that have been transacted for all the right reasons.

Now I want to speak a little bit about where this is headed. We know that with the transition of the CSV to the VBA, the knowledge and information base at CSV – I am coming back to the point that I made from the outset, because I understand the importance of making sure that none of that knowledge is lost, noting that in any organisation you will have people who will maybe take other jobs or do other things in any case. So having sustainability or a continuum, if you like, of that important information is very important.

As part of the transition from CSV to the VBA, the knowledge and information base that CSV has built over six years of operation – I am thinking of the thousands of investigations that have taken place – will be transferred and managed appropriately. This is to ensure knowledge remains available to local councils, building practitioners and Victorians in the community. I did hear that concern, but to be absolutely clear, there is very good reason to sustain the availability and accessibility of that information. Clear messages regarding any potential questions arising after CSV’s closure will be made available. Certainly there is absolutely good intent, and not only good intent but clear action that has transpired as a result of the taskforce’s important work on this really serious subject matter. Therefore there is absolutely a built-in, if you like, continuum that has been anticipated, quite rightly and with goodwill, but also from a practical point of view, because there is no need to reinvent the wheel when the knowledge is already there, in anticipation of the time-bound element of Cladding Safety Victoria transitioning.

We know that we will be discussing the new Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 this week, so we do not want to pre-empt that bill until it has actually passed, except to say that there are a number of stages that are being very importantly implemented for the benefit and the safety of Victorians and their homes. And yes, I know – sometimes I get online and some people say,

‘Is an apartment a home?’ I am going to say now an apartment is a home. I am just going on a little tangent there, because they will have a go at you and they will say, ‘An apartment is not a home. The only type of home is a freestanding property with a garden et cetera.’ I live in an apartment, and that is my home. It is nice and cosy, and I have plenty of lovely neighbours who also do, because, further to a point that was raised, living in the City of Melbourne, I would say the overwhelming majority of the homes there are apartments, and therefore it is just as much a home, whether it has a huge, big backyard or otherwise. But anyway, coming back to the point of the bill, it is really about a continuum of keeping Victorians safe.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (16:12): We have heard today a lot about the purpose of this bill, so I will not repeat too much of that, but the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 is to abolish Cladding Safety Victoria (CSV) and the board on the grounds that the government says that the cladding rectification program has concluded in Victoria and then transfer those functions to the Building and Plumbing Commission. We know there is more legislation coming up to specifically deal with that tomorrow, but I will just make all my comments today, rather than speaking to two separate bills which deal with similar issues.

The Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 is the one that is coming tomorrow, and we understand that will set up the framework to undertake compliance and monitoring and enforcement of building legislation, disciplinary and remedial action, something that is very much a concern to my constituents in particular, because we have so many issues that come across my desk. I cannot tell you how many issues come across my desk of rectification and defects that are happening, particularly in big apartment buildings, which then the owners corporations and the owners – my residents – have to deal with. It is awful, and it has meant that we have so many people wanting to leave the city, wanting to leave their apartments, because of not just the financial burden of dealing with defects but the emotional burden, the toll and the number of hours you have to volunteer on the owners corp committees to deal with defects. It is quite extraordinary and not something that anyone should have to deal with because of a defect that was not their fault.

I very much look forward to seeing how this is going to work, but I note that we will wait to see how well it is resourced and how the new framework will be rolled out to see whether it does actually improve things, because there have been a number of actions the government has tried to take to improve things, particularly for the residents that I talked about, but things are still bad. Things are still not working in many cases.

In terms of flammable cladding specifically, I note that CSV did announce in February:

The job is nearly done, with 95% of the program now completed. This is more than 1,550 residential buildings and tens of thousands of Victorians now safer from the risk of combustible cladding thanks to our program.

We have had some briefings from the minister’s office on this issue, so I appreciate that. Thank you for those briefings, particularly with my upper house colleague Mr Puglielli. They have assured us the work really has finished, barring a few ongoing cases that need to be wrapped up – I very much hope that is the case – and they assured us that the work can continue as that work is transferred, even if CSV shuts down. We have only had two weeks to look at this matter, though, and it is something that is really of huge concern to my electorate, because the majority of the buildings that had flammable cladding were in my electorate. So we are doing some more work to talk to our constituents who have contacted us over the last few years with cladding issues to talk to them about how it has gone, whether there are still outstanding issues and the kind of impact that it has had on them. We will bring those to the minister’s office and continue to talk with all of those constituents, and I very much encourage anyone in my electorate to reach out to me to talk to me about that so that we can follow up to make sure that this is actually working as intended.

Many people in this place talked about the Lacrosse fire of 2014, but not many people in this place were actually here when that happened – but I was. 2014 was the year that I was elected, and of course the Lacrosse building is in Docklands, which is in my electorate. That was a real flashpoint, and it was

shocking. It was incredibly distressing for those residents. Very fortunately, nobody was killed and everybody was able to be evacuated, but not enough action happened quickly, because it took another three years. That was in 2014, and it took another three years, until the awful, devastating 2017 Grenfell Tower fire, for the world to start paying attention and this government to start paying attention to the issue of flammable cladding and just how dangerous it is for people. Of course we all remember the Grenfell Tower fire in that public housing building – a housing estate. It was one of the deadliest structural fires in London's history. 72 people lost their lives and dozens more were injured, and it devastated an entire community. It really was a horrific tragedy that forced governments around the world to finally confront the dangers of flammable cladding on buildings, particularly high-rise buildings, and to wake up and figure out what they were going to do about it.

In 2014 the state government did not take much action. After 2017 the state government still did not take much action. It actually took until 2020, six years after Lacrosse and three years after Grenfell – I think we have had a bit of rewriting of history on the government side of the chamber, but this was my electorate, so I lived through this – for the government to establish Cladding Safety Victoria to conduct this large-scale audit across the state. Where cladding was found to be noncompliant or dangerous, those notices were issued to owners corporations and building owners requiring rectification. It took a long time, with my residents pushing, my constituents pushing and my upper house colleague Samantha Ratnam, who was in the other place at the time, and me pushing so hard to get the government to recognise this as an issue and then actually stump up the money to help people actually replace their cladding. I am very thankful that the government did realise that that was something that was really a government responsibility in the end and that they did stump up the money so that people were not left high and dry. That was a huge relief to so many of my constituents, because imagine what the alternative would have been. There was huge uncertainty, a huge amount of risks for constituents, and it was no fault of their own. These were people who bought into apartments I think very reasonably believing that the government would have set rules and regulations to ensure that those buildings were built in a way that was safe for human habitation. It was a failure of government regulation that this flammable cladding was allowed to be imported and then was allowed to be installed on buildings. It was not a failure of the individual owners; it was not people taking risks knowing what the risks were. These were people who I think very reasonably thought just at a bare minimum the role of government should be to set rules and regulations to keep people basically safe in their homes and make sure that the material their homes are made out of is not going to kill them.

It was a failure of government regulation. I do not know why; perhaps there were some cowboy operators bringing in materials illegally. But I think more often than not what had happened was there was no regulation, there was a lack of regulation, the regulation was too lax or there was a blind eye turned to cheaper materials being imported which were then putting people's lives at risk.

It really was a failure of government regulation, and that is the root of the problem here, around the rules of what types of cladding could be imported and used. It was ordinary residents who were really left with the risk and left with that incredible uncertainty and the dangers of living in these buildings. It did take quite a while for the government to really recognise that was a government responsibility. I am glad that that is what happened in the end, and I am glad to see that CSV has had so much success.

I did hear back from a few residents over the last couple of weeks, and I thought I might share some of their stories, just to highlight some of the issues that still remain. In one case in my electorate, for example, only 45 per cent of the cladding on the building was scheduled to be removed. The other 55 per cent, for some reason, did not need to be removed, according to CSV, and those owners really felt like they were quite stuck in limbo because they did not really have any independent guidance to help them navigate these decisions. They were very highly technical decisions that affected their homes and their safety but also their financial security. They did not really know whether to trust that this was the right amount to be removed or not, and that placed a lot of burden on them. Other owners highlighted to me the deep unfairness they felt at having to pay increased owners corporation (OC) fees under the levy while the groups responsible for the crisis – such as designers, planners, builders,

asset managers and auditors – they feel, basically got away scot-free. They felt like many of these same companies actually ended up being employed with government funds to fix the crisis that they felt that they had created. One owner told me that they have already spent \$2.5 million on cladding-related issues already. There were a number of charges and things that owners corporation still had to pay for. Over and above just the cladding, owners corporations still had to pay for a lot of other rectification works or pre works and things like that. I will read out the email this resident sent me, because I think it is important. They say:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

We have engaged independent fire engineers to do tests, and the report showed that we are high risk in our building. However, CSV sponsored a couple of our tests last year and deemed our cladding issues were low risk.

So there were conflicting fire reports and risk reports there.

But CSV would not issue reports signed off by a fire engineer. So we have nothing to produce to the city council to remove our building notice, and CSV is about to cease operation, so there will be no more funding. So we are now completely left in the dark by the government, not knowing how safe our building is and where to go from here, and the spending on cladding issues has broke the OC. We have almost a thousand units in the complex, and every owner is suffering from this change of policy by the government.

We might see more of these stories coming through, and of course I will pass them on to the minister's office to see if we can get to the bottom of some of these. But we still know quite over and above flammable cladding issues that there are still so many issues related to the laws that govern people who live in apartments, particularly the owners corporation laws – so many. If I go through my inbox, in terms of residents who live in the CBD, by far the most common issues that they bring to me are issues with owners corporations and high-rise living. It is everything from costs to difficulty of dealing with building defects, which is a huge one, but there are a litany of other issues – I have raised them in this place many times. There is the difficulty of getting apartment buildings off gas, for example. I have got a whole host of buildings, particularly in places like North Melbourne, that want to get off gas and are happy to pay to get off gas but just cannot do it. It is just technically very, very difficult to do that. There are rules not being fit for purpose – very restrictive rules about what people can do in their apartments. There are developer kickbacks to owners corporation management companies or for maintenance. There are commissions charged on insurance. There is lack of training for owners corporation managers – just the sheer amount of time that people have to put into being volunteer owners corporate on the owners corporation committee. There are just a whole host of issues. We had a public forum about it that just so many people attended at the end of last year. There is so much interest in fixing these issues, and I will continue to raise those with the government and with the minister as well, because they have been ignored for far too long.

Governments, including this government, want more people to live in apartments, and that is a good thing. We want more people to live in apartments. The government is doing a lot to encourage people to live in apartments, but then the laws that govern people's lives once they do live in apartments are so outdated and terrible that they end up significantly impacting people's lives, and they desperately need fixing. We are also still waiting for the government to act on the OC review. That has been years and years in the making. We are still waiting for the government to come and tell us what will actually happen. We have had so many residents engage in good faith in that process to talk about what needs to happen when it comes to the OC laws, and really it has been radio silence.

I very much urge the government to act quickly to make sure that for not just the people who live in apartments now but the thousands more people that the government is wanting to live in apartments these laws are much better than what we have now. I want to thank all of the constituents who have passed on their concerns to me. There have been hundreds and hundreds of them over the years, and please know that I will be continuing to follow up every single case with the government, because people who live in apartments are people too and they have not had as much attention as they should have.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (16:26): I rise in support of the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. This bill does three things: it formally repeals the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 and winds down Cladding Safety Victoria as an agency, it repeals the cladding rectification levy and it adjusts the building permit levy to fund the Building and Plumbing Commission's ongoing consumer protection work. This is a good day, not because we are repealing something but because of what that repeal represents. It represents a job done, a promise kept, a government that said it would protect Victorians from the dangers of combustible cladding and then went out and actually did it – maybe not to the timeframe that the member for Melbourne was really wanting, but we did it, we achieved it. Cladding Safety Victoria was always designed to be a time-limited agency. It had a clear goal: find the buildings putting Victorians at risk, fix them and make sure the cost of that does not fall on the people living in them. That is exactly what happened, and now, with the work substantially complete, it is time to wind it down. This bill does that cleanly and responsibly.

Before I get into the detail I would just like to take a moment to acknowledge the people who made this possible: Rod Fehring, Sarah Clarke and the entire CSV board, CEO Dan O'Brien and every single person on that team. They took on an enormous, complex task. They built a methodology that has been shared around the world, and they protected hundreds of thousands of Victorians who without this program would have been left to face that burden on their own – and that matters. So thank you to those people.

Let me briefly take the house back to where this started. In November 2014 the Lacrosse tower in Melbourne's Docklands caught fire. I still remember seeing the footage on the television, and I was somewhat surprised and appalled that a building could catch fire on the outside. Noncompliant aluminium composite cladding ignited by a cigarette spread flames up 13 storeys. People could see it from the other side of the city, and luckily no-one died. But it was a warning, and the Victorian Building Authority audit that followed found that more than half of building permits inspected did not comply with cladding regulations. More than half: that was not a rounding error; that was a systematic failure. Then, in 2017, we watched in horror as Grenfell Tower burned in London. Tragically, 72 people died, and those deaths were preventable. That fire was the catastrophic result of noncompliant cladding, failed oversight and a system that had left residents without protection.

Victoria paid attention. The Allan Labor government established the Victorian Cladding Taskforce, committed over \$600 million to the rectification program and built Cladding Safety Victoria from the ground up, and the results speak for themselves. More than 1660 buildings were identified, over 83,000 homes were made safer and 150,000 Victorians will go to sleep tonight in buildings that are genuinely safer than they were before this program began.

And it was not just for apartments. The program reached 131 public use buildings – hospitals, police stations, fire stations, TAFEs and courts – and 40 Victorian schools, with nearly 19,000 students. These are the places people trust, the places they send their kids, the places they turn to in an emergency, so CSV have made them safer also. As of 28 February this year, 442 of the 448 private residential buildings approved for rectification works funding have been completed. The remaining six buildings are in the construction phase, and two further buildings have been addressed without any cladding works needed. That is 90 per cent completed and 10 per cent well on the way, so that adds up to 100 per cent job done. A further 132 government-owned and community housing buildings have also been completed. That is not a near miss; that is a program that did what it set out to do.

I might just add here too that in the fulfilment of its functions under the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020, CSV has reviewed in detail the original plans and permits for 1000 privately owned apartment buildings. During extensive and direct engagement with impacted owners and tenants, two of the frequently asked questions have been 'Why was combustible cladding used?' and 'Who is responsible?' The resulting report addresses the second question with insights about more than

800 buildings where adequate information was available in designs and permits to yield a robust conclusion about the compliance of external wall cladding. The report states:

An analysis of this data reveals widespread misapplication of Victoria's regulatory requirements for external wall cladding by the key professionals responsible for the design and permitting of buildings, namely the architects, draftspersons, fire safety engineers ... and building surveyors

You can find a copy of that on the CSV website. The member for Narracan and the member for Morwell spoke about that complete issue – that they thought they were using things that had been approved. Obviously there was a lot of misinformation and misapplication that went on and, thankfully, that has been caught.

Now to the other important work that this bill does. When CSV is abolished, its functions, assets, staff and liabilities transfer to the Building and Plumbing Commission. The BPC is a consumer-facing building regulator to be established by this government to hold dodgy operators accountable and give working Victorians genuine protection when things go wrong. The cladding expertise that CSV has built over six years does not disappear, it carries over. The bill also makes significant changes to the building levy structure, and I want to be clear about what that means in practice. The cladding rectification levy is repealed. It was created to fund half the cost of rectification works. That work is done, and the levy is no longer needed. In its place, a new, lower component of the building permit levy is introduced. This applies only to class 2 to 8 buildings in non-metropolitan areas valued at \$1.5 million or more and only until June 2029. The net effect: an overall reduction in levy costs of between 47 and 66 per cent. Those savings should flow through to builders and to consumers.

Buying a home is the biggest financial decision most working people will ever make – we know that – and every dollar of unnecessary cost we can remove from that process is a dollar back in someone's pocket. This sits alongside the broader work the Allan Labor government is doing to make the building system work for Victorians, not against them. The BPC has tough powers to stop occupancy permits being issued on buildings with serious defects. If it is not fixed, it is not for sale, and soon rectification order powers will force builders back to address seriously defective work, even after move-in day. The first-resort domestic building warranty means homebuyers can make a claim when a problem is first identified, not just when the builder has gone under. The developer bond scheme gives buyers of high-rise buildings a financial safety net that simply did not exist before. These are not abstract reforms; they are the difference between a working family losing tens of thousands of dollars chasing a dodgy operator through VCAT and having a regulator with the power and resources to step in and hold that operator to account.

I will say this plainly: there are members on the other side of this chamber who have stood up and spoken at length about the suffering of Victorians caught out by dodgy builders. They have shared real stories – some have shared their own stories – and yet, when the time came to back the reforms that would actually fix the problem, they opposed them, and that is a choice. Victorians remember those choices. Labor answers to working people. That is why we built CSV, that is why we are building the BPC and that is why we are getting on with constructing more homes with more protections to better standards. In the 12 months to January this year Victoria approved nearly 53,000 dwellings, commenced over 55,000 and completed over 54,000, more than New South Wales and more than Queensland. We are not just building more, we are building better. We said we would fix the cladding crisis. We funded it, we built the agency, we ran the program and we protected 157,000 Victorians in the process. Now we are winding it down responsibly, locking in the savings and making sure the BPC has what it needs to keep protecting consumers for years to come. I commend the bill to the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): I acknowledge in the gallery Ryan Smith, former member for Warrandyte and former Minister for Environment and Climate Change and Minister for Youth Affairs.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:36): Much to the disappointment of my two colleagues in the chamber, I have arrived on time to speak, so it has saved me a slab of beer. I rise to speak on the

Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. In going to this, one of the previous speakers I heard talked about Ted Baillieu's role in this initially, and can I commend Ted for what he did as a Premier and as an architect for the thoughts that he put through and a lot of the things that he did when we were in government. It was his architect's mind that was thinking about this when we got involved in that particular issue after the fire in London and making sure that Victoria was safe. I think we all watched the horror of that fire in London and what happened there and the tragedy it was. All of us collectively, and Ted as a former Premier, wanted to make sure that we did not actually have that in Victoria here. We can argue about the legislation and we can argue about how effective it was, but we have been very fortunate that we actually have not had one of those fires here in Victoria. Now that the majority of that cladding has been removed, there is some debate, particularly from smaller builders, who say that when they used that cladding it was approved and they were working within the rules of the government of the day in using that particular cladding. They found it difficult as smaller builders that they had to then find the money to actually have it taken off and different cladding put on. Their view was that if they did something that was within the government rules and the government has now found it is not safe, why wasn't the government helping them more in actually covering the cost of changing that?

It has been difficult for a lot of body corporates, and a lot of buildings have had to raise the money to change their cladding, but it is now overwhelmingly done. As I understand the statistics, 81 per cent of the program has been completed, 409 high-risk buildings in that program have been completed and something like 275,000 square metres of cladding has been removed. As our lead speaker talked about, that would cover the MCG playing field 13.5 times, so a huge area has been taken off buildings. It was quite a logistical job, and as I said, it covered quite a significant area. A number of government buildings had to be remediated as well through that particular process, and 80,000 private apartments were supported in going through that issue and 133 government buildings were made safer. As all the other previous speakers have talked about, it is time now to wind this particular piece of legislation up and roll it into other legislation.

While we are talking about building and the opportunities for Victoria, I know in my electorate – and I can speak probably for most country electorates – we are all desperate for more housing. When businesses try and attract people to come to our communities to fill the jobs that are there that need to be filled, whether they be professional people from the medical profession, lawyers or accountant, right down to people that do any job in the community, one of the challenges they have when they come to regional Victoria is actually finding a house.

I know that is an issue in Melbourne. Some of my family moved out of a flat that they were not happy with and now have found it very, very hard to get back into a flat here in Melbourne. I think for all the younger people in Melbourne who are looking to rent flats it is really challenging to find accommodation in Melbourne as well. I think some of that comes back to the fact that the current government has changed the balance of power between the investor who owns a rental property to rent it out and the tenants who want to rent that property and live in it. Renters have rights and should have rights, but so do landlords, and they should have rights to protect their asset as well. I think that the balance has gone too far.

I am seeing people in my electorate who own rental properties selling Victorian rental properties and buying rental properties across the river in New South Wales or going to South Australia to buy rental properties because they believe they will get a better return on their investment and have more control over the property – about who can go in it, what they can do with it and how they can actually manage that property and make sure their asset is protected into the future. A word of caution – I know there are some new rules coming in today around rental forms and how you apply for a flat, but my observation, from talking to people who are looking to get a flat and talking to people who have owned rental properties, is that there has been an exit from owning rental properties here in Victoria to other forms of investment or to other states to own rental properties, and I think that is to the detriment of us as a society.

Everyone starts out in life renting a property. Most people do not have the luxury of being able to buy a property straight off. Most people do not have the luxury of having parents who can help them buy a property. Most people start off with a flat. When they are from the country and they move to Melbourne to go to uni or get a job, they get a flat. They build up their reserves. They might buy a flat. They might then trade up to a house at some stage. But at the moment, getting that first step on the ladder to get a rental property is a real challenge. To get the next step to actually own a property is a real challenge.

One of the numbers that I have quoted quite often from the Housing Industry Association is that more than 40 per cent of the cost of a house and land package in Victoria is state government charges, taxes and fees and red tape, green tape and black tape that has to be met to build that particular property. If we want to solve the housing issue, we need to make sure that we can reduce that amount of red, green and black tape in this state for builders who want to build a house, and we need to take the government's hand out of the pocket of everyone who wants to build a house. My philosophy on life is that the government is there to make sure that people do the right thing, but after that it should get out of the way and let private enterprise do what it does best, and that is run businesses and build houses. When any government – it does not matter what side or what colour of government it is – gets too involved in the market, they generally make a mess of it.

I think, collectively, the current government have made a mess of the supply of rental properties because they have changed the rules so much, and they are also making it very expensive for house and land packages because of all the taxes and charges that are on those. If you could reduce a house and land package – cut the taxes in half and take it back to 20 per cent – that would have a huge impact on the price of a house and people's ability to get into one. I know our side of politics has made some commitments around the next election to reducing some of those taxes. That is necessary if we are going to solve the housing issues of this state. We do not want to see just more acres and acres of houses out in the regional areas on the outskirts of Melbourne. I agree that some sensible densification is the way that we do have to go. I know there are debates from our metropolitan MPs as to where that should and should not be, and I will stay right out of that.

A member interjected.

Peter WALSH: Well, I think your electorate is a perfect spot for densification. We really need a fast train to Ballarat. Huge high-rise buildings in Ballarat would be just the way to go. I look forward to you announcing that as a policy. Sorry, through the Chair – I look forward to that being announced at the next election. Sensible densification – but most importantly, get the government's hand out of the pocket of the people who actually invest, who buy the property and who do all the work to do the subdivision and put the roads, the drainage, the sewerage and everything in.

It costs a lot of money to do a subdivision. Stop taxing them so much, and speed the process up. I have talked about it a lot previously because it is now getting houses on it, but C117 was a huge subdivision of 5000 lots to the west side of Echuca. That took six years from concept to actually having final approval of a precinct structure plan. That just cost far too much money for the holding costs for that particular project. There has to be a way of getting these things done faster. I know the government has streamlined some of the processes, but, talking to the people who are doing subdivisions in regional Victoria, it still takes a long time. I was talking to a group in Kyabram on Monday who are doing a small lot for pensioners to live in, and they were told no matter what they do, it was going to take at least 12 months to get through the planning process with local government. That is far too slow. The land is there, some designs are done and there is a philanthropist who is prepared to invest in it to build low-cost housing for pensioners. Why can't it be done faster? The question that was asked of me was: why does it take so long? I do not know the answer to that, but I would love someone to tell me.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:46): At the outset, I reckon that the member for Wendouree is pretty proud of the massive upgrade of Wendouree station that enables residents of Lucas and

Delacombe to get down to Melbourne on 20-minute services at peak times and in 40 minutes the rest of the day, which is about infrastructure coming together to support housing.

The Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 has been an interesting debate, and it has thrown up some interesting I think philosophical counterpoints between the parties on different sides of the house. I will take exception to the Greens political party leader's contribution in due course. But I was interested in the contribution of the member for Murray Plains' contribution and his reflection about the role of government. I would contend that the very bill that we are discussing here, the entity that it seeks to unwind and disestablish in effect, is an act of really substantive and effective government intervention in a market that had failed. To suggest that government should excuse itself, exclude itself, recuse itself, whatever the right word is, from the housing market in that sense puts people's lives at risk.

Cladding Safety Victoria and the steps that took place in this state in the years between 2014, when the Lacrosse fire took place in Docklands and particularly after Grenfell in 2017, and the establishment of CSV in 2020 all represent a really important intervention in a failed market, and failing to have made that intervention would have left Victorians at acute risk, fundamentally, let us be honest, of burning alive and dying of smoke inhalation in their own homes, which is what happened, tragically, to at least 72 people in Grenfell Tower, in Kensington in west London, in June 2017. The response to the Grenfell fire of the UK Tory government after 2017, which was a bit distracted, I suspect, at the time by an election and various other things, or the lack of a coherent response to that fire, contrasts really visibly and starkly with this government's response through the establishment of CSV and through the work that took place in the years leading up to it.

In repealing Cladding Safety Victoria this bill – I think the member for Hastings put it well – reflects the successful completion of its work, and it was I think a genuinely innovative and effective public policy response, grounded in a comprehensive analysis and understanding of both data and risk and delivering upon CSV's mission, which was about keeping Victorians safe, and I think it did that. It maintained confidence simultaneously in the construction sector and regulation and I think sits in pretty stark contrast with the approach of those opposite. I think it is a program that Victorians should be proud of. It was established before my time in this place, but looking at its track record and its effective record of delivery, it is certainly something I am proud of and I think it is something that Parliament should be proud of. It has kept over 150,000 Victorians safe in their homes. It has protected them from debilitating debts which have accrued to those who are left to grapple with issues that have occurred that are no fault of theirs, that are the failure of buildings and of regulation, which have led to flammable building materials being used in their construction.

We have seen this in other forms of construction as well. It is particularly insidious in the high-rise sector – the Opal Tower in western Sydney and the issues with concrete and the structural engineering of that building.

It has a real knock-on effect for people's confidence to buy into higher-density forms of housing and also keeps people locked into properties without the capacity to sell them on. That is something which has been particularly challenging in the UK. By the time it is wound down as a consequence of this bill, CSV will have made over 1600 buildings safe and, as I say, protected hundreds of thousands of Victorians both from real physical harm and indeed death but also from debilitating debts.

The background to CSV's establishment has been pretty well traversed by a number of speeches and contributions to this debate, but I do really come back to that point about Grenfell and the divergent policy approaches that followed that fire in the UK and the lack of coordinated action on behalf of the UK Tory government contrasted with the approach that this government, the Andrews government at the time, took in the aftermath of Grenfell in particular, which I think really emphasised to people on a very tangible, real scale the risks of not grappling with flammable cladding. I do again emphasise that in the lead-up to the establishment of Cladding Safety Victoria the use of high-risk combustible cladding had already been restricted and was effectively banned on new buildings. Enforcement

powers had already been increased, allowing authorities to carry out more inspections to issue emergency orders and to take disciplinary action against non-compliant builders, skewering the argument of the Greens political party that somehow the establishment of Cladding Safety Victoria in 2020 was the first response to either Grenfell or the Lacrosse fire in 2014. But this government also committed very substantial funding – around \$600 million – to support the removal and replacement of high-risk cladding, particularly on residential buildings. In effect, that created risk pooling – a form of post-hoc insurance, if you like – reflecting the fact that those costs are catastrophic to an individual who happens to be in a tower that is affected but we all stand to benefit if there is confidence in the construction sector, confidence in housing and effective regulation of all of those dimensions.

The Grenfell Tower fire began in a fourth-floor flat then flew up the outside of that building in really graphic ways that I think everyone can recall. It exhibited an array of really core public policy failures. Firstly, there were regulatory gaps and fragmentation that led to those combustible materials still being used after their risks were well, well known. There had been cost cutting, outsourcing pressures and delivery of public housing, and housing more broadly, that was not properly supported by stringent regulatory standards and safeguards – the kinds of, I suspect, government intervention that others have suggested should not be taking place. But if it does not take place, you have catastrophes like that, so there is a need, I think, for government – as this government has done – to keep people safe, to keep Victorians safe, to keep them alive and in their own homes. In the context of Grenfell, though, where the Victorian approach was to have a systematic review of where the risky buildings were and then to work through that risk in a systematic way to address the high-risk buildings first to ensure that cladding was removed, to target the investment where it was most needed and then to work through the tail of that risk, as it were, the UK response in effect did not adequately address the needs of either vulnerable populations or the enduring presence of cladding. It was not only the fact that Grenfell Tower itself remained as a stark, burnt-out silhouette on the sky of west London near Westfield shopping centre – and I figure it is a part of Notting Hill that they do not show you in the film – but it was that buildings like it were not properly rectified. It was left to the owners of those buildings, the social housing trusts and the tenants to undertake their own rectification, absent proper intervention and support from central government or indeed local housing authorities. The culmination of all of that is that not only did public confidence in that form of housing decline precipitously after 2017 but there was a broad-based decline in trust in government and government institutions, which I think manifests itself in many different ways. One of those ways is in the attraction of populist parties, extremist parties, which can proffer simplistic solutions in the absence of a coordinated and effective response, which should be the core business of government.

If you have that erosion of trust in public institutions, then it manifests, as I said, in an array of challenging ways across society and undermines institutional and governmental legitimacy as well. I think there are clear policy lessons in the approach that Victoria took in the establishment and the funding and the action of CSV in seeking to address the most high risk buildings, and then that tail of risk, so that Victorians, 150,000 of them, can be kept safe but also so that there is more broad-based confidence in the construction sector in that form of higher density living, contrasted with the UK approach, which has failed to grapple with not just the presence of high-risk cladding but the broader undermining of trust and confidence in the construction sector, in housing, and in the governments, which should be standing up for people who live in those buildings.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:56): I am pleased to be able to rise and speak on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 and join my colleagues in saying that we will not be opposing this bill and for the most part we can see the sense in winding up the activities of a body that has accomplished most of its objectives and rolling it into the Building and Plumbing Commission. In commencing my remarks I do want to acknowledge the work of the building cladding taskforce and the involvement in a very substantial way of my predecessor in the seat of Hawthorn the former Premier Ted Baillieu, who was well known for his architectural prowess and insights and passion for this particular project when he was appointed to that taskforce. We know that in terms of its work it has made a substantial number of properties safer. We do not have conclusive assurances that all risks

have been identified and eliminated, but as I have said, for the most part we are quite pleased to see these functions rolled into BPC, although, as previous speakers have pointed out, there are a number of tasks and responsibilities the government will have to meet. I do not want to rehearse those particular points that have been made by the previous speakers. I want to use this opportunity to use what has happened here off the back of the Lacrosse and Grenfell disasters – particularly the Grenfell disaster – and to use that as a case study in some of the proposals this government is pursuing against a range of advisory insights, which would point to some of the dangers which could be repeated in the future in different ways. I will come to those in a moment.

As previous speakers have pointed out, builders, owners and tenants in properties were living in buildings with flammable cladding in an environment where this particular building product was legal, and legal for some time, when it was known that there were risks of this cladding being flammable. It is in the context of that that I want to caution the government to use this as an occasion to think about how it is proceeding, particularly in relation to its housing and planning policies.

The first thing I want to note in a ranging over a few examples is the building better apartments design guidelines. As the government has pointed out, its argument is that by 2050 it will see more than 2 million new homes constructed. It announced this policy in 2023, and there have been a series of iterations since then. It has always intrigued me that the government was so adamant about its housing targets and about its activity centres but had not yet developed to full maturity all of the new guidelines that were in place to ensure that the built form, the setbacks, the bedroom sizes, sunlight into buildings and natural light were being addressed, if you were to see hundreds of thousands of new dwellings, many of which, under the government's conception of its housing policy, would be in high-density, high-rise contexts.

I think it defies reason and logic that you would race forward without having done that work on ensuring that the new stock that comes to market – that is, the new supply – would actually meet those standards that we would expect. I use that in the context of this because if you race ahead without consideration of the risks that could materialise, people will suffer in one way or another in the future. That is the first example I wanted to cite.

The second one is owners corporation reform, and I know the member for Melbourne mentioned this too. I have spoken about this in the Parliament before. I think the government is racing ahead with proposals to shoehorn into communities, regardless of amenity and character and livability, hundreds of thousands of new dwellings, despite the lack of the infrastructure needed to support them, and it has not ensured that the rights of owner-occupiers and renters in those buildings can be properly protected. The government would have to admit that it has not even completed its own review into owners corporation reform. Again, it is another example of a government racing ahead with known risks. We know that owner-occupiers in these high-density, multiapartment complexes are struggling in a range of ways, whether it is pursuing third parties when they cannot secure quorum or when they have irreconcilable differences on an owners corporation. That is a real problem if you are going to see millions of Victorians living in these contexts in the future. Owners corporation reform should have preceded the government's housing statement, not succeeded it. So that is another risk.

A third risk I want to identify is in relation to prefabricated homes, modular homes and 3D printing, which is increasingly being used – it is not at scale, but it is increasingly coming online. I say this because, in the same way that there was just a complacency around flammable cladding, we need to ensure that as innovation takes us into increasingly an era of prefabricated homes, modular designs and construction and 3D printing – which I wholeheartedly support. I have said this publicly and I have said it in here. I think this is a key to delivering housing in a more affordable way, because these types of newer homes can be delivered 20 to 30 per cent cheaper than a conventionally built home. Banks like the Commonwealth Bank are now rearranging their credit lending policies to make it easier for people to secure the finance they need to pay the firms providing prefabricated homes in a way that they could not before. The Commonwealth Bank is one institution that is leading that. But like the other matters I have mentioned – owners corporation reform and apartment guidelines and designs –

it makes sense that you would be studying the risks of this in the same way that we saw with flammable cladding.

The fourth risk I want to identify is some of the integrity risk around the development facilitation program, and similar programs the government has, to completely bypass communities and local municipal authorities and to be able to ram through and impose on communities developments that may not be suited to an area. It affects everybody in this chamber, including those opposite, many of whom I note have been quite vocal in their opposition to high-density proposals in their own seats. It is a risk that we should be alive to, because we are missing the checks and balances, the oversight, the third-party review and the brakes on ministerial authority and executive authority to usher through proposals behind closed doors under the DFP, which creates its own set of risks. If you are going to be developing a policy that will allow such a substantial number of new dwellings in the form of high-rise, high-density buildings in communities that are not being supported with the infrastructure needed to develop them, that creates a substantial amount of risk in the system.

With these four examples, what I am pointing out to the government is that we need to learn the lessons of the flammable cladding experience. We cannot change the past, and a lot of good work has been done since – I am happy to acknowledge that – but we should always be learning from these previous experiences. And there are risks in the government's approach with its housing policy here – risks that you will end up with poor design and risks that you will end up with owner-occupiers and renters who have limited rights or rights that are not practically available for them to exercise. We will have situations where we have allowed new stock to come to market with prefabricated, modular materials that the government has failed in its regulatory role to oversee in the interests of consumers and owner-occupiers.

That leads me to my final point on the back of this, which is the elimination of local community voices. On this side of the house, we have made it very clear that we will restore community voices in the development and delivery of more housing in our communities. But this bill, which we do not oppose, is a good case study and should be a real lesson for a government that is proceeding without acknowledging the risks.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (17:06): I rise to speak on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. Of course as we continue to build more homes, it is essential we continue to lift and strengthen building standards, workmanship quality, materials and products to protect home owners, renters, tenants, builders, the community and consumers at large. Given our Victorian Labor government's bold vision to build more homes, this will be essential in helping us to build and foster safe, sustainable and resilient communities, particularly through our respective housing strategies of *Plan for Victoria*; our activity centre program, including in central Coburg and Sydney Road in Brunswick; our housing statement to deliver 800,000 new homes over the coming decade; and our big housing infrastructure build as well.

This bill represents the successful conclusion of the world-first initiative set up by the Victorian government in response to cladding-related safety issues to fight for Victorian consumers by making their buildings safe from combustible cladding. The Victorian government established Cladding Safety Victoria in response to growing safety risks and public concern about flammable cladding on residential buildings. A number of high-profile fires, most notably the Grenfell Tower fire in the UK in 2017, which resulted in the deaths of 72 people in that tower, and the Lacrosse building fire in 2014 in Melbourne in Docklands, exposed how dangerous combustible cladding materials can be and how quickly they can flame up. These events showed that fires could spread rapidly on building exteriors, putting lives at risk.

Cladding is of course the outer skin of a building. When that material is combustible, it can ignite easily, burn rapidly and allow fire to travel up or across the outside of a building. The most well-known example is aluminium composite panels with a polyethylene plastic core. Other risky materials can also include certain insulation products and some decorative facade panels. Many cladding products

used in Australian buildings, especially aluminium composite panels, have been sourced from overseas manufacturers. Imported products often come from Europe and Asia, driven by lower costs and large-scale global supply chains and lower standards. Industry guidance itself has even noted that Australian projects have, on some occasions, used these materials, which have since been rectified in Victoria.

This was a key factor in the cladding crisis – inconsistent standards, certification and compliance across international supply chains for materials being brought onto local residential and other projects. That is why the Victorian government continued to take action to address these dangerous cladding issues. In June 2017 the Cladding Taskforce was established and, as we have heard, it was headed by the former Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu and former Deputy Premier John Thwaites. It worked with the Victorian Building Authority to identify 15 buildings that would have their cladding fixed first, audited buildings across Victoria for combustible cladding, assessed fire safety risks and provided recommendations to government on how to respond. The taskforce ultimately laid the groundwork for major reforms, including the creation of Cladding Safety Victoria and the state's large-scale rectification program. This was a world-first program that was designed to fix the buildings most at risk and to keep Victorians safe. And it was not just about safety – it was also about fairness for people who bought apartments in good faith and were let down by dodgy builders or these dangerous flammable building products. The taskforce also recognised that combustible cladding is a national problem and wanted the federal government, of course, to be part of this process as well, given the importation and lower standards which led to a lot of this coming into the local market.

In July 2019 the Victorian Labor government established Cladding Safety Victoria as a standalone statutory authority responsible for the rectification of buildings with high-risk cladding and the establishment of a dedicated cladding agency. It was allocated \$600 million for the cladding rectification program, and the grants sought to fund that rectification work on hundreds of buildings found to have that high-risk cladding to make sure they were safe and compliant with all building regulations. \$150 million was also committed to complete the statewide cladding audit and the government buildings cladding rectification program.

In February 2021 we also banned high-risk cladding products on new multistorey buildings. The then Minister for Planning Richard Wynne announced a prohibition on flammable aluminium composite panels and rendered expanded polystyrene as external wall cladding on all future multistorey developments, which still continues to this day. The decision to ban the use of these products on certain building types was based on that expert technical advice, which found they can contribute to the spread of fire when used inappropriately or installed incorrectly. It took effect from 1 Feb 2021, and the ban prohibited the use of these products on apartment buildings and other residential buildings, such as hotels and aged care facilities with two or more storeys. The ban also applied to the use of these products in office buildings, shopping centres and other retail premises, warehouses, factories and car parks with three or more storeys. Applying the ban to a new multistorey development of course would limit the potential risks, and the Victorian Building Authority was provided the responsibility of enforcing the cladding ban in its role as the building regulator, with penalties of up to \$400,000 for significant breaches.

In 2022 the Victorian government also approved a further \$40 million for the cladding remediation partnership program to protect a wider range of consumers from that cladding-related harm, and the program provided all in-scope buildings assessed with a lower cladding risk with the pathway for remediation. The partnership program also meant that local councils, importantly, were provided with a consistent framework to support owners of these buildings to mitigate cladding risk at the lowest cost and satisfy any enforcement notice issued by a municipal building surveyor. In December 2023 additional funding again, of \$109 million, including \$95 million, was approved to rectify a further tranche of buildings which had been also identified through those processes with an unacceptable cladding risk.

Over the last six years Cladding Safety Victoria has made countless Victorians safe from the dangers posed by combustible cladding. In partnership with stakeholders, including building owners, corporations and Fire Rescue Victoria, Cladding Safety Victoria has completed remediation of more than 99 per cent of the highest risk buildings in the cladding rectification program, dramatically reducing their combustible cladding risk, with the remaining buildings to be completed this year. CSV has also worked to remove the cladding risk on 130 government-owned and community buildings, including schools, hospitals and buildings of cultural significance, with three more to finish soon. The partnership program has put in place the risk mitigation pathways for 100 per cent of additional lower class 2 buildings – that is 1210 buildings – and as of 28 February 2026, 442 of the 448 private residential buildings approved for rectification works funding had been completed. The remaining six buildings are in the construction phase, and two further private residential buildings have been addressed without the need for any cladding works.

CSV has contributed significantly not just on the ground here in Victoria but also to global knowledge on combustible cladding risk and has led the way in development of evidence-based cladding risk reduction approaches. Now, with CSV's work largely acquitted, the time for legislative reform, streamlining and embedding its resources and services into the new Building and Plumbing Commission has arrived.

The main purpose of this bill is to repeal the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 and abolish Cladding Safety Victoria and the Cladding Safety Victoria board and confer upon the Victorian Building Authority, trading as the Building and Plumbing Commission, additional functions to enable the completion of CSV's activities and administrative obligations; to transfer Cladding Safety Victoria's property rights and liabilities to the BPC; to transfer Cladding Safety Victoria staff to the BPC, the Building and Plumbing Commission; to repeal the cladding rectification levy; and to introduce a new element of the building permit levy to be applied to class 2 to 8 buildings in non-regional Victoria, with costs of building works of \$1.5 million or more up to and including on 30 June 2029, reducing the overall cost of the building permit levy.

At a local level I have continued to work and support residents impacted by dangerous flammable cladding. Whilst no public information is available of course on specific builds that have been rectified through the program, for obvious financial, privacy, legal, property value and safety reasons, CSV did designate, as we know, three main cladding categories in determining which to prioritise for rectification work, including those of unacceptable risk, which is the highest level of danger; elevated risk, which is moderate risk; and of course low risk, which is the lowest level of concern. What we know locally is that in Merri-bek, in my community, including Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, mostly apartment buildings in class 2 with elevated risk were rectified, mainly in Coburg, Brunswick and Brunswick West, and typically those built in the last 15 to 25 years were the area of focus.

Merri-bek was of course part of the cladding remediation partnership that was delivered with Cladding Safety Victoria and worked to support the risk assessments, fire safety upgrades and full cladding replacement where required.

I had a number of residents throughout the last few years approach me on different issues relating to the cladding process. I was very happy to help them. I would love to list them all and how we helped resolve their various issues in respective ways. One in particular was in April 2023. I was approached by local resident Belinda from Coburg seeking assistance. In December 2019 she was told her building would be inspected for flammable cladding. Expanded polystyrene was found on the first level and rooftop balconies, and the building was to be classed with a level of risk. They sought advice from Cladding Safety Victoria to rectify the situation and in March 2023 were informed that they were not eligible for rectification funding. I subsequently made representations to the relevant minister on Belinda's behalf. I was informed that from a fire safety perspective each of the apartments in her block has direct street access. The building has a brick-veneer construction on the ground floor and lightweight cladding to the upper storey. Each apartment is separated by fire-rated walls. CSV would

not have provided funding due to its assessment of the building having a lower risk of fire spread. She wrote me a beautiful email which basically said:

We need to install one heat detector –
as a result of their visit –

in each unit in the living room. That's all. No expensive and drawn-out building works – just a fix that costs a few hundred dollars.

This plan has already been signed off by Merri-bek Council, so once we get it sorted, the whole ordeal will be over.

Thank you so much to you both, and to your team, for being in our corner. I doubt we would have this resolved without your help.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): I call the member for Bulleen.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (17:16): Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I appreciate it.

Brad Rowswell: You're very popular, aren't you, member for Bulleen?

Matthew GUY: So is the member for Pascoe Vale. I enjoy the welcome. The member for Pascoe Vale is always fun to come after; he is a good speaker. I want to make some remarks about the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. Firstly, though, I am a bit perplexed because, as the member for Sandringham has shown me, the only point of government business for the whole week is this repeal bill. I would have thought that a government with an agenda, as the government say they have, would have more than one repeal bill on government business for the entire week. While I do not take away from the seriousness of this bill, and I do want to make some comments about it in depth, I would have thought that there is more to do than just one repeal bill for the government for the whole week.

When I was a minister, I had responsibility for the Victorian Building Authority, the VBA, and I noticed members from the government before my contribution saying that the BPC, the Building and Plumbing Commission, was established by this government. Well, no, it was not, unless you call establishing a commission a rebrand with a new logo at the same premise and with the same staff doing the same things, which would be quite odd. I did not establish the VBA either. In fact it was the Building Commission before it was rebranded as the Victorian Building Authority and then rebranded again as the Building and Plumbing Commission. I would hardly call establishing an authority designing a new logo, getting some decals and sticking them on the door and saying, 'Give us a pat on the back.'

Brad Rowswell: Highly expensive.

Matthew GUY: It would be, member for Sandringham. It would be a large and expensive thing to do. Now, one thing I do want to say, noting the importance of this topic, members opposite and other members have said, 'We've fixed the cladding crisis. We're concluding it once the job is done. We've kept over 150,000 Victorians safe.' This project is not concluded. It is a very serious project, it is a very important project and it is not concluded. Now what we are asking for is a regulator to be the enforcement agency for an area that is outside their current remit. I submit to you that this is not getting the job done. The 20 per cent of the buildings that are noncompliant that are not complete yet are no less important than the 80 per cent that have been done. While I do not at all criticise the government for moving on this – in fact I think Ted Baillieu and John Brumby back in 2017, from memory, gave advice to the government about what was necessary and people moved on with it, and of course they would do; it is the role of government – the concept of saying that the job is done when it is 80 per cent complete is not real. Patting yourself on the back, I think, frankly is why Victorians get frustrated and angry with government. They say, 'You're patting yourself on the back and you're asking us to thank you and fawn over you' – like they are fawning over themselves – 'when the job is not

completed.’ It is an important job at that. I mean, you are talking about hundreds of buildings – up to 400 – that are still not compliant.

I question whether rolling this authority up now is the right thing to do. I mean, why roll it up when the job is not done? Why give an enforcement responsibility to a regulatory agency whose roles and responsibilities have got nothing similar to this in terms of enforcing a national building code and then inspecting it and then testing and compliance? You know, I find that quizzical. I mean, the Victorian Building and Plumbing Commission is, as it says, the regulator for the building and plumbing industries. It says on its own website:

We combine the functions of the Victorian Building Authority (VBA), Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria (DBDRV), –

which is a small authority –

and the domestic building insurance function of the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) ...

There is nothing wrong with that at all, but then they are throwing on top of that an important task – I would say the most important task – of completing the one in five buildings that are still non-compliant with what Cladding Safety Victoria’s specifications were said to be. It is an immensely important task, and I just do not understand why the government determined that Cladding Safety Victoria should be wound up at this point in time and rolled into a regulatory agency somewhere just before an election. I actually have not heard any excuse. I have heard a lot of pats on the back for an 80 per cent job done, but I have not heard anyone saying, ‘Well, this is why it’s being wound up now,’ when the job is not complete and one in five buildings identified have not been repaired of the cladding material that has been identified, some of which go back, as the member for Narracan said, to the 1990s. You cannot blame builders for this. Builders were putting in what was specified by the Building Code of Australia. It is not a political document – the building code is the building code – and if they met those building codes, builders could obviously use what was specified in them.

The issue of course is that we have found that a number of those cladding materials are highly flammable and thus do need to be replaced, quite obviously. We saw the spectacular fire in Southbank and the overseas examples, very sad examples – in London, for instance, where 70 people died in the Grenfell Tower – which brought to life that there is a problem and this material needs to be identified and dealt with. Quite rightly, the government of the day – I think it was the Andrews government – went away and said, ‘This is an issue and we are going to get on with it very, very quickly,’ and they did. Like any government, they needed to do so, and they put in place an authority to oversee it, which had the sole responsibility of ensuring that the new Building Code of Australia requirements applied to any buildings that were new in Victoria. They of course identified buildings that had been built with or in which these materials had been used. As the member for Narracan, a former builder, said, whether or not the materials had been applied technically as part of a wall or applied as part of the structure or whatever it might have been, the buildings were then able to be retrofitted after the event. We saw some examples of that which were quite important and which had to be done, some of which were quite substantial in size. The key point is that they were important and needed to be done, and we had an authority to do it.

Having an authority that registers and licenses builders and plumbers, inspects and audits building and plumbing work, provides a dispute resolution service for building issues, manages and audits domestic building insurance for insurance and residential work over \$16,000 and enforces compliance through rectification orders is, in my view, very important. They are doing their job, but their job then should not extend to subsuming Cladding Safety Victoria at a time when one in five buildings identified by the current government have not been repaired under the specifications of the current government and when the current government is saying, quite rightly, that those buildings possess a potential risk and Cladding Safety Victoria has said they need to be replaced. Okay, gotcha – we all understand that and we all appreciate that. So why, when the job is only 80 per cent done, does the government then walk

into the chamber and say, ‘It’s all over, it’s all done, give us a pat on the back. We deserve to be effusively praised – by ourselves, nonetheless – for doing a job that is not complete.’

It is not just a job, it is a job that is of the utmost safety importance. Not I, but a number of government members have referenced some pretty sad and fairly dangerous events that have occurred overseas for the extent of the danger that is potentially presented by some of this cladding material. Members of the government were highlighting those examples. I accept that and I accept their examples. I accept it, and I think they have raised some very important examples as to why it was necessary for an authority to get on with the job and why the then Andrews government did get on with the job very early on to say, ‘Yes, we need to do this. Yes, we need to come in and fix this problem. And yes, builders are not at fault because they simply put in place what was auspiced from the 1990s onward.’ I accept all of that, but what I do not accept is the government then coming in saying, ‘Job done,’ because the job ain’t done. It is like the Gippsland rail project: ‘Job not done.’ You cannot not build the one thing you said you were going to build and then say, ‘Oh, look, we’ve got it done.’ You cannot do 80 per cent of Murray Basin rail and say, ‘Job done.’ These things are not done. So I simply say, in conclusion, we do not oppose it. I do accept a number of the key points around safety that government members have raised. I accept them and think it was good work to get onto it very quickly and put in place a mechanism to fix it. But the job is not done, and I have concerns that it will be.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (17:26): I rise to speak in support of the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026, and I do respond to the member for Bulleen’s comments in regard to this bill that it is quite quizzical. He did repeat on numerous occasions that the job is not done. But I just have to remind him as he walks out of the chamber that the opposition are not opposing this bill, so they clearly must think the job is done. But anyway, we will move on.

I would like to use this moment to reflect on the journey that brought us to this moment, one that started in the early hours of November 2014 – a November morning 11 to 12 years ago when Victorians watched in horror as the Lacrosse tower in Melbourne’s Docklands was engulfed in flames. Non-compliant aluminium composite cladding, ignited by one single cigarette, sent fire racing up 13 storeys. Our fantastic Melbourne Fire Brigade crews responded to the reported fire at the multi-storey apartment building on La Trobe Street in the Docklands, and when they arrived, it only took them 5 minutes to attend to that incident. Fire had already spread through a further six floors above the room that was ignited and within just 11 minutes of the fire starting, it had reached above the 21st floor. As I earlier said, the cause of the fire was a cigarette butt on the balcony, but it was the building’s non-compliant external cladding that turned a small fire into a major emergency, allowing flames to travel rapidly and vertically through the building, penetrating multiple apartments along the way.

There were 400 residents, many of them students, who were safely evacuated from the building, and that is a testament to the incredible work of our emergency services. 120 firefighters attended that fire and 22 vehicles worked to bring the blaze under control in around 30 minutes, which was quite amazing given the significance of the fire. I thank those firefighters for doing such a great job in saving all of the people that were in that building; it was a remarkable response. But the speed and the scale of what unfolded that night laid bare just how dangerous non-compliant cladding truly was. Ultimately, what it did reveal was the work that this government needed to do, and that is what is before us.

The blaze was visible from across the city, and by extraordinary good luck, no lives were lost. But the image is seared into our collective memory. If you do not have memories of this event, I encourage you to check the documentation online. The photos go some way to capturing the horror. It is something that we never, ever want to see again, and hence Cladding Safety Victoria was created. Most of us have memories of seeing building fires, whether it is in our professional capacities, like the member for Pakenham, or the members for Werribee or Bass as members of their local CFA, or the member for Frankston as a FRV firefighter – well, you saw fires, didn’t you?

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Steve McGHIE: Yes, that is right. They did great work in responding to emergency calls and we thank them for their efforts not only in the CFA but also in their former careers as firefighters. It is fantastic.

Of course every fire is a life-changing event, no matter how big or small. As a government, we are compelled to act to make sure that our communities are safe. The MFB's post-incident analysis of this fire handed down in April of 2015 confirmed what many in the industry had feared, and that was that the noncompliant cladding or aluminium composite panelling had materially contributed to the fires that rapidly spread through that building down at the Docklands. While the appropriate use of external wall cladding was addressed in the Building Code of Australia, compliance had clearly fallen through the cracks, and this raised the troubling question of how many other buildings across Victoria were in the same position. Our community deserved answers on this, and in 2016 the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) launched the result of their major audit of building permits. Out of that, more than half did not comply with the cladding regulations – that is right, more than half. That was what was found. I think today we are still shocked by that.

The next year, at just before 1 am on 14 June 2017, we saw a fire that broke out in the kitchen area of a fourth-floor apartment at the 23-storey tower block in North Kensington, West London. Of course that tragedy was watched by many millions of people around the world. We watched London's Grenfell Tower burn and the tragedy of those people in that fire. From the analysis there, what ignited that fire was a fridge freezer in a fourth-floor apartment. Despite a rapid response from fire crews, it was a tragedy. There were many lives lost in that fire. I think there were 72 lives lost in that fire, which was so traumatic. To watch the footage of it was so horrific. It was simply a tragedy, and it was a catastrophe and a consequence of systemic failures across the board by developers, by builders, by regulators and by gaps in government policy accumulated over many, many years.

The most significant part of the renovation of the Grenfell Tower was the addition of external cladding, of aluminium sheets bonded to a central plastic polyethylene core. In the report about that to the public inquiry, Professor Luke Bisby said that evidence strongly supports the theory that polyethylene material in the cladding was the primary cause of the fire's spread. Of course 72 victims were failed, and their deaths were 100 per cent preventable. This is exactly what we tried to do here in Victoria in making sure that our buildings were safe from this highly flammable material, this cladding material used on many, many of our buildings, through the removal of that cladding so we would not see another episode of what happened in Kensington.

In 2019 a fire at the Neo200 building on Spencer Street in Melbourne had eerie similarities to the Grenfell disaster, but fortunately no-one lost their life. Residential buildings are particularly vulnerable to the effects of cladding fires because people can be asleep and windows are often left open. The amount of smoke generated by the Neo200 fire was frightening. Over 350 buildings in Melbourne were rated very high risk, and the Neo200 was regarded as only a moderate risk.

Grenfell and Lacrosse stand as a permanent and sobering reminder of what is at stake when we allow noncompliance to go unchecked in our built environment. But 10 years on from the Lacrosse fire flammable cladding fires continue to occur around the world, and progress on the systemic reforms recommended in the wake of these tragedies has been far too slow. These events, both at Lacrosse and at Grenfell, were the well-needed wake-up call that shaped what followed here in Victoria. There was of course the VBA audit, and the Labor government established the Victorian Cladding Taskforce. They were charged with investigating the true extent of noncompliant external wall cladding on buildings throughout our state.

The taskforce findings and recommendations were the foundation upon which the private residential cladding rectification program was established in July 2019.

I just want to give a shout-out to the CSV, and I will come to that in a minute. I just want to take the opportunity to sincerely thank the chairperson Rod Fehring, the deputy chairperson Sarah Clarke, the entire CSV board, CEO Dan O'Brien and every member of the CSV team for their dedication, expertise and tireless commitment to keeping Victorians safe. Their work has been genuinely world-leading, and I know that we have a lot of eyes watching us, with interstate and international agencies, other governments and other departments all paying close attention. By the time CSV concludes its work it will have delivered safety improvements to over 1660 buildings across Victoria, keeping many, many Victorians safe and shielding hundreds of thousands of residents from both physical harm and the crippling financial burden of self-funded rectification. The work that they have done has been amazing, hence the repeal of this bill. It is a good law. It has protected the Victorians, it has rewarded diligence and it reflects the kind of government action that makes a real and lasting difference to people's lives. This was good work done, and I commend the bill to the house.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (17:36): I also rise to address the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. Similar to the member for Bulleen, who spoke before me, I think it is important for the house to note that the bill we are considering at the moment in relation to the government business program for this week appears to be the only piece of legislation being brought forward by the government, with a couple of other motions to be debated at some point of the government's choosing during the week. The claim by the Minister for Energy and Resources during question time was – and I paid special attention to this; without demonstrating a prop, because that would be disorderly, I took note of it at the time – that this government has 'new solutions that make life easier' for every Victorian. I am sure that that has been tested within an inch of its life in some focus group somewhere. But having only this bill, the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026, which in fact abolishes Cladding Safety Victoria, is hardly a new solution that makes life easier for every Victorian, in my view. If I was to offer advice to the government, it would be – a bit like my attempt at the high jump in a recent very well viewed social media video – to underpromise and overdeliver. The amount of times I have been sent that screenshot is quite extraordinary.

Specifically in relation to this bill, I am grateful to the member for Caulfield, my colleague Mr Southwick, for his leadership on behalf of the coalition in relation to this bill. As other speakers have addressed previously, we will not be opposing this legislation. But that does not mean that we do not have questions, which we believe to be legitimate questions, around the government bringing forward this legislation – the timing of it, the content of it, the impact and effect of the legislation that the government has brought forward. We believe those are legitimate questions which many other speakers on this side have asked and I intend to ask as well.

As others have addressed, this bill will wind up Cladding Safety Victoria, CSV, which is now quite evidently a time-limited body. It will transfer the residual functions of that body. It will repeal the cladding rectification levy. It will replace funding through a revised building permit levy structure. It will frame the CSV program as substantially complete. The bill will commence on 1 July this year or at proclamation, whichever occurs first. It is good to see the member for Croydon in the chamber, actually. I wonder if he has had any cladding issues in his electorate.

It does a number of things, and that is all very important. I did note the contribution of the member for Bulleen, who raised what I believe to be a very important question, which was: if there are one in five buildings which are still not compliant according to the government's standards, and it is at this point that the government is choosing to bring forward this piece of legislation to wind down Cladding Safety Victoria and for the residual functions to be housed within the Building and Plumbing Commission, noting the two different roles of those two different organisations, is this the right time for the government to be putting their hands around each other and slapping each other on the back and saying, 'Job well done'? I am just not sure that that is right.

If, as the member for Bulleen pointed out, something like 20 per cent of buildings in this state are still non-compliant according to the standards which have been set out, then why at this point in time would the government be seeking to bring forward this legislation – for it to be introduced, debated and come

into effect within this timeframe – if the job is not actually done? Perhaps the reason for that is because, unlike what the minister for energy sought to convince this chamber and others of during question time today – that the government is full of ‘new solutions that make life easier for every Victorian’ – maybe that is just not true. Maybe the government has in some way run out of ideas. Maybe the ministers sitting on the front bench of the government side of this chamber have run out of ideas. Maybe there is some sort of stranglehold on the cabinet process and bills being brought forward through the cabinet process that propose, to again quote the minister for energy, ‘new solutions that make life easier for Victorians’.

I am very happy to stipulate some of those new solutions that could be considered that would actually make a real difference in the lives of Victorians at the minute. The Minister for Police tells us he has got a bunch of ideas in the top drawer or the bottom drawer – well, maybe it is time to dust those off to make our community safer. Maybe it is time for the Treasurer in the other place to dust off the tax savings that I am sure she is considering. Maybe it is time for the Minister for Health to dust off some ideas there as well and to make sure that when Victorians are sick there is an ambulance that arrives on time and there is resourcing within our public hospital system to care for those who are unwell at a time and place where they need that healthcare. Maybe it is time for the Minister for Education to do a deal with the union to give teachers and students and in fact parents the certainty that they require at this time. Maybe it is time –

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think it is time the member got back to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): I uphold the point of order. Please come back to the bill.

Brad ROWSWELL: Indeed. I thank the member for Frankston for his diligent observation of my parliamentary contributions. It is something that I can always rely upon the member for Frankston to do with much vigour and purpose, and it is something which he should be commended for. It is something he should be commended for because not many other people do it, frankly. Well done, member for Frankston.

Indeed on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 the point remains that this is the only bill on the government business program this week. The other two things on the government business program are motions. One of them quite clearly is a sledge motion, and the other – well, you know. And there is this bill, where the government is patting themselves on the back for a good job well done. It is only 80 per cent complete, and they are patting themselves on the back for it. Have they run out of ideas? Have they run out of what the minister for energy claims are ‘new solutions that make life easier for every Victorian’, or are they in fact out of ideas? I think it is a valid question to ask. But I thank the member for Frankston for being so astute in drawing me back to the bill.

I am grateful to the member for Caulfield for the work he has done on this bill, for the fact that he has taken the time to consider the matters before the house, that he has engaged with organisations like Master Builders Victoria, like the Association of Consulting Architects Australia, like Cardinia Shire Council, like industry expert – this will get him riled up, you watch – Michael Buxton and others –

Daniela De Martino interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: Well, member for Monbulk, he is a very good constituent, I am sure. What a great contribution Mr Buxton has made and continues to make to bring truth and order to such matters as are before us now.

This bill primarily facilitates the transfer of responsibility for cladding to the BPC, the Building and Plumbing Commission. Setting aside again the differences between the purpose of Cladding Safety Victoria and the regulatory role the Building and Plumbing Commission has, the opposition will not be opposing this bill but fully encourages the government, perhaps not during this sitting week but

perhaps once legs are up and breaks have been had on the government's side, to come back with, as the minister has promised, new solutions that make life easier for every Victorian, because if there is a time when we are needing that, it is right now.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (17:46): Happy birthday, Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): Thank you.

Brad Rowswell interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: If you had known that, you would have got about 3 minutes out of it, I reckon. Well, how do you top that? That was a totally adequate speech. There are not many gaps I can fill on that one. The boy from Sandy does it again. He did a good job.

Of course we are talking about the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026, which has three major functions: it is obviously repealing the Cladding Safety Victoria organisation, it is repealing the cladding rectification levy and it is also adjusting the building permit levy to fund the Building and Plumbing Commission's consumer-focused enforcement work. From the outset, though, I would like to say that there have been one or two opposition speakers that have mentioned the member for Bulleen's contribution. I am not sure where he got his statistics – I am not even sure they are out-of-date statistics – but claiming that there are 20 per cent of in-scope buildings which have not been addressed by the program is incorrect. As of 28 February this year 442 of the 448 private residential buildings approved for rectification works funding had been completed, the remaining six buildings are in the construction phase and two further private residential buildings have been addressed without any cladding works required, so that clarifies that. There have been members that have talked about the horrific Grenfell fire and the Lacrosse fire as well, which I will get on to in a second.

This bill talks about something that we are winding up but something I think we should be incredibly proud of. We have adapted and overcome something that put people's lives in danger. We saw that in November 2014. I was on night shift, and although there was no danger of anyone in Frankston attending that fire, we were looking at the news broadcast of the Lacrosse fire. We were more than a little bit stunned about how the whole building was not on fire, but it seemed like the cladding was on fire. Although we had seen smaller versions of this before – single storeys, things like that – I do not think anyone that I was working with at that time, amongst the shifts in south-east Melbourne, had ever seen something like that. As we heard the member from Melton say, it was basically ignited by one cigarette and put life at risk. Then of course, moving forward, we saw the tragic Grenfell fire and the even more tragic consequences of that and how difficult, politicised and, I guess, not pragmatic some of those solutions were to that fire. That night I was working, and we knew after a couple of hours of hearing what was going on that there was a bit of a new frontier that was going to have to be tackled, and when I saw that I guess I made the transition from being a firefighter to being in politics.

But at the same time in Frankston there was a fairly well publicised residence, a block of about 90 units, at Culcairn Drive, and I know the member for Mornington, as the member for Dunkley, advocated fairly strongly, along with me, for those residents.

But along with some other issues at those residences, what we saw was an investigation into their cladding, which found many, many other issues, which is also why we have legislated or introduced a bill, which we will see tomorrow, with some of the issues that have been somewhat solved by evidence that was provided from residences like Culcairn Drive. When that building was assessed for flammable cladding, it was found it did have some. But one of the biggest issues was not the cladding, it was that it was not up to code. Somehow this building had got an occupancy certificate. People had moved in, people had put their life savings into buying a property – it was their nest egg, the main investment they might have throughout their life, apart from their super. What we saw was that after a building assessment, the assessor basically said that they would remove the occupancy certificates, that there was no waterproofing in some rooms and that the balconies actually had shifted and were falling down. Terribly and negligently, an interior fire alarm system had been put on the exterior of

the building, and that was actually rusting off – which does not help the cladding issue much. But also in a residence where you have parking underneath where people live, under the building code in Australia you need a sprinkler system to protect people from car fires and whatnot, and there was no sprinkler system, even. Those residents had to band together and take legal action, and eventually we took the building licence off that individual as well.

I know that those opposite are not going to contest this with a vote, but I get the impression today that those opposite do not understand the relevance of this and the impact of this. If Cladding Safety Victoria was not there to do this work and if the government did not fund this work, we might well be looking at something else purporting to the level of a Grenfell, where I think over 70 people perished. Looking at some of the reports or the after-action reviews of what the emergency services had to do during that fire, it was real kind of 9/11 Twin Towers stuff – above and beyond the call of duty with equipment that was not designed to be doing what it was doing in a building that was not designed to withstand that kind of heat. And what happens to these structures when you do have cladding on fire? Well, it heats up the structure, the metal of the structure expands and the integrity of the structure goes very quickly, and that is very dangerous for people inside, whether they be residents or whether they be emergency services workers. What we were doing by stepping in was actually backing in Victorians and preventing that kind of story happening again. As I explained to one constituent who said, ‘We don’t need to spend money on this. That’s why we have smoke detectors,’ well, smoke detectors do not work on the outside of the building. If the outside of the building is on fire, buildings are not usually designed – unless you are out in the bush somewhere with a BAL rating – to withstand fire from the outside; it is usually the other way around. It is something we needed to take action on, and I fully believe we did. I think it is only a Labor government that stands up for working families in the biggest purchases that they make. We have seen that in the past where the Liberal Party have failed to support residents and community members in Frankston and in Victoria by not backing them in. It is programs like this that everyone should be proud of. We protected Victorians from combustible cladding-related harm.

I want to take a moment to thank CSV chairperson Rod Fehring, the deputy chairperson Sarah Clarke, the entire CSV board, CEO Dan O’Brien and the entire team for their tireless work, because by the time CSV are wound down, they will have actually made over 1660 buildings safe, and that has protected well over hundreds of thousands of Victorians from potential harm.

As you know, we often take a potentiality as something for granted until it happens and people die. Then we have royal commissions and we have inquiries about why things were not done. To me, CSV was government backing in Victorians, keeping Victorians safe and blocking off one of those holes in the Swiss cheese model, so to speak, of risk, making sure that Victorians were not going to end up in another Lacrosse, in another Grenfell and emergency services workers would not be put in those terrible positions where they really had no choice. They really had no choice about doing what they did. They were put in a really bad spot, and kudos to them; they did an incredible job. But to fund this program, to, I think, be a bold government that took action before another incident happens, says a lot about this government’s attitude towards housing, towards residents and towards our community. We do listen. We do take things seriously. We are pragmatic in the way we do things. We do not just sit back and give sympathetic smiles to people. We have to take action, and I am proud of what we have done.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:56): I rise too to contribute on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 and make it clear from the outset, as other members on this side have done today, that we do not oppose this bill, because Cladding Safety Victoria was never intended to be permanent. It was established as a response to a crisis – a necessary intervention when Victoria’s building system had failed, and failed in a way that put people’s safety, homes and financial security at risk.

Of course this refers to, largely, high-rise apartment buildings and the tragedies that have occurred. In Mildura, you might be surprised to learn, we do not have any high-rise apartment buildings. In fact I think our planning scheme dictates that we can go three levels high and that is it. So what does the

member for Mildura have to say about Cladding Safety Victoria? Well, actually quite a lot. You might be surprised. Stick around and find out, because it might be story time – who knows. It is 6 pm on a Tuesday, and with the engagement and apathy levels in this place, it looks like we need a story or two.

We do not have a huge amount of high-rise apartment buildings. But I was, as I do most weekends, driving around my electorate, going to events and different things, and I was actually doing a count of the affordable and social housing. As you may or may not know, before this role I was in local government. It was identified that in regional Victoria – and this bill gives me a chance to talk about housing, obviously – and particularly in some of the small towns, the market has failed. It is hard to get tradies to build houses, build homes, build flats in small towns, particularly those like – well, Ouyen actually has a developer and a builder that has moved back there. They built 18 new homes privately for new families.

A member: Wow.

Jade BENHAM: I know. In a town of less than a thousand people, 18 new homes in a year is huge. That is due to the opening up of land. We still have a bit to go with the old school site in Hunt Street, which is very close to the CBD; that needs to be able to be developed. But it is amazing when you can attract tradies to come to town and build and send their kids to school, get involved in local cricket clubs, footy clubs, all the rest of it. Since then also our pharmacist in Ouyen – Alex Look is his name – has moved from Brisbane actually to buy the Ouyen Pharmacy and has actually redeveloped it. He moved, bought his own premises. No-one ever thought that there would be a new pharmacy in, like I said, a town of less than a thousand people. But this is what happens when you actually stimulate the market, bring trades: young families move back.

It attracts new people.

A member interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Yes, planning. Planning and opening the doors for business, because where there is a gap in the market, the private sector will generally fill it if they can identify that market. In my municipality, when I was a councillor and a mayor, the private sector did not fill that lack of housing, but there was zero rental stock and zero social housing. So I got to work with the then CEO of the Swan Hill Rural City Council to identify what local government could do. There is certainly a role for government at all levels to be able to solve the housing crisis, some of which may not be the typical remit of any level of government. You would not think council's usual remit would be to start building houses. But again, during my first year and being quite green to the local government sector, I sat down with the CEO – and it is also hard when officers are based an hour and a half away and do not quite understand the local landscape, and it is even harder for departments and bureaucrats based in the city to understand the local concept on the ground out in the regions, obviously. I said to the CEO, 'Our budget is in surplus. Why can't we go to RDV and invest that money and just start building houses?' There were some other councillors that were opposed to that – 'not the job of council'. I agree, it is not usually the job of council to start building houses, but in this case it was the only way that we were going to fill a gap. So we did go to Regional Development Victoria. The Leader of the House at the time was the Minister for Regional Development. That was the first time I had met the minister, and she came to turn the sod on that project. We ended up building eight three-bedroom homes on very small blocks. It was some surplus land, an old road reserve actually, that we had rezoned.

Local government have a role to play here – being open for business, going to state or federal governments to get titles for an old road reserve to be able to build houses on it. We did that, we got some investment from Regional Development Victoria. We built eight houses that were to be sold by private treaty rather than auction, because what happens often in regional areas is we could build some beautiful new houses, but there are those labour hire providers and other investors, let us say, that will attend the auctions and buy everything up, which leaves us with no long-term rental stock, no housing

for healthcare workers, locum pharmacists et cetera. So we decided that auction was not the way to go – it also was not the way to go to keep those houses affordable. We agreed to sell those eight houses via private treaty, which we did. We started with the first four, and then that investment, once they were sold, was going to build the next four. That is what we did. They are now complete. They all sold really quickly. It was really good local decision-making, kept local, to fill a gap that the locals understood was needed, and also local government got involved in something that is not typically their remit but they understood the gap in the market.

Since then we have also had investment from Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative, who have been successful in a grant to provide Indigenous housing for Indigenous youth and men, which is amazing. That is a huge project. There has also been the worker accommodation program. There are another 10 houses being built now. Haven Home Safe have also built 13 additional homes, which are all now filled. So in my time in public office, in one town – depending on who you talk to, the population of Robinvale is anywhere from 3500 to, at this time of year, about 12,000 people – we have managed to build 31 new homes by just offering up solutions, coming to the table with a problem, yes, but also having some ideas that might be a bit audacious. I know people often laugh at me when I come to the table with big audacious ideas.

But this audacious idea has provided 31 new homes for families, for healthcare workers and for teachers. The Leader of the Opposition came to Robinvale to have a look at some housing, which is my next idea, the Department of Education housing. She was the Shadow Minister for Education at the time. I would invite the current Shadow Minister for Education to get on board.

Brad Rowswell: I accept.

Jade BENHAM: Excellent, because I have some more ideas with education in Robinvale. But the next audacious idea – and this is not unique to any small rural town – is around the Department of Education, which has huge blocks of land in very central locations a lot of the time with very large, very old dilapidated houses sitting on them with sometimes one person in them and sometimes no-one in them at all. The idea to fill the gap – and fill it very, very quickly here – is to redevelop those blocks into one- and two-bedroom units so then we can fill the vacancies with attractive housing for teachers to come out to regional areas where they will get a very unique experience teaching, particularly in some of our P–12 schools, and also to develop the Hunt Street site in Ouyen, whether that be for family homes to bring more families back to Ouyen or one- and two-bedroom units for healthcare workers at Mallee Track or Ouyen P–12 or wherever it is. These issues are not unique to small towns, but I dare say there would be sites that we could identify all around rural Victoria. And I say ‘rural’, because there is a very big difference between how we define ‘regional’ and ‘rural’.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (18:06): I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a contribution on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 and to follow on from comments and contributions that have been made this evening that go to the matters that this bill deals with, which I will come to shortly. I will make some comments about the response that was provided at a time when we saw some significant incidents globally when it came to the use of cladding and the tragic events that occurred as a result of the use of these materials. The contributions that have been made this evening have well canvassed the provisions and some of the history of the response that was provided by the government upon the work that was done by the cladding safety taskforce and the \$600 million that was provided for rectification. The work that was done at the time was a significant and important announcement. The instances of Grenfell and Lacrosse, Lacrosse in 2014 and Grenfell in 2017, showed the concern – more than concern regarding the tragedy that struck in the UK. But there was recognition that these materials were used all too commonly, and there was such significant concern about the way that when a fire would break out it had the ability to cross floors. I listened to the member for Frankston’s contribution around the use of these materials and what that would then mean for those buildings.

To be able to provide for the rectification and indeed the safety of residents and those that are in those buildings is something that is of great concern and was of great concern to so many of us in this place

and the wider community. The work that has been done is significant and important and goes to the heart of community safety. Understanding that and the repeal, due to the work that has been done and the processes which this bill deals with, is indeed something that is very, very important. As others have said, community safety is any government's top priority. Making sure that the use of building materials is safe and robust and, most importantly, protects the residents and those that are in these dwellings is something that is very important.

What we know and understand is that the work that has been done is incredibly important, and we acknowledge and thank all of those that have done the work. Of course it builds upon the work, as I mentioned earlier, of the taskforce and responds to the situation that is at hand. The bill will repeal the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 and abolish Cladding Safety Victoria as an agency, including abolishing the CSV board and the role of the CEO. It will transfer the property rights and liabilities to the Victorian Building Authority and amend the Building Act 1993 to confer upon the VBA cladding safety related functions to enable the VBA to complete any outstanding cladding safety related activities after CSV is abolished, transfer remaining employees to the VBA and a range of other functions. Making those changes and those provisions draws to a natural conclusion the work, but we say that in the context of making sure that we remain committed, vigilant and practical when it comes to building materials in this state and knowing that we do have such significant growth, both in terms of population and in terms of the housing that has been identified as a priority of the government. We know that this work is and has been very important. We need to make sure that we are working with our building authorities, our regulatory agencies and those that are on the ground every single day doing this important work to make sure that we are in a situation where we are strongly enforcing the rules and the provisions when it comes to materials, so that in essence we do not find ourselves in this same place again.

The establishment of Cladding Safety Victoria in 2019 to oversee the private residential cladding rectification program and the work that was done went to working closely with building owners to rectify high-risk cladding and make buildings safer for Victorians by reducing cladding safety risk. At the conclusion of the programs it is important to put on the record and acknowledge that Cladding Safety Victoria will have rectified around 450 private residential apartment buildings, assessed over 21,000 buildings for cladding risk, worked with the government to improve the safety of users of 133 government buildings and funded remediation works and produced cladding risk information for more than 80,000 privately owned apartments. They are significant and important numbers, and they are numbers that are not just numbers; they are people's dwellings. They are buildings where we know people are, and to prevent the tragedies that I mentioned at the start of this contribution to go to some of that work is really, really important.

The work that was done at the time was well thought and indeed needed to have a rapid response. Being in this place at the time, I remember the work of Richard Wynne as the former planning minister, and the work of the whole team in getting this program up was something that was very important and provided an opportunity to respond in a timely manner and in an efficient and effective way. What we need to make sure that we do is continue to work with our agencies going forward and continue to make sure that the use of these materials and of any material within the community that goes to the provision of housing, of community infrastructure and of any or all of the programs, projects and initiatives that are being delivered each and every day in this state is regulated and done in a timely and effective way. What we see is a set of circumstances where the government had to at the time – and being a member of that government at the time, I can make some reflections – deal with something that needed to be done in a fast and effective manner, and I do want to thank the entire team who I think stood this up really quickly, did a really significant and important job to get this going and most importantly led to a situation of improved community safety.

What the bill seeks to do is to draw to a natural conclusion the government's position where that work has concluded, with the recognition that we need to make sure we are continuing to do all of the

groundwork, all of the preparatory work, all of the work around regulation and reform to make for a better and safer system.

I do want to acknowledge again the team that have been able to deliver these numbers. They should not be seen as isolated numbers, but as the government's response to what was a very serious and significant problem within our community. To be able to allocate \$600 million-plus to deal with these matters was something that was really important. Time and time again we come into this place and we hear all sorts of characterisations from those opposite about allocations and investment of money, but what you must do in government is be responsible for community safety and deliver timely, effective and robust programs that go to supporting those in our community who deserve support and, of course, make for community safety and a better standard of living, because the alternative, which we saw in the UK, was tragedy. This was a response that was needed, and this was an important response that was delivered. I want to again thank all of those people that have done an amazing job to get this done. This draws the work to a natural conclusion, but of course – we continue to be committed to community safety. I commend the bill to the house.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (18:16): This evening I rise to speak on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. Let me say at the outset we will not be opposing this bill. This bill repeals the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020, abolishes Cladding Safety Victoria – otherwise known as CSV – as a standalone body, transfers its remaining functions, staff, rights and liabilities into the broader regulator and repeals the cladding rectification levy component while replacing it with a lower levy component within the building permit system. That is the substance of the bill before this chamber. But this bill is not insignificant. In fact it raises a much larger question: what exactly has this Labor government done on this issue over the last 10 years, and what exactly is this government asking Victorians to believe? The story that this government wants to tell us is that the cladding crisis is effectively behind us, that the hard work has been done and that this bill is simply a neat bit of tidying up at the end of a successful chapter – a chapter, I might add, that would not have come about if this government had done their job in the first place. That is the political message that this Labor government is putting out, but the problem is that for too many Victorians, and certainly for families connected to places like Culcairn Drive in Frankston South, in the member for Frankston's electorate, that story is nowhere near the lived reality.

The government itself described this repeal as marking the successful completion of Victoria's efforts on combustible cladding. Its second-reading explanation says that CSV was established to rectify or make safe buildings with flammable cladding and that this bill marks the successful completion of those achievements. But the government's own 2024–25 annual report says that 1346 class 2 buildings in CSV's program were resolved and that this represented 81 per cent of the program. That same report says that works had been completed on 409 higher-risk residential buildings. This government wants to talk about completion and success, but its own public reporting still describes a program that was not yet fully complete. That contradiction matters, because when governments start abolishing agencies and congratulating themselves before affected residents feel safe, before the last difficult cases are genuinely resolved and before accountability has truly bitten, people lose faith. They hear ministers saying 'world-leading' and other terms like that and they think, 'This is not what it feels like inside my very own home'.

That is why I want to bring this debate back to Culcairn Drive in Frankston South. I have worked with these residents for many years, since late 2018, when I was the federal member for Dunkley, even though this was a state issue at the time. I met with them and I raised their plight repeatedly in the media and in so many different forums.

This was a plight that came about due to this government's failed regulatory oversight and indeed their failed enforcement of existing laws under the building system. In November 2024 I said in this Parliament that many of the owners and residents of 5 Culcairn Drive in Frankston South had been forced to move out, that I had raised this issue eight times in Parliament – and I know I have raised it more since – and that the residents had been facing what I called a living nightmare, with cladding

issues, balcony collapses, cracking and more. I note that one resident who had his own home there was forced to live in a van, effectively homeless when he actually had a home, because of the issues in his apartment. What I said at the time is still true to this day. That was not an exaggeration – that was a plain description of what these people have endured and what they continue to endure.

The public record on that building is shocking. The ABC reported on it and described the Frankston complex as ‘wrapped in a highly combustible form of polystyrene’. Residents were told to remove mulch and trees because of fears that a small garden fire could quickly engulf the block. The same reporting – and what I saw in person – detailed balcony collapses, water leaks, mould and even mushrooms growing inside apartments. I know that they could not use their basement for parking and were actually forced to park in the street, whereupon they were then getting fines from the local council for parking on the street when they could not park in their own apartment building. Another report recorded that owners had received an emergency order around Christmas at the time, stating that the condition of the building posed a danger to life, with the threat of fines if works were not done – fines that would be imposed for what would be millions and millions of dollars worth of works for people that just did not have the money.

That is what this debate is really about – not abstractions, not agency charts, not anything else, but families being told that the place they saved for, borrowed for and built their lives around was a danger to life. Here is the heart of the problem. This Labor government’s cladding response has too often fixed the headline but not the whole harm. Even when cladding funding or rectification pathways existed, residents were still left confronting wider defects underneath and behind those walls. ABC reporting on the Frankston complex made clear that removing the cladding could expose other building faults – as it did – and that the works might not extend beyond replacing the combustible material itself. In other words, this Labor government could say it had addressed the cladding risk, while owners were still left with leaking windows, structural issues, defective exits, faulty systems and enormous financial exposure – and that is what has occurred. Eventually money was put aside towards fixing the cladding issue, but residents have been left millions and millions of dollars more out of pocket. That is 33 residents there who have had to share in a massive financial burden that has sent many broke and to the wall with mental health issues and much more. Many of these residents and former residents are still impacted to this day.

I raised in a speech previously to this Parliament that in this situation the surveyor, the builder and the developer were all related and signed off on the project. I noted, and I continue to note, that residents lost money and were impacted with mental health issues and more. I mentioned the gentleman in his van, effectively made homeless when he had a home. I note as well that, as was mentioned by the member for Frankston, eventually the builder did lose his licence, but there was a lack of prosecution of that person and the others involved in this project, and I note that that builder continues to operate to this day through his own son. There seem to be little to no consequences for those doing the wrong thing, and residents are still out of pocket to this day. It again comes down to failed regulatory oversight and failed enforcement under this government. I note that I was introduced to so many owners and residents in other properties across Melbourne and across Victoria through the residents at Frankston South, who raised enormous issues and even raised people who had taken their lives because of this issue.

That is why this bill should not be read as a triumph. It is not a complete solution; it is only a partial solution that has been sold as a closure. It should be read as a reminder of the government’s broader failure in building oversight. The Victorian Auditor-General found that the Victorian Building Authority did not meet all the government’s performance targets and did not consistently monitor and report its progress against those targets and recommendations. The Auditor-General also said the VBA had not been transparent with the public in the way that the Minister for Planning required.

This is incredibly serious, because when you have a building regulator that is supposed to protect Victorians from exactly this kind of systemic failure but is not meeting targets and not transparently reporting progress, the public is entitled to ask where the transparency was and where the

accountability was before families ended up trapped in unsafe buildings or indeed millions out of pocket, as I have mentioned. Where was the enforcement, and where still is the enforcement to this day? Where there is a lack of enforcement as well, people are at risk of losing lives, losing money and being in unsafe buildings, and indeed other builders who are doing the right thing cannot compete properly with those doing the wrong thing who can outcompete them on price.

In conclusion, we will not oppose this bill but let us be very clear about why: we are not opposing it because the existence of a temporary standalone structure and agency cannot go on forever. We are not opposing it because in form it mainly transfers functions and tidies up arrangements. But nor should anyone on that side of the house pretend that this repeal wipes the slate clean. It has not erased the anguish of Culcairn Drive. It has not erased the costs imposed on innocent owners. It has not erased the years of delay. It has not erased the regulatory failures that allowed buildings like that to be approved and occupied in the first place. It has not erased the fact that such residents continue to be out of pocket to this day. It has not erased the fact that there continues to be a lack of enforcement and a lack of prosecution for those who have done the wrong thing. If Labor wants to abolish Cladding Safety Victoria, then the least Victorians deserve is honesty. They need honesty that building safety is not achieved when government says the matter is over; it is achieved when residents can finally say with confidence that their homes are safe, that their homes are fixed and that justice is brought about for those who are responsible.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:26): I too rise today to make a contribution indeed in support of the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. I note the passion that goes with the contribution that the member for Mornington was making, but if you are so passionate, how come your side of politics never, ever supports any consumer-focused building reform that is put forward by this government? Why isn't it ever supported? It never, ever is. If you are going to bring that kind of passion to this place, you have got to be able to back it up with some substance as well, and we are certainly not seeing that from the opposition.

This legislation marks the successful completion of Cladding Safety Victoria's work and the beginning of new powers given to the Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC) to protect consumers for years to come and ensure that dodgy builders do face consequences. Our government understand building or buying a home is the single biggest investment most Victorians will make in their entire lifetime, and we are fighting for working families who do get this opportunity from getting caught up in debt stress or the headache of having the dream of building your own home ruined by those dodgy builders who do the wrong thing. This is especially prevalent when cost of living is front of mind for so many. Builders do not need to deal with the stress of potential debt as a result of dodgy building works. The bill shows how this government is on the side of working families, making sure that the goal of having your dream home becomes a reality and that homes are safe, affordable and are built to last as well. Victorians deserve to have the confidence that work will be done right the first time and that there is a regulator that is on their side in the event that things do go wrong.

The Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 has three major functions: repealing Cladding Safety Victoria, repealing the cladding rectification levy and, finally, adjusting the building permit levy to fund the Building and Plumbing Commission's consumer-focused enforcement work. As many have already mentioned before me, the terrible building fire that was caused by noncompliant cladding at the Lacrosse apartment tower in Docklands back in 2014 is something that has stuck with all of us. That led to a major audit of external wall cladding by the Victorian Building Authority (VBA). Of course the London Grenfell Tower incident in 2017 reinforced that. That incident, however, which tragically killed some 72 people, showed the catastrophic risk of noncompliant building works.

These incidents revealed what can happen when there are failures by developers, builders and regulators and where there are gaps in policy.

At the same time as the VBA audit, the state Labor government established the Victorian Cladding Taskforce. It was tasked with investigating the extent of noncompliant wall cladding on buildings

throughout Victoria. The taskforce's recommendations led to the establishment of the private residential cladding rectification program and the subsequent creation of Cladding Safety Victoria 2020 to protect Victorians from combustible cladding-related harm. This bill marks the successful completion of Victoria's world-leading cladding rectification work carried out by Cladding Safety Victoria. The work of this organisation has been really successful and is something that we can be really quite proud of in Victoria. Cladding Safety Victoria is on track to substantially complete its programs by June 2026, and by this time rectification works will have been completed on nearly 450 private residential apartment buildings, mostly in inner metro Melbourne, and 131 public-use buildings too.

In addition to the successful completion of Cladding Safety Victoria's work, the bill will also futureproof the Building and Plumbing Commission. The bill repeals the cladding rectification levy, which will see a reduction in building costs for builders while also helping prospective consumers looking to build their own home. This means that consumers will save between 47 per cent and 66 per cent on cladding rectification levy costs, putting money back into homebuyers pockets, where it belongs. The bill will also adjust the building permit levy to bolster the Building and Plumbing Commission for years to come and ultimately protect consumers too.

The work of the Building and Plumbing Commission is important in helping to protect consumers from the stress and financial burden of having to deal with bad building work on their own. This will help the stress and heartache of chasing dodgy builders, trying to get them back to rectify missing or noncompliant works and then potentially having to take further action through our VCAT system or, in even harsher cases, through the court process. Of course there are so many great builders out there who are doing the right thing, but many good businesses are being undercut by many dodgy operators who continue to subcontract through that supply chain and who try to make a quick buck at the expense of Victorian families.

I am pleased to hear that those opposite are not opposed to the bill, and it is good to see that they are at least taking a little bit of a break from thinking about themselves for a change and actually trying to assist Victorians. We remember last year, when this government introduced the buyers protection legislation to establish the BPC and to give it tough new powers to protect consumers, that those opposite stood in opposition. I made the point earlier that it is generally true that in this place whenever we introduce some consumer-focused building reform where we start to enact that good consumer-focused policy in the building industry through the legislative process those opposite will generally oppose it. They are good at generally standing in opposition to things that help everyday working people. They have stood in this place and effectively said, 'No, we won't fix the building system. Consumers, you're your own.' It is no surprise to me that they opposed the BPC. They always take the side of those selling rather than those who are purchasing.

This state Labor government will always help Victorian families to own a home that is safe, a home that is affordable and one that is built to last. Our government has its bona fides in backing families when it comes to previous legislation that has covered housing reform in this state. I point to the creation of the Building and Plumbing Commission, the banning of underquoting, making real estate agents disclose the actual sale price of homes and helping first home buyers to get into the market through stamp duty exemptions.

As we all know, it is hard enough to get into the housing market on your own or to own your own home. We are committed to making sure we help Victorians, especially those just starting out, by building more high-quality homes where people want to live.

This bill is a good bill. It concludes the important work of Cladding Safety Victoria, and it really does signal an important step in the establishment of the Building and Plumbing Commission to ensure high-quality builds for future homes, especially as we begin to increase housing supply. I know that many young people in my electorate are looking to break into the housing market, and I know that the

passage of this bill will help them not only with cost but with the quality of their first home as well. It is for those reasons that I commend this bill to the house.

John LISTER (Werribee) (18:36): In rising to speak to the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026, I know we have had a broad range of contributions around the purpose behind this bill and what we are working on with the Building and Plumbing Commission, which I am particularly excited about for the fast-growing community that I represent. But I do just want to briefly reflect on cladding. Before November 2014, as some of my colleagues have observed, when that fire at the Lacrosse towers happened, I have to admit, as a kid from the suburbs, I had no idea what cladding was. It did not sound particularly appealing. I note that the member for Morwell has observed that cladding looks smart and good. Well, I have seen a fair bit of cladding now that we have been removing it, and thinking of *Grand Designs* and Kevin McCloud, in the spirit of Kevin McCloud, I think that he would frown at this design choice to have cladding. I think, rather than looking smart and good on the side of a building, it could be described as being tacky and life threatening, as we tragically found out in the case of Grenfell in London. In 2017 we saw, as the result of those catastrophic regulation failures and a lot of different issues, particularly too with the service that they had there and the response, 72 lives were lost at Grenfell. These victims were failed by these different – some would say bureaucratic – failures, but some of them were quite real and on the ground as well. This noncompliant – well, we say ‘noncompliant’, but this design choice, I have to say, led to the lives that were lost at Grenfell. We have to make sure that we never see this kind of cost-cutting and, frankly, tacky material used in the way that we construct our buildings anymore.

I know the member for Frankston reflected on his experience as a firefighter. I would like to add just a couple of little notes about what we get trained in around the risk of combustible cladding, although as I will go to, it is becoming less of a risk in Victoria of course. But you see the different materials on those PowerPoints when you do your responding to urban fire training, and one of the issues we have with the rise of plastics and composite materials in building and construction is that we see more risk in places where we choose to live, work or send our kids to school. When it comes to that pyrolysis and the breakdown of the material, particularly the foam in cladding, it can cause toxic fumes as well as non-combusted materials to travel through a building and end up spreading essentially what is fuel – it is like having petrol, except vaporised – all through that property. Of course we saw what happened at Grenfell, where a fire should have been contained – that is how we build our apartments now; we build them as little fire jails, as some people refer to them – to that apartment or that fire jail, but instead, because of that tacky and life-threatening design choice that was made to clad that building in aluminium composite material, we saw those lives lost in London.

It is forever ingrained in all the training material and all the experience that you get in the fire brigades around our state to always look out for material like this, because it is unpredictable and it is dangerous.

Once we saw the results of these fires and those learnings that we had particularly from overseas, the Labor government established that cladding taskforce, which we are looking at repealing elements of – Cladding Safety Victoria, which came out of that taskforce – in this bill today. This bill is about repealing Cladding Safety Victoria, but it is not about necessarily removing the purpose behind CSV. It is around making sure that it is incorporated into what is our quite nation-leading response to building safety and compliance through the Building and Plumbing Commission. It marks a successful completion of the rectification works, and I will go to a few of the figures in just a moment. But it is remarkable, at least in the case of 2014 – I was not in government, obviously; I was at university – to see that early response. And then in 2019 – and I am showing how young I am – I saw that response while I was working in government, and now to see it come to a conclusion is something that this government can feel quite proud of: to see an entire rectification program through from start to finish.

There are some other things around the cladding rectification levy that hopefully, if those builders pass it on, will reduce some of those costs for people constructing their dwellings, which would be covered by that CRL at the moment, and also adjust the building permit levy to make sure that we can continue to fund those compliance processes in the Building and Plumbing Commission, which has been quite

topical these last few weeks. We have seen a lot of reports, and we will obviously be discussing here in this chamber this week why the BPC's work is so important. Thanks to this work – I have got a few figures here, if I may indulge the house by quickly finding the figures – we have seen a great deal of properties fixed when it comes to their cladding. We saw at the start 1660 buildings with noncompliant cladding identified. It is amazing now to see that there are only around six that have been identified as still needing rectification, and it is well within the scope of the new scheme to get that done. Of course a lot of these locations were in central Melbourne or those middle suburbs where we do see these sorts of medium- to high-rise density apartments that would have been clad with this tacky and life-threatening design choice.

Of course too it was not just places where people live but also places like hospitals and 11 police and, ironically, fire stations – I remember seeing that on the news and thinking, 'Oh, goodness me' – 27 public and community housing sites, five law courts and justice facilities, lots of TAFEs and a fair few schools. But of course through this program Cladding Safety Victoria has helped keep 18,885 Victorian students at those 40 schools safer because we have removed the tacky and life-threatening design choice of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

I think it is important to reflect at this time that we want to try and create a framework that is more straightforward for our construction industry – hence the work that we are doing with the Building and Plumbing Commission. I would expect the small-'l' liberals opposite to be more supportive of things like streamlining regulation and making sure that there is a one-stop shop for people in the construction industry, but we have seen all sorts of fun and games from their response towards the BPC. This is an example of trying to make sure that there is a simpler process across government when it comes to making sure people are safe. Quite often I sit here and I hear people talk about regulation, and I think I spoke on this when we had the regulations bill only a few weeks ago.

I hear from some of the conservatives opposite this idea that 'regulation is in the way. Get out of our way. We just want to do it. We don't want more red tape.' We do agree that red tape that is unnecessary should be reduced, and we have gone to a great length in this government to do that. But ultimately regulation is about the government setting a standard that the community has called for or that we have identified through expert opinion, or experiences from overseas in the cases of cladding, to make sure that people are kept safe. Ultimately all regulation and legislation should be there to keep people safe, and when it comes to the work of Cladding Safety Victoria, it is something to look back and be proud of, to see how we took something that was incredibly risky, incredibly unsafe, and turned it around as a state. It is something that we can look to as an example for other risks that may come out of building material innovation, and of course I encourage all people who work in that innovation space to think, in the future, 'Is this going to be good for the people that live in this building, or will it simply be tacky and life threatening, like the cladding that we saw come out of the 1990s and 2000s?' I commend the bill to the house.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (18:46): I rise to speak in support of the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. This bill is about something very simple and very important: keeping Victorians safe in their homes and making sure families are never again left to carry unbearable debt and stress because of dangerous building defects that were not their fault. This bill also marks the end of a major chapter in Victoria's history, a chapter where we faced a serious problem head on, took responsibility and fixed it. Cladding Safety Victoria was created for a reason. It was created because people were living in buildings that were not safe. It was created because building owners were being told that they might have to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars, sometimes millions, to fix dangerous combustible cladding. And it was created because government had a responsibility to step in when the system failed. Today, because of the work of Cladding Safety Victoria, tens of thousands of Victorians are safer in their homes. Because that work is almost complete, this bill responsibly winds the agency down, transfers the remaining work to the Building and Plumbing Commission and cuts building costs by repealing the cladding rectification levy.

This is a bill about completion, responsibility and consumer protection. Many of us remember the fires that changed the way the world thinks about cladding safety. In Melbourne we saw the Lacrosse building fire in Docklands. Flames raced up the side of the high-rise building. People ran for their lives in the middle of the night. And overseas we saw the tragedy of the Grenfell Tower in London. Seventy-two people lost their lives. The tragedy was not an accident, it was a result of dangerous materials, weak regulation and failures across the system. These events forced governments everywhere to ask hard questions: how many buildings are unsafe, and who will fix them? Here in Victoria, Labor did not look away: we acted. The Victorian government set up the Victorian Cladding Taskforce to find out how big the problem really was. That work showed us something deeply concerning: there were hundreds of buildings with combustible cladding, and many owners simply could not afford to fix them. So in 2020 Cladding Safety Victoria was established as a time-limited agency with one clear mission: to identify the riskiest buildings and make them safe, and that is exactly what has been done

Over the past six years Cladding Safety Victoria has delivered world-leading reform. It has remediated more than 99 per cent of the highest risk private buildings in Victoria. It has made schools, hospitals, public housing and community buildings safer. It has worked with owners, fire services, councils and industry to reduce risks and save lives. By the time its work is complete, more than 1600 buildings will have been made safer. That means hundreds of thousands of Victorians can now sleep easier at night. And just as importantly, it has protected families from being forced into crippling debt to fix a problem they did not cause. That is something we should all be really proud of. I want to place on record my sincere thanks to the chair, board members, CEO and every staff member of Cladding Safety Victoria. Their work has saved lives. Cladding Safety Victoria was never designed to exist forever. It was created to solve a specific problem, dangerous combustible cladding, and to wind down once that job was done. That point has now been reached. Most rectification work is complete, only a small number of remaining matters need to be finalised, and they will be done by the new regulator. This bill repeals the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 and formally abolishes the agency because its job has been done.

This is a good government. It shows discipline and it shows respect for public money. Importantly the bill does not leave any loose ends. Any remaining cladding-related work will be transferred to the Building and Plumbing Commission, which is the strengthened building regulator created by this government. We know how important that work is. We need quality building and plumbing. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard stories of floods in apartment buildings because of dodgy work or dodgy materials that have been used, and how distressing and disrupting that is when people have to move out of their homes and relocate. They are displaced, their homes are damaged, their furniture is damaged, their clothes are damaged, and they have got to find somewhere else to live but also deal with all of the paperwork with the insurance and all of the rectification works. In apartment buildings it is usually not just confined to one apartment – because they are so close, it is a number of apartments. That is why we need commissions and that is why we need good regulators doing the work they do.

Furthermore, staff with specialist knowledge will transfer no-worse-off conditions, ensuring expertise is retained. The commission will be able to finalise any outstanding rectification works, make final payments, support owners and owners corporations, and advise the minister on cladding safety outcomes. No-one is left behind, no building is forgotten and no work is abandoned.

The bill also delivers real cost relief, and we know how important that is. The cladding rectification bill was introduced in 2020 to help fund this massive safety program, and at the time it was needed. But now, with the work largely finished, it is no longer required. The bill repeals the cladding rectification levy, and in its place a new lower building permit levy will apply only to large class 2 to class 8 buildings in non-regional Victoria with construction costs of over \$1.5 million, and only until the 30 June 2029. For affected developments this means an overall levy reduction of between 47 and 66 per cent, and that is significant. It means lower construction costs, and when passed on, it means lower costs for consumers. Homes will be cheaper to build without compromising safety.

At the same time this bill makes sure that we do not repeat past mistakes. The Building and Plumbing Commission needs stable long-term funding to do its job, to protect consumers, hold dodgy builders to account and lift standards across the industry. This bill ensures that funding continues without overcharging industry and without placing unnecessary pressure on homebuyers. Cutting red tape should never mean cutting corners, and Labor will never allow safety to be optional. We have shown this time and time again. Labor steps in when the market fails, Labor protects consumers and Labor fixes problems, even when the work is hard and expensive. This bill sits within a much larger program of reform. The government has banned underquoting, forced real estate agents to disclose real sale prices, strengthened warranty protections, introduced developer bonds and created a building regulator with real enforcement powers. At the same time we are building more homes than any other state in the country – more approvals, more commencements, more completions.

Just recently I was at the topping-out of 120 new social homes in Broadmeadows, and I am really proud of that. I was there with Minister Shing. They are just wonderful quality. These homes will give so many people the dignity of a roof over their head, and they were beautiful. There was a dishwasher in there. More than 5 per cent of them are fully accessible, but in an apartment building they are all pretty accessible, so people with disabilities can access them as well. On top of that, 700 jobs have been created. My dad was in a wheelchair, and we know how hard it is to get accessible housing. It is so important that people can not only live in accessible housing but visit as well.

On top of this investment in Broadmeadows, in Hume Homes Victoria has completed 123 new homes and 161 new homes are underway. The Big Housing Build investment of \$134 million has resulted in 1200 jobs being created. A further 85 homes have been completed, and 600 homes have had maintenance or upgrades in the Hume local government area. We are building more homes and building them better, because a house is not just an asset; it is dignity, it is security, it is safety and it is a home.

This bill does three important things. First, it honours the success of Cladding Safety Victoria and responsibly brings its work to a close. Second, it cuts building costs by replacing an outdated levy. Third, it protects consumers by ensuring a strong, well-funded building regulator into the future. This is balanced reform from a responsible government – Labor governing in the interests of working Victorians. Cladding Safety Victoria did what it was asked to do, and it did it well. This bill confirms its success, protects consumers and keeps our building system strong. It means safer homes, lower costs and lasting reform, and I wholeheartedly commend the bill to the house.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (18:55): I am going to speak very briefly. I have got a lot of things to say, but I know others here are very keen to get up and speak on this bill as well. I could not possibly take time away from them – not reading my mobile phone and the text messages in the way that I should. I appreciate so much, member for Lara, your support for my having a couple of minutes on this before you get your opportunity.

I am speaking on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026, and I am glad to hear that the opposition does not intend to oppose this bill. Why would they? This authority has made a terrific effort in making sure that Victorians are safer in their homes and their places of sport and entertainment and recreation. Thank you, Acting Speaker Mullaly, for your recommendation on that.

I want to take a moment to thank the CSV chairperson Rod Fehring and also the team down there: the deputy chairperson Sarah Clarke, the entire CSV board and CEO Dan O'Brien. This has been a big job to make Victorians safe. We all saw the horrors of what happened in the UK, and I do not think there could have been a worse tragedy for us to observe. Each of us would have seen that in our own way and thought of those large buildings in Melbourne and the risks that were in place for those. We also remember those circumstances down in Docklands as well. But the risk was to houses across this state – the risk of cladding being so flammable and so dangerous for our community. 157,000 Victorians are now safer because of Cladding Safety Victoria's efforts. I do appreciate and thank them for those efforts, but the time has come to move these responsibilities into another area of

government, as is appropriate when we get to the end of a significant program. I just want to note that the vast majority of buildings with non-compliant cladding were also in metropolitan Melbourne. We saw big examples in Port Phillip. We just heard Nina Taylor, the member for Albert Park, make some comments on this earlier.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): Correct titles.

Mathew HILAKARI: Sorry. Yes, correct titles. I can understand your impatience with me not getting on with this bill, so I will give the member for Lara a moment.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (18:57): It is a real pleasure to be rising to add a contribution to the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026. I thank the member for Point Cook for yielding his time to me to make a contribution on this. This bill is truly something to be celebrated here today and something to be proud of as Victorians, because in Victoria we have led cladding rectification work. It has been a world-leading reform that has seen buildings across the state made safer with the removal of combustible cladding. It was a Labor government that established and funded Cladding Safety Victoria to protect Victorians from combustible cladding related harm. Cladding Safety Victoria went on to identify a number of buildings, both apartment buildings and publicly owned buildings, that put Victorians most at risk, then fronted half the cost of removal and made tens of thousands of homes safe from combustible cladding. Now that that work is done, this bill seeks to repeal the legislation that was required to establish the program of rectification in the first place. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the many ministers who have worked on cladding rectification over the years, completing this important work.

By the time Cladding Safety Victoria winds down, it will have left a huge impact across Victoria. I would like to conclude with a few statistics. Over 1600 buildings are safer, over 83,000 homes are safer, and over 157,000 Victorians are safer because of this important work led by a state Labor government. This is just one of the many reforms that this government has introduced to improve housing and to support home buyers in Victoria. On this side, we are so proud of all of that work. We are very proud of the world-leading work we have done to remove combustible cladding here in Victoria. We are proud to continue this work to support first-home buyers, to support renters and to support every Victorian to ensure that they live in a safe and comfortable home. With that, I am very pleased to commend this bill to the house. I wish it a speedy passage.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Whittlesea-Kinglake Road

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (19:00): (1609) I have a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to ensure works are undertaken as a matter of priority to improve line markings on the Whittlesea-Kinglake Road, right across the Kinglake Ranges, before winter sets in. The line markings now are almost invisible. The cat's eyes in many places are worn out or damaged, further reducing visibility and safety. Luminescent markings have faded and lost any effectiveness. The Kinglake Ranges is known for its unique weather. Heavy fog is a feature, so safe roads are paramount during the day and at night. These much-needed improvements are simple and should be a no-brainer. Many raise the condition of this road with me. Potholes are a constant and now equally the line markings are dangerous.

A long-time emergency services volunteer who travels this road frequently contacted me recently about her concern. She knows this road, drives it regularly and understands the risks and hazards, and her message is stark. With fog now rolling into Kinglake, she says that the current state of line markings is a recipe for disaster. Driving the Whittlesea-Kinglake Road in heavy fog at 7:30 am two

weeks ago, she described needing intense concentration simply to keep her car on the road. The lines, she says, are almost invisible, and she says it is the worst that she has encountered. This is not an abstract concern; this is someone responding to emergencies, often at night, in poor conditions, on a narrow, winding and somewhat unforgiving road. In those conditions line markings are not cosmetic, they are critical. When visibility drops, they are often the only guide a driver has.

The government has trialled new technologies on a number of segments of this road, including enhanced and luminescent markings. In the end, that trial, like the visibility on this stretch, simply faded away. But what matters to drivers on the ground is simple: can they see the road? Right now they cannot and the community knows it. The consistent message is that this road needs more than patchwork fixes and routine maintenance. It needs clear, visible, well-maintained line markings that perform in real conditions at night, in fog and on a road where mistakes are unforgiving. Cat's eyes are crucial for delineating lanes at night and in poor weather, and their deterioration can cause significant visibility issues for motorists. Missing or damaged road studs can make it difficult to see the road ahead in low light or wet weather. Before winter sets in and fog becomes a daily hazard, the minister must act, because when a frontline volunteer is telling you the road is unsafe, you do not want to wait for a report; you fix it. The question is simple: will the government act now or wait until somebody is seriously injured or worse before it does?

Monash University

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (19:03): (1610) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Skills and TAFE in the other place, and the action I seek is that the minister update the house on how the government is acting to enhance Victorian university governance. I recently received some correspondence from a constituent named Thomas. Thomas is studying law at Monash University, just down the road, and recently commenced his second year. Thomas, like many of his peers, was shocked to be told last October by the university that tutorials would be discontinued for all but first-year students. I understand this decision was made without any prior consultation with students or the Monash Law Students' Society, and Thomas has conveyed to us his fears about the impact this will have on his future as a lawyer. The students are missing out on essential collaborative work, discussions of learnings and practical analytical skills that are fundamental to the legal profession. I thank Thomas for reaching out with his cohort. Apparently, I have heard, Monash did not stop the tutorials for the medical students. Obviously our doctors are very important; they are trained just like our lawyers and other people. So you wonder whether Monash are thinking to themselves, 'Oh, we better not do it for medicine, because that might have other effects.' But I would put it to Monash to consider, on stopping tutorials for legal students, whether they have thought of any other effects that might have. Our lawyers are accredited; they need to do proper work. And as much as sometimes they have a bad rap, we need our lawyers to be skilled and excellent.

I believe a committee of the house is currently conducting an inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance, including through elevating student voice at the higher level – and a shout-out to the National Tertiary Education Union, who are doing some good work in this area as well. Removing tutorials without consultation is the kind of action I would hope would not happen when student voice is elevated at universities. I look forward to the minister's response.

Euroa electorate roads

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:05): (1611) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for her to come for a drive with Broadford local legend Archie Baines in one of his trucks and see firsthand the state of our local roads. It might sound like a nice invitation, but it is anything but. It is pretty dangerous. The shocking and deteriorating condition of our roads is incredibly serious.

I want to tell you about Archie. Archie Baines is 82 years old, a highly experienced truck driver with decades behind him, the kind of man that knows our roads better than most. On Sunday 22 March, after attending the Kyabram Mack Muster, Archie was driving along the Nagambie bypass at the

Goulburn Valley Highway – a major arterial road, a key freight route, a road that should be safe. As he approached the first Nagambie overpass, his truck struck a large pothole in the right-hand wheel track, and within moments his steer tyre blew out, and what followed could have been fatal. His truck was dragged across the lanes, taking out about a hundred metres of fencing and safety barriers. There was significant damage to his truck and the vehicle he was towing, but by sheer luck Archie survived. Another local driver just behind him in a new vehicle hit the exact same pothole: multiple tyre blowouts, two incidents, the same stretch of road, the same hazard. What is concerning for every Victorian is the pothole had already been marked, ringed in white paint but not repaired, and this is exactly what people are seeing across the state: circles of paint everywhere, like warnings, but nothing is ever fixed. How many more circles of paint do we need before something is actually repaired? How many more warnings do the Allan Labor government need before it acts? Next time we may not be talking about a damaged truck. We may be talking about a life lost.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Archie's story is one of many. Shae, traveling the Violet Town to Murchison road four times a week for essential therapy, is navigating a road that is putting her at risk every trip. Corey hit a pothole in Anzac Avenue in Seymour. He hit it so hard he bent his rim and now has the most expensive hose reel that you can purchase. Julie between Heathcote and Nagambie has taken it upon herself to mark the potholes with her own paint, and across from Benalla to Yarrawonga and Avenel to Nagambie the roads are unsafe, pothole after pothole, rough patch after rough patch.

When someone like Archie, with decades of experience, is nearly taken out by a pothole on a major highway, that should be the wake-up call. He was incredibly lucky, and seconds later it could have been fatal. He could have gone on to a railway embankment, and the outcome could have been catastrophic. Our communities deserve safe roads. Our freight operators deserve infrastructure that reflects the critical role they play, and our families deserve to know that they will make it home safely. Minister, come for a drive. See it firsthand. Get into a truck with Archie, and let him show you the state of our roads properly.

Fuel supply and prices

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (19:08): (1612) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how the fair fuel taskforce will operate in growth areas like Melton and to consider Melton as the first or an early location for taskforce activity so local residents can see these new protections in action. This issue is front of mind for many families in Melton – fuel prices and the pressure they place on household budgets. In a growing community like Melton people rely on their cars every day. Getting to work, school or appointments is not optional, it is essential. When fuel prices spike, families feel it immediately.

I welcome the Allan Labor government's anti-price gouging laws and Servo Saver. These reforms give motorists transparency and the ability to plan ahead. I have long called for action on fuel pricing in Melton, and requiring retailers to set a 24-hour maximum price is a practical step that gives drivers certainty. Of course the success of these reforms depends on enforcement. Melton has had some of the highest fuel prices in Melbourne for years. Unfortunately, despite my repeated calls to the federal ACCC, they have refused to investigate price gouging of fuel in Melton.

Last week the minister updated the house on the establishment of the fair fuel taskforce. This is a strong step, and communities like Melton will be looking forward to seeing it implemented. There is strong interest in fuel pricing across Melton, and my constituents want to see these new laws in force. With many families feeling cost-of-living pressures, my community stands to benefit from strong oversight. This makes it important that communities like Melton are prioritized as these reforms are rolled out.

Warrnambool train services

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:10): (1613) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is to urgently reinstate train seat bookings and stop this chaos by postponing track maintenance until after school holidays and after the May racing carnival. This train service is nothing short of a debacle. Labor cannot organise the simplest of systems. They cannot even guarantee a seat on the train. The Allan Labor government's decision to make public transport free in April might have sounded good in a press release, but in reality it has created further confusion, disruption and distress right across my community. My office has been inundated with calls from frustrated locals – people who are being told they cannot reserve a seat. The website says one thing, staff say another, and even after hours on the phone there are still no answers. This is not the fault of the frontline staff; they have been left in the dark by a government that announces first and thinks later.

The consequences are real. Schoolchildren could be left on the side of the road unable to get to camp, because there is no way we can know whether the group booking will be honoured. The Narrawong District Primary School excursion now hangs in the balance. A local carer was forced to cancel a long-planned trip to the zoo for two clients with disabilities because she could not guarantee them a seat. These are vulnerable people who rely on certainty, and this government has taken that away. Ian Anderson from Portland travels to Melbourne every fortnight for cancer treatment at Peter MacCallum. He cannot stand for a 3-hour journey. He relies on a booked seat. Now he is left wondering if he will be able to access life-saving care. Honestly, this tired and arrogant Allan Labor government could not organise a chook raffle.

If that is not enough, this government has scheduled planned rail maintenance again right in the middle of peak school holidays over Easter and, during the May racing carnival. There will be no trains for one of Warrnambool's biggest weeks of the year, an event that brings more than \$15 million to our region. Imagine shutting down trains during Melbourne Cup week. That is exactly what is being imposed on our region. This is a pattern: big announcements, no planning, no coordination and no regard for regional communities. Free public transport means nothing if you cannot get on a train. Labor has turned something simple into chaos. My constituents are not asking for much. They are asking for basic competence and the ability to book a seat, to plan a journey and to rely on the system.

Renewable energy

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:13): (1614) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Could the minister please provide an update on how our government's investment in renewable energy is assisting constituents in the Lara electorate who are feeling the impact of the rising cost of living. I was really pleased to share with constituents last week that the Victorian government has announced that Victorians will soon be able to access 3 hours of free power in the middle of the day, which could save families up to \$300 per year off their energy bills – and even more than that if they have solar panels and batteries installed at home. Given so many people are doing it tough right now, it is more important now than ever that we look at ways to assist with the cost of living for households. Every dollar saved on energy bills makes a real difference, and that is why the Victorian government's long-term investment in renewable energy is so important. By building a resilient, future-ready energy system over our time in government, we are securing lasting relief for households across our community for decades to come.

Warrandyte electorate ministerial visit

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (19:14): (1615) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for her to visit my electorate of Warrandyte so that my community can look her in the eye and tell her exactly how things are right now. Across Victoria and indeed across our country people feel let down by the government. Here in Victoria after 12 years of Labor the government has left Victoria carrying nearly \$200 billion in debt. I hear from working families in my community and

small business owners all the time who tell me that they are stretched to breaking point – groceries, power bills, rent, all of these things going up. While there are Victorians making difficult choices, like choosing between paying a bill and putting food on the table, the Allan Labor government continue to fob off the \$15 billion that has been wasted into the hands of criminals and crooks on their government worksites. It is no wonder that trust in politics is at an all-time low, with 55 per cent of Australians believing that politicians do not serve their interests.

Victorians are sick of a justice system that seems like it is protecting the wrong people: men who secretly film women in bathrooms walking free and machete attacks met with weak sentences that insult every family that has been a victim of crime. Victorians are sick of being gaslit about energy, being told that the electricity system the government is building will save them money when their bills have never cost them more in Labor's big energy con. Victorians are also sick of having their concerns about housing and infrastructure not keeping up with rapid population growth be dismissed or ignored. That this Labor government has decided Melbourne will grow to the size of London within 25 years, it is entirely fair for Victorians to ask where the hospitals, schools and houses will be for these people and to ask whether their future and housing will be secure. It is absolutely insulting that whenever something does not suit the narrative of the government, they label it as racist or misinformation or someone else's fault. When people in my community tell me that they feel like the system is rigged or that no-one is fighting for them, I get it. I am the daughter of working-class migrants. I am the granddaughter of a World War II survivor who to this day is still illiterate because her family was so poor they could not afford to send her to school. My parents are battlers who came to the lucky country where they got given a fair go, and their story inspires me to fight for Victorians every single day. People have had a gutful of the political elites who just do not get it. I am here to fight for the battlers, for people in our state to get a fair go and for working-class Victorians who have aspirations to better themselves and their families. I am here to fight for these Victorian values, no matter what the government says.

Power saving bonus

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:17): (1616) My adjournment matter for tonight is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action that I seek is that the minister for energy come to my electorate of Wendouree to meet with neighbourhood houses to talk about how the power saving bonus has supported constituents of mine. We know that the cost-of-living pressures are having a very, very significant impact, particularly on many households across my electorate of Wendouree, and that is why we have seen thousands upon thousands of people apply for the power saving bonus. This is just another measure that the Allan Labor government is following to make life easier for working families, such as our free public transport that just started today till the end of April that will give every Victorian the opportunity to leave the car at home and take pressure off the household budget by being able to catch public transport. Also, you look at our free breakfast programs across schools, and we know that that is making a real difference to families with the ability to have their little learners, their students, be able to get to school and be supported by this government. But I do want to give a shout-out, talking about the power saving bonus, to my incredible staff. They have worked so hard, and I want to thank Christy, I want to thank Ella, I want to thank Aditi, and I want to thank Patterson for the incredible work that they have done talking to constituents. We have gone out and we have done remote offices, we have been out to senior citizens, we have been to the badminton stadium, and we have been to the heart walk groups. We have taken the laptops out, and we have gone and supported people to make sure that those households that are doing it really, really tough are managing to access the power saving bonus. I really look forward to hearing from the minister and welcoming her to the electorate of Wendouree to say thank you to our neighbourhood houses for the great job that they have done as well in rolling out the power saving bonus and supporting households across my electorate who need it the most.

Polwarth electorate train services

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:19): (1617) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is the immediate addition of three extra carriages for the Warrnambool line. Since late last year the service levels on the Warrnambool train line have just been appalling. People's safety is at risk, the ride is uncomfortable and the service levels are just appalling. We have seen today and ongoing that the government's announcement of free travel will make this problem even worse. Currently for commuters on the Warrnambool line, right through the heart of the Polwarth electorate, the government leaves three carriages in Geelong and proceeds down the line with only three carriages. There is no reason why the people in country Victoria cannot be afforded the safety and comfort of enough seats to sit on. I will read just for one moment a text I received only 10 minutes ago.

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Complete chaos on V/Line Southern Cross to Warrnambool because of no bookings. Some people have booked seats, but the conductors are not enforcing them. People are fighting – a ridiculous situation. A person I work with – we both came on the train this morning – described it as a war zone. People are jam-packed, people sitting on the toilets all the way from Terang.

This is no way to run a modern, fair and safe public transport system. We do not allow buses to be crammed full of people, yet we have people sitting in hallways, in doorways and in toilets just because that is the seating.

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

The government announced this week that they are going to stop taking reservations on the seats. This has caused great chaos. Brendan Stahl wrote to me this afternoon. He and his 80-year-old wife are going to the airport, or plan to. That is how they get to Melbourne: on the train with their luggage. Brendan wrote to me with great concern that he feels that he will not be able to use the train to get to the airport in Melbourne because it is simply too packed. There is no luggage capacity – there is nowhere to put his luggage – and he and his wife simply are not fit enough to stand for the 2½ hours from our region to Melbourne. This service level is just appalling.

Further, today I was contacted by the self-advocacy group for people with disabilities, R.A.I.S.E Your Voice Colac. They wrote to me absolutely desperate that so many of their members throughout western Victoria simply cannot any longer get on the train with any degree of certainty or safety. There are people in wheelchairs and there are people with walking frames having to have their walking frames put somewhere down behind the toilet or up on the roof rack away from their access. People cannot get to the toilet during the journey because they do not have their walking aids with them. It is a disaster waiting to happen. Unfortunately rail cannot be guaranteed not to have other catastrophic things happen, and to have literally hundreds of people standing and sitting on the floor, crammed in in unsafe conditions, is simply not good enough. Furthermore, people in country Victoria deserve the same services that you get in the city. They are paying the money for it. They deserve to travel safely and affordably and with some degree of certainty.

Air pollution

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:22): (1618) My adjournment is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is that the minister outline what steps are being taken to ensure the ongoing odour investigation in Sunshine delivers timely and enforceable outcomes for the many affected residents. As the minister knows, we have a bit of a smelly problem in Sunshine at the moment, with odours from industrial meat-processing facilities wafting north into Sunshine and other surrounding suburbs. I want to acknowledge the many residents who have written to and called my office over the past few months and who have really wanted to express how bad this smell is.

I want to thank and acknowledge the work of the EPA, who, it has to be said, have been proactive in allocating resources to a dedicated investigation of this issue since before the start of the year. Since

the start of January this year the EPA has conducted more than 45 inspections across multiple sites in Laverton North, Sunshine West and Brooklyn in my electorate. They have issued around 11 compliance notices to businesses including abattoirs, renderers and meat-processing plants in and around this area, who are, by and large, the culprits for these odours.

Everyone deserves to be able to live happy, healthy lives free from odours or pollution in the air, and that is exactly what we are trying to achieve here. It is a complex task that the EPA have had in tracking these odours. While this demonstrates strong regulatory activity, the key issue for residents is not just investigation, it is actually resolution. Given the complexity of identifying odour sources and the reliance on both officer assessment and community reporting, what assurances can the minister provide that enforcement action will escalate when noncompliance persists, agencies are working in a coordinated way to reduce ongoing impacts, residents are being informed and updated on notices and residents will see tangible improvements in air quality in the near term? I am really grateful for this work, but of course there is more to do. Ultimately communities deserve confidence that this work will lead to clear outcomes and not just ongoing investigations.

Responses

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (19:25): It is my pleasure to hear the excellent member for Laverton support her community of Sunshine. I will, in response to the member's adjournment debate, seek advice from the EPA about what action they have already taken – the member has touched on some of it – but also what action they can continue to take and what resolution they can come to to assist those residents in the member's electorate in relation to the odour issue.

The passionate member for Eildon raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in relation to the Whittlesea-Kinglake Road and line markings, and I will refer that to the minister for roads. The steadfast member for Ashwood raised a matter for the Minister for Skills and TAFE, and that was about updating the house on how the government is updating university governance, a very important matter. The florid member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and that was a matter asking the minister to come for a drive with a local to talk about local roads issues. The equally steadfast member for Melton raised a matter for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and that was to update him on the fair fuel taskforce and the impacts on growth areas like Melton. I will raise that with the Minister for Consumer Affairs. The equally florid member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport in relation to train service bookings in her electorate. The equally hardworking member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it was about investment in renewable energy and how the government's investment in renewables has helped people in her electorate. The overwrought member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Premier, and the matter was about visiting her electorate of Warrandyte. The passionate member for Wendouree raised a matter for the minister for energy, and that was about how the power saving bonus of this government has helped her electorate and her community – and that ends this evening, member for Wendouree. The exaggerated member for Polwarth raised a matter for the minister for public transport, and that was about extra carriages on the Warrnambool line in his electorate. The excellent member for Laverton I have already addressed. I will raise all the rest of the matters with the relevant ministers.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister knows that it is not appropriate to make derogatory remarks about a member of Parliament, and I think he should withdraw what he said about the member for Warrandyte being overwrought. I think that is extremely insulting to a woman.

The SPEAKER: It is for the member for Warrandyte to make that request. The house will now be adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:28 pm.