Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 5 March 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

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Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

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Ben Carroll (from 28 July 2026)

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023 to 28 July 2026)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Gabrielle Williams (from 28 July 2026)

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Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

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

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Andrews, Daniel[1]	Mulgrave	ALP	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marsh, Anthony[9]	Nepean	Lib
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren[2]	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim[10]	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim[11]	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan[12]	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden[3]	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will[4]	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam[5]	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam[6, 7]	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole[13]	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel[14]	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib
Lister, John[8]	Werribee	ALP			

[1] Resigned 27 September 2023
[2] ALP until 29 April 2024
[3] Sworn in 6 February 2024
[4] ALP until 5 August 2023
[5] Resigned 13 February 2026
[6] Greens until 1 November 2024
[7] Resigned 23 November 2024
[8] Sworn in 4 March 2025
[9] Sworn in 2 June 2026
[10] Resigned 6 January 2025
[11] Died 19 September 2026
[12] Resigned 7 July 2023
[13] Sworn in 3 October 2023
[14] Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

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

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Thursday 5 March 2026

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Bills

Integrity of Government Construction Projects Bill 2026

Introduction

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:35): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to ensure the integrity of government construction projects, to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and for other purposes.

This week the coalition has released its plan to clean up Victorian government worksites. We have seen each day the coalition seek to move a private members bill in this place to clean up Victorian government worksites, and every single day every Labor member of this place has voted against it. Today we move the third element of our plan of private members bills to seek to clean up government worksites. What this plan will do is make sure today in this bill that those who have been convicted of or found guilty of or are subject to pending charges for specified serious offences, including organised crime, fraud, intimidation, harassment and certain industrial offences, will not be on Victorian government worksites, because we know that criminals are. We have seen expert evidence confirm that activity on Victorian government worksites has been akin to organised crime – organised crime on our government worksites. What this bill will do is to say that criminals will not be on government worksites.

I would expect and suspect that every Victorian already thinks that is the case. I would think that most Victorians would say, 'Well, why aren't our government worksites clean? Why aren't they?' That is why we have all been so, frankly, shocked by what is clearly the biggest instance of corruption our state has ever been struck by, under the watch of this government – $15 billion of corrupted taxpayer money – which is why the coalition has said we need a royal commission and we need a royal commission now. We need to get to the bottom of where every dollar has gone, and we need to get it back. But more than that, this week the coalition have announced our plan to go further than simply holding a royal commission to get to the bottom of where the money has gone. Our plan will clean up government worksites. Earlier this week, absolutely shockingly, when we attempted to expand IBAC's powers every Labor member voted against it. Shame. We have seen the members in the Council and members in this place from the Labor Party vote against powers that our chief anti-corruption agency has asked for and that we have tried to give it as a coalition.

Yesterday the member for Sandringham moved the second plank in our plan to ensure that we have a construction code and enforcement of that code. How could it be that Labor members voted against our anti-corruption agency having those powers and then against having a cop on the beat, frankly, in terms of oversight of construction sites? Today we are seeking to move to ensure that certain criminals are not on government worksites – criminals. I cannot believe I have to say it. I hope with this speech, this attempt to convince the government, that we will see them today come to their senses, because if they vote against this they are saying, 'We want criminals on government worksites.' That is what they are saying. If the government do not vote to allow this bill, they are saying, 'We want criminals on government worksites. We still want them there.'

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate, the introduction of a bill. I ask that you ask the member on his feet to come back to the narrow procedural motion.

The SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. Before I call the next member I remind members – member for Sandringham – that party-political material is not allowed in the chamber.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:40): Let me put to bed any suggestion that the way we vote on this procedural motion in any way puts forward our position on criminality or otherwise. We know that criminality on any worksite undermines every Victorian worker, and we would urge anyone who has any knowledge of any illegality to report it to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. Furthermore, I would say that the government has taken decisive action. Through Operation Hawk there have already been 70 criminal charges laid. The Labour Hire Authority has cancelled 147 licences.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, I am loath to interrupt the member for Albert Park, but for the benefit of members in the chamber –

The SPEAKER: Member for Ringwood, what is your point of order?

Will Fowles: I would like some clarification around what you just said about the bringing of political material into the chamber. I think the possession of party-political material –

The SPEAKER: If the member for Ringwood would like to raise this matter after I leave the chair, I am happy to discuss it in my chambers.

Nina TAYLOR: The construction complaints referral service is operational and the culture on worksites is improving. But I will come back to the premise under which we are debating today, and that is that this is strictly a procedural motion. There is much to be discussed in the chamber today, not least on free TAFE. I can understand why those opposite would not necessarily want to speak to that matter today, but it is important to Victorians because it offers positive pathways into work and opportunities to fulfil all their talents in Victorian workplaces.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:42): I am pleased to rise to support the Manager of Opposition Business on the introduction of the Integrity of Government Construction Projects Bill 2026, and this should not come as any surprise to government members. This is a position that the opposition has had for a number of years now – that we need to ensure that we get crooks off government-funded construction sites. If there is any doubt about why that is important, it should have been laid to rest after the release of the Watson report a couple of weeks ago. It should have been laid to rest by the 'Building bad' reports by the *Age*, *60 Minutes* and Channel 9 over the last couple of years. All of these things have been raised repeatedly, highlighting that the Victorian government Big Build projects have been swamped by crooks, criminals and bikies. This is something that should be understood by the Labor government. I hear government members, government ministers, saying, 'This is a matter for government. We can't be doing private members bills. It's government business.' This is the Parliament of the people of Victoria. The people of Victoria have elected all 88 of us to represent their interests, and the Parliament should be considering legislation like this at a time when we have seen $15 billion of Victorians' taxpayer money go missing because the government was asleep at the wheel and allowed the CFMEU to bring on bikies and criminals and gangs.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the member on his feet is required to be factual, and in fact he is making speculative comments. I ask that you ask him to be factual.

The SPEAKER: It is a requirement that all members be factual. I am sure members are already responding to the spirit of standing order 58.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is extraordinary that the government on the one hand are saying 'We're doing this, we're acting, we're responding' and on the other hand are saying that all the allegations that we are raising are unfactual. Which is it, government members? Do they accept that there is corruption happening on government worksites or not? The evidence has been pretty clear for a number of years now. That is what this legislation is about. This is the third piece of legislation we have moved this week to try and clean up Victoria. We have moved this week to try and give IBAC the powers that it wants, the follow-the-dollar powers, to go beyond government agencies and into the private sector and to third parties to ensure that we can follow the dollar. What did Labor do? They opposed that. Yesterday we brought in the legislation for Construction Enforcement Victoria. We committed to that

two years ago and to bringing back the code of practice. If you are going to have a code of practice in the building and construction industry, you need to have a watchdog to enforce that. That is what that legislation was about. Government once again opposed it. Here today is now the third tranche of legislation which we think is needed to ensure that we are delivering on the concerns of Victorians when it comes to the Big Build project and to ensure that we do not have crooks, bikies and criminal bosses working on and benefiting from government contracts on government projects. We have seen –

Jess Wilson interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is not a lot to ask, Leader of the Opposition. I would have thought it would be fairly straightforward. I would have thought that perhaps the people of Victoria are pretty keen to see us actually get to the bottom of where this $15 billion has gone and who has been responsible for siphoning it off to criminals and bikies, and yet we have got the government members not interested. They are not interested in doing this. They say, 'Oh, we fixed all that.' We have got the Premier who says, 'I wrote a letter to IBAC and said they should investigate this – job done.' IBAC wrote back and said, 'I'm sorry, Premier. We can't; you haven't given us the powers to do so.' What does the government do? When we moved this week to give IBAC those powers, the government opposed them, and yet we are told Victorians are meant to believe that this government is serious about cracking down on corruption on Big Build building projects. It is just an extraordinary situation that the Labor government is not prepared to act on these issues. We hear government ministers say, 'This is the government's time. The opposition should sit down.' This is the Parliament of Victoria doing the job that the Labor government refuses to do. The Labor government is refusing to act on the $15 billion of corruption, the $15 billion to criminals on worksites and the state-sponsored strippers and the action by people to try and coerce businesses. This legislation is critical. We should be debating it today to ensure that government worksites are clean. We know we want to clean up Victoria. It seems the Labor government wants to keep covering it up.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:47): I rise to make a contribution on this procedural debate. I have to say, just when you think those opposite could not be bothered to turn up to their own circus, they are all sitting here today to talk about the introduction of a private members bill when yesterday they had the opportunity, with the member for Caulfield, to talk about a matter of public importance on exactly this same thing and none of them turned up, not even the Leader of the Opposition, to talk about this. This is how disinterested, fake and confected the outrage from those opposite actually is.

Matthew Guy interjected.

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

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

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

The SPEAKER: The member for Laverton to speak to the procedural debate, please.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Well, there is the fall guy pulling out another stunt to protect those opposite from the ridiculous confected outrage –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I am deeply distressed that the allegation was put on you – deeply distressed.

The SPEAKER: Thank you for your distress on my behalf.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Do not worry, Speaker. It is only confected and fake – imaginary – by those opposite.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Laverton will speak to the motion before the house.

Sarah CONNOLLY: The introduction of this private members bill and this procedural debate here before the house is just another example of why those opposite deserve to sit on that side of the chamber. You had the opportunity yesterday, every single one of you.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is now continual in terms of the behaviour of the member. On relevance, I would say the member has strayed so far they are not making a contribution that the house actually needs.

The SPEAKER: I have ruled on this matter. Member for Laverton, if you cannot speak to the procedural debate, I will sit you down.

Sarah CONNOLLY: The procedural debate is absolutely ridiculous. We should be getting on and debating the government business program for the day, which is determined by this side of the house because we are in government. The bills before the house that are being debated by this side of the house today are exactly what the Victorian public want us to bring to this place as part of our legislative reform agenda, and I will not waste the house's time any further.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting when members are on their feet. It is very disrespectful. We are all wearing ribbons this week for a reason.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:50): I note the comment there that procedural debates are ridiculous. This comes from a government that wants to be a dictator rather than listening to the entire community, because these procedural debates are about putting legislation onto the government business program. As the member for Gippsland South has said, it is so important that every person in here, all 88, has a voice. The reality is what we are trying to put on the government business program today is a bill, the Integrity of Government Construction Projects Bill 2026. Why is it important? Why is it important that it is on the business program? We talk about the $15 billion that has been lost; that is something that is essential. We talk about the corruption that has happened here in Victoria. We talk about the Watson report. You would think that Labor might want to back this for one reason: because everybody deserves, and should have, a safe workplace. The more corruption and coercion and violence we have on our worksites, the more that the tradies who go to work cannot feel safe.

Members interjecting.

Brad BATTIN: I note that they are trying to yell me down as I stand up for the tradies, because, guess what, it is the tradies that are contacting us that are sick and tired of this on their worksites. I note, as I said, dictators love to yell down, and they yell – it is like being out in the street at a protest when you see a lot of those lefties in your face and they are just yelling and yelling with nothing to say. It is kind of sounds like the manager of government business there – just having a go right in your face. But the reality is they have nothing to say because they do not believe what they are saying. They just do not believe it, because the reality is at the moment in Victoria we need to clean up construction across the whole state.

We need to clean up the corruption that has happened under Labor for the last 10 years, because the current Premier, who was minister, has overseen this and ignored the issues for far too long. If the government will not do it, we will. We will clean up Victoria. The member for Pakenham would know because the member for Pakenham has had emails sent to her, as well as the minister and the Premier, from organisations, particularly a company in Officer which lost $21 million because of corruption in this state. They had to sack every single staff member in their business. A company that had received awards for engineering in this state went broke; they went under. Why? Because the corruption that was seen was ignored by this government and it destroyed the soul of that business.

I have sat with the owners of that business. I have sat with them and seen exactly what happened when union thugs came onto the sites. They imposed provisional improvement notices and stop-work meetings because someone was sitting on the wheel of their tractor. You know who was sitting on the

wheel? It was the union rep who was writing up the PIN to close down that site because they would not deal with Mick Gatto; it is as simple as that. They would not pay $300,000 to Gatto's organisation to ensure that they were protected. These allegations, the minister might say, were referred. They were referred, and the minister at the time came into this place and defended it and said, 'There's nothing to see here.' That is why you need to have this legislation in place. You need to have IBAC with the powers to investigate ministers who ignore it and who effectively oversee corruption in this state.

The Premier of this state is the reason that this corruption has increased to the level it has today; it is as simple as that. This Premier was the minister who ignored the calls from too many: from Indigenous organisations, from businesses across the state, from tradies who want to have a safe workplace, from businesses who continually get hounded and pushed aside and from journalists, including Nick McKenzie who has gone out there and found more evidence and yet was totally ignored. Let me assure you the reason that this is more important than ever is because under a Wilson government we will ensure that this legislation is introduced, that the money can be followed and that any person who is involved in corruption – I do not care what level, I do not care what their colours in politics – will be caught and will be dealt with. Because the reality is when you continue to let it go down the path that it is today, not only do the crooks benefit from this but the trades miss out on opportunities and Victorians miss out on funding for things like schools, roads, extra police, nurses, hospitals and education – all of these things miss out. When you have an incompetent government, that is one thing, but when you have a government that ignores corruption, it is time to change that government and fix the problem once and for all.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:55): I rise to make a brief contribution opposing the procedural motion by the member for Brighton. I will oppose it for similar reasons that I and other government members put forward on Tuesday when he moved a very similar motion. As we made clear then, these are important issues, there are proper ways to address them and this is not such a way. Perhaps while I am on my feet I will also repeat a point that I made on Tuesday, which is that there are also proper ways to do quantitative analysis. There is a stat – I think the member for Murray Plains used it most recently – that 47 per cent of the cost of a house in this state is taxes, and it is the most ridiculous statistic you have ever heard if you know anything about housing or taxes. But I feel this $15 billion figure that gets thrown around now has trumped that for having absolutely no substantial analytic basis. I oppose the procedural motion by the member for Brighton.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (30): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

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

Motion defeated.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Notice given.

The SPEAKER (10:02): General business, notices of motion 4 and 12 and order of the day 10, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Petitions

Container deposit scheme

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) presented a petition bearing 2518 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the closure of the Over-the-Counter Container Deposit Scheme depot by Visy at Little Yarra Free Range Eggs in Launching Place. The petitioners are passionate about the program being returned to Little Yarra Free Range Eggs in Launching Place. The depot was easily accessible, minimised disruption to nearby businesses and residents, offered safe access for collection trucks, kept the town clean and benefited community clubs and organisations with fundraising efforts.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly provide Return-It Vic (Network Operator for the East Zone) with an exemption to operate outside of their network zone to manage the CDS depot at Yarra Free Range Eggs.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005 – Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Scheme – Report 2024–25.

Motions

Motions by leave

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:03): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for allowing the exploitation of women on Big Build projects where strippers were hired to perform for workers and $15 billion of taxpayer money was used to line the pockets of bikies and criminals.

Leave refused.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:03): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the member for Bulleen's remarks referring to Victorian Electoral Commission staff as sewer rats and calls on the Leader of the Opposition to confirm whether these comments reflect the culture and views of the Liberal Party she leads.

Leave refused.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (10:04): I move, by leave:

This house notes that Victoria is the only remaining jurisdiction in Australia where voters cannot number their preferences when voting above the line and that this blight on our democracy is a relic which should go.

Leave refused.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:04): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that at a time when extremist rhetoric is on the rise Victorians deserve an opposition leader who will unequivocally condemn One Nation's comments. Rather than hedge her position for electoral advantage, she needs to call out One Nation.

Leave refused.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:04): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Melton for failing to clean up corruption on Big Build sites, costing Victorians $15 billion that could have been delivered through key infrastructure to support population growth in the Melton electorate.

Leave refused.

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:05): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the member for Bulleen's offensive remarks towards Victorian Electoral Commission staff and calls on the Leader of the Opposition to explain why she has failed to condemn the comments, raising serious questions about her ability to maintain standards within her own caucus.

Leave refused.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (10:05): I move, by leave:

That the house condemns the member for Ashwood for failing to clean up corruption on Big Build sites, costing Victorians $15 billion that could have been delivering police officers to staff the Mount Waverley police station in the Ashwood electorate.

Leave refused.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (10:06): I move, by leave:

That this house notes Victorian Liberal MPs voted against censuring Pauline Hanson and her racist and offensive 'no good Muslim' remarks, and I condemn the Leader of the Opposition for refusing to unequivocally condemn those comments, raising the question of whether her silence reflects convenience or quiet agreement.

Leave refused.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (10:06): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Frankston for failing to clean up corruption on Big Build sites, costing Victorians $15 billion that could have been delivering social housing in the Frankston electorate.

Leave refused.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:06): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to publicly condemn One Nation's extremist statements and make clear that there is no place for racism, division or fear-based politics in Victoria.

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:07): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bass for failing to clean up corruption on Big Build sites, costing Victorians $15 billion that could have been delivering the next stage of the Wonthaggi Hospital in the Bass electorate.

Leave refused.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:07): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bulleen for his unacceptable attack on independent Victorian Electoral Commission staff when he called them sewer rats and calls on him to issue an unreserved apology.

Leave refused.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:07): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Werribee for failing to clean up corruption on the Big Build sites, costing Victorians $15 billion that could have been delivering more police on the beat in the Werribee electorate.

Leave refused.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (10:08): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Victorian Liberal Party has joined One Nation in opposing work from home, demonstrating just how far the opposition has drifted from the needs of everyday Victorians and that they are more interested in culture wars than supporting working families.

Leave refused.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:08): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Eureka for failing to clean up corruption on Big Build sites, costing Victorians $15 billion that could have been spent upgrading and repairing the Colac-Ballarat Road in the Eureka electorate.

Leave refused.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (10:08): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the opposition for directing abusive language towards Victorian Electoral Commission staff, recognising that all public servants deserve respect, not insults or abuse, especially by elected members of Parliament who serve our community.

Leave refused.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (10:09): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Ripon for failing to clean up corruption on Big Build sites, costing Victorians $15 billion that could have been used on delivering roads without potholes in the Ripon electorate.

Leave refused.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:09): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the continued failure of the Leader of the Opposition to clearly and unequivocally condemn the extremist and divisive views repeatedly expressed by One Nation and calls on her to stand up for Victoria's multicultural communities, just like mine in the electorate of Mulgrave.

Leave refused.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (10:10): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Albert Park for jeopardising the safety of women by presiding over a system in which state-sponsored strippers were exposed to thuggish, violent and corrupt behaviour on Big Build sites.

Leave refused.

David HODGETT (Croydon) (10:10): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bayswater for failing to clean up corruption on Big Build sites, costing Victorians $15 billion that could have been used delivering repairs to roads in the Bayswater electorate.

Leave refused.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:10): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Sydenham for jeopardising the safety of women by presiding over a system in which state-sponsored strippers were exposed to thuggish, violent and corrupt behaviour on Big Build sites.

Leave refused.

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:11): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Mulgrave for failing to clean up corruption on Big Build sites, costing Victorians $15 billion that could have been delivering upgrades to Wellington Road in the Mulgrave electorate.

Leave refused.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:11): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Eltham for failing to stand up for women by refusing to call out appalling behaviours on Victorian government construction sites, which have seen women bashed, abused and locked in rooms.

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:11): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Women for failing to stand up for women by refusing to call out appalling behaviours on Victorian government construction sites, which have seen women bashed, abused, locked up and used as strippers on Victoria's Big Build sites.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:11): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Laverton for stating that community anger at about $15 billion in CFMEU corruption is just confected outrage, and she should apologise to the community for her statement.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK: I move, by leave:

That this house:

(1) stands with the people of Iran and hopes that this moment is the beginning of a new era of freedom; and

(2) condemns the sick and twisted decision of those who celebrate a brutal dictator whose regime imprisoned, tortured and oppressed the Iranian people for decades.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:12): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the friendless Premier appears to have purchased another 30,000 social media friends from a bot farm overnight, after apparently purchasing 53,000 friends earlier this week.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY: I move, by leave:

> That this house notes the Leader of the House sends her colleagues to speak on procedural motions rather than herself.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Adjournment

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (10:13): I move:

> That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 17 March 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Rotary Club of Essendon North

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:13): I rise to mark the 50th anniversary of the Rotary Club of Essendon North, a significant milestone that reflects five decades of practical, sustained service to our local community. It was wonderful to celebrate at Essendon Fields sitting alongside local legends like Alan Murphy, Denis Kosnar, John Boundy and Max Nichols, people who have so many decades of experience. I really do appreciate all of their work. Five decades is something to really celebrate, and that is what we did. 'Service above self' is not just a slogan but something that Rotary really does. Under president David Mott's leadership, the club continues to bring together local people committed to giving back, people who generously contribute their professional skills, their time and their experience to deliver meaningful outcomes.

While proudly local, the club is part of the broader Rotary International network. This global connection of local clubs contributes to initiatives well beyond our local suburbs, including the global effort to eradicate polio. It is a powerful reminder that local action can have global impact. Today we celebrate Essendon North. For half a century the club has invested directly in our local community, supporting youth development, funding grassroots initiatives, contributing to local causes and fostering fellowship among residents. I do want to pay special tribute to Sam Pennisi, John Boundy and Max Nichols, who have been part of the Rotary Club for 50 years. Five decades of voluntary contribution is simply extraordinary. Congratulations Essendon North Rotary on 50 years. Here's to 50 more to come.

Kew East Primary School

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (10:15): I was delighted to visit Kew East Primary School recently to present leadership badges to this year's student leaders. It was so inspiring to see so many of the enthusiastic students stepping up to represent their peers and take on leadership roles in their school community. Can I particularly congratulate the school leaders Molly, Grace, Tom and Ayrton and all the badge recipients. I wish them every success throughout the year, and I know they will do a great job in leading Kew East Primary School.

Lunar New Year

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (10:15): Our vibrant multicultural community was on full display for the 2026 Lunar New Year celebration hosted by Kew Home of Chinese and Australian Vietnamese Association Boroondara. These celebrations were a joyful showcase of culture, tradition and community spirit, with very colourful performances and families coming together to welcome the new year. I always love the cultural dancing and the song at these celebrations. Can I say

a big thankyou to Hinkay and her dedicated team at Kew Home of Chinese and to Hahn Tran and the AVA team for their work in organising these celebrations.

Balwyn Saints and Blasters Cricket Club

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (10:16): Can I also congratulate the Balwyn Saints and Blasters for hosting their recent Pink Stumps Day. This is a fantastic local event that raises very valuable funds for the McGrath Foundation, and the women's first XI do a terrific job. It is wonderful to see this team playing throughout the year – and a particular shout-out to Kate Maher and the entire team for their dedication and for growing women's cricket in the electorate.

Romsey skate park

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (10:16): Romsey, your skate park is here. On Sunday I joined around 2000 locals and visitors alike for a massive opening celebration. What a great day, watching kids of all ages skating, rolling, riding and scootering and having massive amounts of fun. It was also a celebration of community spirit. The skate park had its genesis at the Lancefield Romsey Lions Club, and while I want to thank all Lions, with their philosophy of just getting on with it, I want to particularly acknowledge Ged McLaughlin. Quite simply, without Ged we would not have a skate park. When Ged and his wife Wendie approached me with their idea, I wanted to do everything I could to help realise the dream, and with a $950,000 grant from the Allan Labor government, we were able to help the Lions bring to life their vision for a modern, inclusive space where young people can have fun and connect safely in their own community.

I also acknowledge the Lancefield Romsey Lions Club for its more than $166,000 contribution, and of course the skate park was designed and built by locals. A shout-out to Baseplate, Grind Projects and Newearth Constructions as well as Creative Sparks and the Romsey Lancefield community bank and of course all the kids who helped to design the park and the murals and ensure that it is a place that truly belongs to them. This new skate park is more than just infrastructure; it is an investment in young people.

Electricity infrastructure

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:18): I want to remind the Allan Labor government that agriculture should be a priority in our regional communities and should be central when decisions are made that affect our communities. Prime agricultural land is hard to come by, particularly when it is located within a high rainfall catchment. We must stop the continued push to force renewable energy projects onto local communities like Meadow Creek near Wangaratta. It is unacceptable behaviour. The Liberal–Nationals in government will give farmers back their rights to allow a fair process when planning considerations are made.

Firearms regulation

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:18): I wish to go on record prior to the release of the rapid review firearms report and remind us all that it is important that Victorians understand that recreational shooting is a legitimate sport and pastime, and there should be no confusion between those who use guns as legal firearms and sporting shooting, duck hunting or any other form of recreational shooting. The number of guns that licensed gun holders require can add up to 12 to 15 very easily if you compete in various types of shooting, and added to that is the fact that many shooters have a family heirloom that sits in their gun cupboard and is rarely used. If there is a reduction in the numbers of guns allowed, it is fair to say the small-bore pea rifles, air rifles et cetera will all be the first thing to go, rather than the large-bore rifles. We must never forget that guns do not kill people; it is people that kill people, and we should not confuse the amount of legal firearms one can have with enforcing the law on illegal guns and guns used for criminal activity.

Victoria Police

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:19): Last week I attended the annual Victoria Police neighbourhood policing forum in South Morang titled Our Community, Your Safety, Our Priority. The forum was hosted by a Victoria Police panel of senior-ranked members who addressed the results of their fourth annual Victoria Police community sentiment survey. The panel was comprised of senior members including the commander and Assistant Commissioner Brett Curran, divisional commander Superintendent Kelly Lawson and local area commander Assistant Acting Inspector Matthew Wheeler. It was an excellent opportunity for community members to have their questions answered and to see what action is being taken to address them.

I attended to listen to community concerns. It is through listening to the concerns of our community that the Allan Labor government is taking strong action to tackle violent crime, especially by young people. As we know, the Labor government's adult time for violent crime laws took effect from last Friday, which will ensure that youth offenders face serious consequences for violent crimes. It is these actions and the important bail reforms our government implemented last year, the police operation to put PSOs in shopping centres being extended now and the violence reduction unit which are helping to make communities safer. This is all backed by the biggest police force in the country. I want to thank all members of Victoria Police for the work that they put into our community, for keeping everybody safe. We will continue to back our police and to support the communities that they serve so faithfully and so unreservedly.

Carrum electorate student leaders

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:21): Congratulations to the 2026 college captains at Carrum Downs Secondary College: Abigail Wardell, Alexa Caneta, Madison Burridge and Ezra Morris. Congratulations to the 2026 college captains at Patterson River Secondary College: Keira Light, Donovan Batey, Olivia Doherty and Annie Murphy. And congratulations to the 2026 college captains at Flinders Christian Community College, Carrum Downs campus, Eden and Harry, and vice-captains Esther and Jesse. We are so proud of you and wish you every success in 2026.

Bonbeach Life Saving Club

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:21): Bonbeach Life Saving Club is doing incredible work through its CALD water safety program. The program is led by Ramzi Hussaini, who fled Afghanistan many years ago. Ramzi volunteers his time to support so many young people from Victoria's diverse and multifaith communities to build confidence and skills in the water. Even better, he supports many of these young people to go on to gain their accreditation and become lifesavers themselves. It was great to meet many of them at the club last weekend – a fantastic example of community leadership in action. Thank you to club president Dawn Walterfang, patrol manager Tara Hocking and treasurer Thomas Landstra.

Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Carrum flotilla

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:22): Thank you to absolutely everyone who came out in record numbers to support our Coast Guard Carrum VF07 at their 10th annual fun run around Patterson River on 22 February – a huge shout-out to the flotilla.

Ringwood-Warrandyte Road, Warrandyte, pedestrian safety

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:22): Locals who send their children to Warrandyte Childcare and Preschool Centre have raised with me the issue of the unsafe crossing on Ringwood-Warrandyte Road. Last week I visited the centre during peak hour to see the issue for myself. It is a 70-kilometre-per-hour zone in Warrandyte. Every single day families take their lives into their own hands just to drop off and pick up their children. On the day, I witnessed that myself. There were families who

create a bike bus to get their kids on their bikes to be able to drop their kids to school. It is their bit that they are doing for the environment, where they are hopping on their bikes or choosing to walk. It is on this busy stretch of road, where you have got cars coming in and out, you have got two bus stops dropping off kids as well and you have got this heart-stopping moment where families have to run across the road with prams, with toddlers, with kids, with kids on bikes to be able to just get through the way. There have been far too many near misses that I have heard about from concerned parents, and I call on the government to urgently act before tragedy strikes. We need a safe crossing solution at this centre, and we need it urgently.

Warrandyte electorate events

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:23): I also want to just shout out the many vibrant community events that are happening at this time of year. We have got the Warrandyte market, the Park Orchards Market, St Anne's Strawberry Fair, Run Warrandyte, Doncaster Rovers family fun day, Manningham Chinese senior citizens, East Doncaster ladies lunch, Beverley Hills family day, Park Orchards Cricket Club and the Pink Ladies.

David Hutchison

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (10:24): I rise to remember the life of David Hutchison. I first got to know David in the lead-up to my first election campaign, and he quickly became a trusted adviser to me. I learned very early on that when David had a point to make you listened and you listened carefully. David was a civil engineer by trade and an incredibly talented and inquisitive man. An expert in the water sector, he won the Gascoigne medal for a paper he co-authored while at Melbourne Water. His thinking covered issues such as using biogas from wastewater, new forms of fish farming and seaweed farms in the bay – ideas which were, quite frankly, radical in the 1980s and 90s. He was also a great advocate for social justice, especially education funding and the implementation of phonics into the curriculum. Many a friend and family member would be drawn into discussions about how to create a fairer system for all. David loved hiking and the great outdoors, and his son James spoke of spending a wonderful childhood filled with beach swimming, surfing, looking through rockpools and hitching the trailer to go scouting for treasure in hard rubbish collections.

David was diagnosed with glioblastoma in July of last year, a devastating, aggressive brain cancer diagnosis for which there is currently no cure. When one of his treating doctors asked him how he felt, he sat quietly before answering, 'Well, I now know how the soldiers must have felt in the trenches, bayonet in hand, about to charge over the top into the machine-gun fire.' That was David. He did not mince his words. Kate believes that when David spoke of the trenches, it was not solely about the fear of what was to come but more about the courage and bravery he showed throughout his fight. David met his battle head-on with honesty and determination. In those final months my time with David was great. Vale, David Hutchison.

Vocational education and training

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (10:25): I speak in absolute frustration at the Victorian government's reckless and short-sighted cuts to apprenticeship and traineeship incentives and the devastating impact they will have on organisations in my electorate such as Swan Hill's Murray Mallee Training. Let us be clear, this is not merely a budget adjustment. This government has chosen to pick winners and losers in our training system. By prioritising which apprenticeships receive funding, it is actively stripping support from critical regional communities, including in horticulture and agriculture, the very sectors which sustain communities across the Mallee. Murray Mallee Training's group training model exists because small regional businesses cannot carry the financial and administrative burden of employing apprentices alone. It spreads risk, provides mentoring, keeps young people in work and gives students career path options. Yet the government has cut the very incentive which makes this model viable, undermining one of the most effective pathways into skilled employment in north-west Victoria. In Swan Hill and across the Murray Mallee, horticulture and

agriculture are not optional extras, they are economic pillars. These industries rely on skilled workers and rely on structured traineeships, and now because of arbitrary funding priorities set in Melbourne, those pathways are being choked off. Small family-run enterprises are being told their industries are somehow less worthy of support. Young people are being told their chosen trade or traineeship does not fit the government's preferred list. That is not workplace planning, it is bureaucratic interference at its worst and truly disrespectful to regional communities.

Dandenong Ramadan night market

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:27): I rise today to update the house on the Ramadan night market that is currently underway in Dandenong. Following the incredible success of last year's inaugural event, this year it has returned bigger and better with hundreds of metres of stalls, and an extended period of time is even stretching for a couple of nights into Casey as well. It has already drawn tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of people to the south-east – not just locals but people from right across Victoria. On that note, it was great to have the Premier come down and visit the market on Saturday night to experience all it has to offer and the great community connection that it represents. The Ramadan night market is delivered by the Bright Community Organisation, led by Ahmad Ghowsi, and it is built on strong local partnerships and the tireless work of volunteers, sponsors, largely local businesses and community leaders. It obviously takes place during the holy month of Ramadan, and it is designed to draw in people from all backgrounds, to encourage connection, to encourage a sense of community and of course to have people sharing their traditions, faith and knowledge as well. I am very proud to be part of a government that backs events like these. We were able to share on Saturday that we have supported the market with a $50,000 grant. At a time when some seek to stoke division, events like the Ramadan night market are the ultimate antidote to hate, creating spaces where understanding grows.

Alamein, Belgrave and Lilydale rail lines

David HODGETT (Croydon) (10:28): I rise to address the scheduled maintenance works on the Belgrave, Lilydale and Alamein train lines, which will see buses replacing trains across the Labour Day long weekend during one of the busiest periods on Melbourne's events calendar. A local commuter raised this issue with me last week. Then the matter surfaced on the 3AW 'Rumour file' on Tuesday morning, and unlike some in this place, I do listen to the 'Rumour file'. It was then reported in the *Herald Sun* on Wednesday, and I have been waiting patiently to raise it in the house today. From Friday 6 March to last service on Sunday 8 March, trains will be replaced by buses between Parliament and Box Hill on the Belgrave and Lilydale lines and between Camberwell and Alamein on the Alamein line.

This weekend will see hundreds of thousands of people travelling to the Australian Grand Prix, including international visitors; the Moomba festival, with its fireworks; the opening round of the AFL at the MCG between Collingwood and St Kilda; concerts at Rod Laver Arena; and the usual theatre and entertainment offerings that make Melbourne a global event city. While maintenance is necessary, it is difficult to understand how anyone could consider this weekend an appropriate time for such significant disruptions, with commuters facing delays, confusion and overcrowding on replacement buses. The decision reflects poor planning and a lack of regard for the needs of the travelling public. Public transport is critical to the success of these events, and Melbourne deserves better than avoidable disruptions on a weekend when our city is on the world stage.

Rosanna Library

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:30): I was pleased to have the Minister for Local Government in Rosanna just the other week to open our new Rosanna Library, with a $1.5 million contribution from the Allan Labor government and some $15 million from Banyule City Council. I remember the old Rosanna Library of course and studying there in my high school days and then being able to take

our daughter there, as her grandparents did, for story time. It is a great location there opposite the new Rosanna station, which has seen the boom gates removed. Work has been done and thousands of people have visited; thousands of people have borrowed items already at the new Rosanna Library. It has a partnership too with the local supermarket, and we have seen that redeveloped as well alongside the new library – a real partnership project for Rosanna Library. I want to thank our librarians; they do an amazing job to support the community.

Libraries are free. Libraries provide a safe space for people to come together to enjoy their time in the community. They support families and they are great places for young people to study, for older people to come and connect and for families to have some time out during story time. Particularly with the $1.5 million contribution from our government, it was a fantastic opening over three levels with just fantastic technology. They did not have podcast rooms at libraries when I was spending a lot more time in them than I do today, but this is a 21st-century library that caters for future generations of Rosanna residents.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

Tim READ (Brunswick) (10:31): It was great to see the press release from the Premier and the Minister for Education this week about their efforts to open up government schools after hours. They just forgot to acknowledge that VicHealth, Victoria's only health promotion foundation, which Labor are abolishing, pioneered this policy. It might not be obvious that opening school gates after hours is health promotion, but helping people to enjoy safe and accessible spaces to move and connect is a big part of health promotion. Several years ago VicHealth spoke with schools, children and communities and studied the health, wellbeing and other community benefits that flow when government schools share sports fields, outdoor courts and playgrounds. VicHealth's groundwork contributed to Infrastructure Victoria's research, which led to the Victorian government's pilot. They published a resource giving tips to schools, *Opening the Gate*. Forging new ways to make it easier for people to enjoy healthy lives has always been part of VicHealth's DNA. In the 1980s VicHealth pioneered the walking school bus, and in the 2020s they championed the vision that public schools should be more than places of learning, they should be community backyards where children and families can thrive. VicHealth helped make that a reality. Wouldn't it be a shame if such a visionary institution with a knack for innovation and productive collaborations was dismantled?

Active Lifestyle, Oakleigh

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:33): Rachel King and Chris Matthews are the owners of Active Lifestyle in Oakleigh. I would like to thank them and acknowledge the extraordinary generosity of Active Lifestyle, its members and the wider community. In early January they organised a community donation drive to support the Sikh Volunteers to provide free meals to people in crisis during bushfires and other emergencies. The response was overwhelming. A week later, as firefighters were battling devastating Longwood fires, Rachel, Chris and the gym community responded again. They gathered snacks and drinks and prepared over 600 individual goodie bags for the CFA firefighters and volunteers. Thank you so much for the extraordinary work you do.

George Haitidis ESM

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:33): George Haitidis is the unit controller of the VICSES Monash unit, and he was awarded an Emergency Services Medal in the emergency services category. George joined the VICSES in 2005, and by 2008 he was made section leader. He is extraordinary, as we know; he has been in that position for 18 years and he leads a dedicated team of extraordinary people. I want to congratulate George for that honour.

Jennifer Gray

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:34): Finally, I would like to acknowledge the remarkable contribution of Dr Jenny Gray, who is retiring after many years of extraordinary leadership as CEO at Zoos Victoria. For nearly two decades Dr Jenny Gray has been a passionate and tireless advocate for wildlife conservation. Under her leadership Zoos Victoria has become a global leader in protecting endangered species, restoring habitats and inspiring millions of visitors to come to our zoos. She is an extraordinary asset to this state, and we will miss her.

International Women's Day

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:34): I rise for a number of reasons. Firstly, I acknowledge on International Women's Day the incredibly generous contributions of so many women in my community – in Sandringham, Beaumaris, Black Rock, Highett, Hampton, Mentone and Cheltenham throughout sporting clubs, throughout churches, throughout community groups and throughout life saving clubs. Women – mothers, grandparents, aunties – undertake work in our local schools to care for our children and to spend time with them. I want to thank them for the generous way in which they contribute to our community and to acknowledge that without that generosity our community would be far worse off.

Stella Maris Primary School

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:35): I would like to welcome Simon Millar, who is the new principal at Stella Maris Primary School in Beaumaris, a primary school which I went to a number of years ago; I am not sharing how many years ago. Stella Maris Primary School is a magnificent primary school – it is a magnificent community – and I am sure Mr Millar will take Stella Maris Primary School from strength to strength.

Hampton Pier

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:35): Finally, the Hampton Pier is open. The new Hampton Pier is open after peer pressure was applied on this government. It was closed in 2020 without warning. Four thousand signatures later and this government did the right thing, with a bit of pressure on behalf of the community. It is a great thing. Go check it out.

Kalkallo electorate cultural events

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:36): In recent weeks our community has enjoyed a remarkable succession of cultural and religious observances, each adding depth and colour to the character of our region. What consistently stands out is the way these occasions become shared experiences. Whether in our parks or community halls, people come together with openness and warmth, creating connections that extend far beyond any single event. A wonderful example of this was the colourful Holi celebration hosted by the Australian Women's Association in Craigieburn. The event once again brought families from across the district together in a spirit of joy and unity. I want to extend my sincere thanks to Raj Mann, Pooja Punjabi and Kiran Sood for the outstanding work they continue to do year after year to make this celebration such a success. Their ongoing commitment strengthens our community in lasting ways.

As we move through this important period in the calendar I also wish to extend my sincere regards to those observing Ramadan. I was honoured to join the iftar dinner at the Islamic Museum of Australia, and I hope that this month of fasting, prayer, reflection and community brings peace and clarity to all who observe. To our Christian communities marking Lent, I offer my best wishes for a thoughtful and restorative season. And to everyone who welcomed the Lunar New Year, I hope that the Year of the Fire Horse brings you energy, optimism and opportunity.

These celebrations, diverse as they are, remind us of something essential: when we honour one another's traditions we reinforce the unity and respect that bind our communities together. This is a great strength of our wonderful multicultural state.

Western suburbs projects

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:37): They said it could not be done, but in the west we are getting it done. We are delivering the airport rail link, with early works underway. We are delivering a brand new station at Albion and also a massive Southern Cross of the west right in the heart of Sunshine. This is not just about travel, it is about opportunity, and my community in Brimbank is home to one of the highest numbers of airport workers. For them, Melbourne Airport is not just a terminal, it is an economic hub. But our investment has not stopped at the platform; we have continued to build a world-class health precinct with the opening of the new Footscray Hospital, complementing Sunshine Hospital and the Joan Kirner Women and Children's Hospital right in the heart of St Albans. We are delivering world-class health care for our families and quite clearly right where they live. Labor is backing families, creating opportunity and of course building in the west.

Clean Up Australia Day

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:38): On another matter, I want to thank the Brimbank Sustainability & Climate Action group, Tamara and the team at the Tin Shed in St Albans and all the volunteers who took part in Clean Up Australia Day in St Albans. As a lifelong local, I know how important it is for our community to be united and participate in local events. It was really special to see so many volunteers in St Albans helping and assisting Tamara and the team at the Tin Shed.

Country Fire Authority Eltham brigade

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:39): Congratulations to Eltham fire brigade on their centenary and a full-hearted thankyou to all volunteers and career firefighters over those 100 years who have worked so hard to support and protect our community. Eltham did not have a local fire brigade in 1926. The Heidelberg and Ivanhoe fire brigades were called when Eltham's weatherboard corner store caught on fire, but with the building gone in 30 minutes, they were too late. Days after, on 24 February, a meeting was held and the decision made to form a volunteer local brigade. Since then the brigade has had many homes, from equipment originally installed in the first captain's shed to the brigade's current location at 909 Main Road, Eltham, which reopened in 2019 following a half-million-dollar facility upgrade from this government. Throughout its history the brigade has responded to many major fire events like the terrible fires of 1965 in Eltham North, which claimed three lives, destroyed 15 homes and burnt 100 hectares, and like the devastating 2009 Black Saturday bushfires that took so many lives and the hurt of which reached so many homes in my own community.

Over this summer they joined numerous strike teams supporting response efforts far and wide. For the brigade's commitment and service during the 2009 fires, Eltham brigade was awarded Community Group of the Year in Nillumbik's 2010 Australia Day awards and 17 members received the National Emergency Medal. The Eltham fire brigade has also been a leader in developing breathing apparatus support capability, leading the introduction of an integrated BA filling station and later developing a mobile support capacity. Time and time again, Eltham fire brigade has been there for us, and I thank captain Steve Riley, his leadership team and every current volunteer. Eltham fire brigade, thank you for 100 years of service to our community.

Holi Festival of Colours

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:40): Happy Holi and, as Minister Spence said, thank you to Raj, Kiran and Pooja and the extraordinary Australian Women's Association team for organising a really wonderful Hume Holi at Anzac park on Saturday. Thank you to the outgoing committee and all

the members of the Northern Melbourne Marathi Mandal for making me and the member for Broadmeadows just so very welcome on Sunday. A little bit of rain could not dampen so many joyful spirits, and it was really special to see families passing on traditions amid so much enjoyment.

Ramadan

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:41): Hayirli Ramazanlar. This weekend marks the 17th annual street iftar of ICMG, Islamic Community Milli Gorus, in Meadow Heights, and I am thrilled to have secured major funding to support this wonderful community event. I am looking forward to joining thousands in Meadow Heights at the mosque this Saturday for a really joyful iftar. It has been such a privilege to spend so many evenings with families and community organisations across Greenvale this Ramadan, with people really making me welcome and opening up their homes to share iftar.

Corpus Christi Community Greenvale

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:41): I also want to thank and acknowledge the residents and staff at Corpus Christi Community Greenvale, who are a really special part of our community. Founded by Mother Teresa of Calcutta in 1974 and now coming under the auspices of Villa Maria Catholic Homes, the dedicated nursing, support, operations, chaplaincy, kitchen and maintenance teams make this a truly special community, providing a home for marginalised men and making them feel welcome and safe.

Pako Festa

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:42): What an incredible weekend we just had in Geelong, with the annual Pako Festa back and bigger than ever. It was so incredible to join the member for Geelong at Pako Festa last Saturday, an annual event that takes place down Geelong's famous Pakington Street and a beautiful celebration of our multicultural communities. Can I say a big thankyou to Cultura, who run this event every single year. Thank you to all of their staff and volunteers and a special shout-out to the Cultura youth council – amazing young multicultural leaders who stepped up, ran their own stage at Pako Festa with great success and were volunteering throughout the event. It is an incredible opportunity to see the diverse multicultural communities in Geelong celebrate their cultures, try some new food and learn more about one another. It is incredible that we have this amazing festival in the heart of Geelong.

Government achievements

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (10:43): It was outstanding to see and hear from so many local residents claiming their power saving bonus recently, and I thank my team for the work they are doing in that space. It was also amazing to come in on the Sunbury line on the Metro Tunnel service, delivering more services more often, to see the Sunbury multideck car park so well utilised and to know and understand that this is a transformative project doing amazing things. There are five brand new stations with a direct connection between the Sunbury line and the Cranbourne–Pakenham line. It is an outstanding project that of course gets people home safer and sooner, only delivered by a Labor government.

Bills

Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026

Statement of compatibility

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:45): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026:

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

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The main purpose of the Bill is to establish a new statutory body called Safe Food Victoria under a new principal Act called the *Safe Food Victoria Act 2026* (the **Principal Act**) and to make reforms for Safe Food Victoria to be responsible for food safety regulation in Victoria.

The Bill will amend the *Dairy Act 2000* (**Dairy Act**), the *Meat Industry Act 1993* (**Meat Industry Act**), the *Seafood Safety Act 2003* (**Seafood Act**), the *Food Act 1984* (**Food Act**) and certain other Acts, including to:

- abolish Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe;
- confer existing functions of Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe under the Dairy Act, Meat Industry Act and Seafood Act on Safe Food Victoria;
- allow Safe Food Victoria to regulate by licence under the Dairy Act non-traditional foods and foods produced using new technologies where those foods are declared by the Minister (referred to in this statement as 'declared foods');
- confer existing food safety regulatory functions and powers of the Secretary to the Department of Health under the Food Act on Safe Food Victoria and on the Secretary to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action;
- insert in the Food Act new compliance and enforcement powers of Safe Food Victoria.

Human rights issues

In conferring food safety regulatory functions under the Food Act on Safe Food Victoria, the Bill will provide for the transfer of information relating to those functions to Safe Food Victoria. The Bill will also enable Safe Food Victoria to request from the Secretary to the Department of Health information relating to Safe Food Victoria's functions and objectives.

The Principal Act will include provisions outlining when information held by Safe Food Victoria under that Act and other food safety legislation may be used and disclosed. The Bill will also insert in the Food Act similar provisions relating to the use and disclosure of information obtained by certain persons under that Act.

To support the regulation of declared foods under the Dairy Act, the Bill will extend certain provisions of the Dairy Act applying to dairy foods and dairy food licence-holders so that they also apply to declared foods and declared food licence-holders. These include provisions relating to the suspension or cancellation of licences, offence and evidentiary provisions, powers of authorised officers to give notices requiring food premises to be cleaned or disinfected, and other general authorised officer powers for the purposes of administering and monitoring compliance with the Dairy Act.

To support Safe Food Victoria in its regulatory functions under the Food Act, the Bill will insert in the Food Act new compliance and enforcement powers of Safe Food Victoria, including powers to issue information or document production notices and to make orders to councils for the inspection of food premises.

The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- Right to freedom from forced work (section 11);
- Right to privacy and reputation (section 13);
- Right to take part in public life (section 18);
- Right to property (section 20);
- Right to be presumed innocent (section 25(1));
- Right against self-incrimination (section 25(2)(k)).

Right to freedom from forced work

Section 11 of the Charter provides that a person must not be held in slavery or servitude or made to perform forced or compulsory labour. 'Forced or compulsory labour' does not include court-ordered community work as a condition of release from detention, work or service required because of an emergency threatening the Victorian community or a part of that community, or work or service that forms part of normal civil obligations.

Orders in relation to food premises

Clause 102 extends the application of section 46 of the Dairy Act, which allows authorised officers to give notices to owners of dairy premises, dairy food or related vehicles that are unclean, unsafe or otherwise not compliant, requiring certain actions to be taken. That section is extended so that the powers are also available

in relation to declared food and declared food premises. Among other things, a notice under section 46 can require that the premises, vehicle, plant, machinery or equipment be cleaned and disinfected to the satisfaction of the authorised officer.

Similarly, clause 172 expands section 19 of the Food Act, which enables orders to be made to food businesses to require that food premises are put into a clean and sanitary condition or that food prepared or handled is made safe. Section 19 is amended to include an additional circumstance where those orders can be made – being that the food premises, or equipment, activities or food on them, does not comply with the Food Safety Standards.

The expansion of the compulsion under those sections to clean food premises and take related actions may interfere with the right to freedom from forced work – specifically, the prohibition on compulsory labour in section 11(2) of the Charter. I am of the view, however, that the right is not engaged as any work required by the notices and orders would fall within the scope of the exception to the prohibition in section 11(3) of the Charter, relating to work or service that 'forms part of normal civil obligations'. The notices and orders can only be given to food businesses and the owners of food premises who are engaging in a regulated activity and have voluntarily assumed associated responsibilities and obligations.

If the exception does not apply, and the right is engaged, I consider that clauses 102 and 172 do not limit the right. In relation to clause 102, under section 46 of the Dairy Act an authorised officer may only order the taking of actions set out in section 46(2) which appear to them to be appropriate in the circumstances (those circumstances being set out in section 46(1)) and so the owner of food premises is not compelled to take all actions specified in that section. In relation to clause 172, under the new circumstance inserted in section 19 of the Food Act, an order may only be made if the relevant authority is satisfied from the report of an authorised officer that the premises, equipment or food does not comply with an applicable requirement of the Food Safety Standards. In relation to both clauses, even when a notice or order compels the owner of the premises to undertake specific work or labour such that the right may be limited, I consider that any limit is reasonable and proportionate to the legitimate aims of maintaining hygiene and food safety standards and protecting public health.

Right to privacy and reputation

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

Section 13(b) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. An 'attack' on reputation will be lawful if it is permitted by an appropriately circumscribed law.

Disclosure of pecuniary interests

Clause 26 requires members of the Board of Safe Food Victoria to disclose the nature of any direct or indirect pecuniary interest in a matter being considered, or to be considered, by the Board and makes failure to do so an offence. The disclosure must be recorded in the minutes of the Board meeting. These provisions may have the practical effect of compelling Board members to disclose information which may include information about the person's personal or financial affairs. This may interfere with the Board member's right to privacy.

In my view, any such interference with the right to privacy will not be unlawful or arbitrary. The requirement to disclose pecuniary interests is clearly confined to when a conflict of interest might arise and only applies when the Board member's interest is greater than that of any other person in the industry. The requirement is also necessary to ensure the integrity of Board decisions, by removing any real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest.

Information sharing

Part 4 of the Bill provides for the use and disclosure of information held by Safe Food Victoria under the Principal Act and certain other Acts. Clauses 41 and 42 authorise Safe Food Victoria staff, Board members, the chief executive officer, authorised officers and other specified persons to use and disclose this information for certain purposes and in certain circumstances.

Similarly, clause 185 inserts new information sharing provisions in the Food Act. Those provisions apply to Safe Food Victoria staff, Board members, authorised officers and other specified persons. Those persons may use and disclose any information obtained by them for or in connection with the performance of a function or duty or the exercise of a power under the Food Act for certain purposes and in certain circumstances.

The information that may be used or disclosed under those provisions of the Principal Act and the Food Act includes personal information and health information.

While the information sharing provisions are likely to interfere with the right to privacy, I consider this interference to be lawful and not arbitrary. The provisions are necessary to enable Safe Food Victoria, authorised officers and other specified persons to effectively perform their statutory functions and exercise their powers. They also include appropriate limitations on when use and disclosure is authorised, including for purposes directed toward supporting the administration of the Principal Act, the Food Act or any other Act and minimising risks to public health.

Further, the handling of personal information and health information is subject to a range of confidentiality and information sharing restrictions in the *Health Records Act 2001* and the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*. These statutory requirements provide additional protections to ensure that information used or disclosed under the information sharing provisions are managed appropriately and consistently with privacy principles.

I consider that these provisions strike an appropriate balance between enabling the effective exercise of statutory functions and powers and protecting individuals' privacy rights. The information sharing provisions are proportionate to the purpose of the limitation and therefore will not be an unlawful or arbitrary interference with privacy.

Transitional provisions for transfer of information to Safe Food Victoria

Clause 64 requires the Secretary to the Department of Health to transfer to Safe Food Victoria information relating to functions, duties and powers under the Food Act conferred on it under the Bill.

Similarly, clause 65 requires the Secretary to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to transfer to Safe Food Victoria information relating to functions, duties and powers under the Food Act conferred on it under the Bill.

While clauses 64 and 65 have the potential to interfere with the right to privacy, the interference will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The information to be transferred is limited to information obtained or held by the Secretary to the Department of Health or the Secretary to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action in their performance of certain functions under the Food Act and other information necessary to perform those functions. Further, the transfer of that information is necessary to enable Safe Food Victoria to perform functions under the Food Act conferred on it under the Bill. I consider any interference with privacy to be reasonable and proportionate to the purpose of the limitation.

Safe Food Victoria may request information from Secretary to Department of Health or Secretary to Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

Clauses 66 and 67 allow Safe Food Victoria by written notice to request information from the Secretary to the Department of Health or the Secretary to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action relating to the performance of Safe Food Victoria's functions or the achievement of its objectives.

These clauses have the potential to interfere with the right to privacy, however in my view the interference will be lawful and not arbitrary. The information which may be requested is limited to information related to the functions and objectives of Safe Food Victoria. The powers to request that information are necessary to enable Safe Food Victoria to perform those functions and achieve its objectives.

I therefore consider that any interference with privacy resulting from clause 66 or 67 is reasonable and proportionate to the purpose of the limitation.

Licence-holders to provide records

Clause 100 extends the application of section 44 of the Dairy Act to also apply to individuals and businesses holding licences for new declared foods. Section 44 currently requires dairy licence-holders to provide records relating to dairy food when required by notice and to permit authorised officers to inspect records required to be kept under that Act. The extension of this provision may interfere with licence-holders' right to privacy, as the records provided, inspected or copied may contain personal or sensitive information.

However, in my view any resulting interference will be lawful and not arbitrary. First, clause 100 merely extends the application of a provision that is already in force. Secondly, the interference will be limited by the scope of the requirement, which only applies to records relating to certain food or which are otherwise required to be kept under the Dairy Act. Thirdly, any interference will be proportionate to the legitimate aim of monitoring compliance of declared food licence-holders with legislation that protects public health and safety.

General powers of authorised officers

Clause 101 extends the application of section 45 of the Dairy Act, which gives authorised officers general powers for the purposes of administering the Dairy Act and monitoring compliance with that Act and with dairy industry licence conditions. These include powers to enter and search dairy premises, enter and search vehicles used to transport dairy food, require the production of records relating to dairy food, inspect records

and other things on the premises or vehicle and seize certain records. Clause 101 extends those powers so that they are available for monitoring compliance with declared food licences and so that they apply to declared foods and declared food premises. By extending these powers, the clause is likely to interfere with the right to privacy.

However, in my view the interference will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. First, clause 101 merely amends powers that are already in force so that they are available in relation to new regulated activities. Secondly, there are clear limitations on the purposes for which the powers may be exercised and the premises, vehicles and information in relation to which they may be exercised. Thirdly, any interference will be proportionate to the legitimate aim of monitoring compliance by licence-holders with legislation that protects public health and safety and with their licence conditions.

I therefore consider the extension of these powers is compatible with the right to privacy.

Orders in relation to food premises

As outlined above, clause 172 expands section 19 of the Food Act, which enables orders to be made to food businesses to require that food premises are put into a clean and sanitary condition or that food prepared or handled is made safe. Section 19 is amended to include an additional circumstance where those orders can be made – being that the food premises, or equipment, activities or food on the premises, does not comply with an applicable requirement of the Food Safety Standards. An order under section 19 can direct that the premises temporarily stop selling or preparing food until the order is complied with – in which case the relevant authority can require the order to be displayed at the premises, displayed at the point of sale of the food premises, or published on the business's website or elsewhere.

To the extent that the expansion of section 19 may interfere with the right to privacy, in my view any such interference will not be unlawful or arbitrary. The powers are conferred by legislation which is precise and appropriately limited. Under the new circumstance inserted in section 19, an order may only be made if the relevant authority is satisfied from the report of an authorised officer that the premises, equipment or food does not comply with an applicable requirement of the Food Safety Standards. In addition, any interference from the publication of those orders will be reasonable as it serves the legitimate purpose of enabling a member of the public to be made aware that a business should not be selling food and so protecting public health.

Information or document production notices

Clause 176 inserts new production notice provisions in the Food Act. Those provisions enable Safe Food Victoria to compel persons to produce information or documents in certain circumstances. The production notice provisions may interfere with the right to privacy, given that the documents or information required to be produced may contain personal or sensitive information. However, in my view, any resulting interference will be lawful and not arbitrary, for the following reasons.

First, any interference in a person's private sphere will be limited by the scope of the powers. To issue a production notice, Safe Food Victoria must first reasonably believe the information or document is in the person's knowledge, possession custody or control and the information is, or the document contains information that is, necessary for monitoring a person's compliance with the Act, determining whether an offence has been committed under the Act or for determining whether a risk to public health exists. This threshold limits the personal or sensitive information that would be disclosed.

Secondly, production notices serve the legitimate purpose of ensuring compliance with legislation that protects public health and safety. Safeguards are also included in the Bill, including a reasonable excuse defence in the offence provision in new section 19BE of the Food Act.

Finally, the production of information and documents under the Food Act provisions will also be subject to the privacy principles in the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and *Health Records Act 2001* in relation to how personal and health information is collected, handled and disclosed. These requirements impose additional safeguards to ensure that personal and health information collected through a document that is the subject of an information or document production notice is dealt with appropriately.

Orders to councils for inspection of premises

Clause 181 inserts new inspection order provisions in the Food Act. Under those provisions, Safe Food Victoria may order a council to direct its authorised officers to enter and inspect specified premises for the purposes of monitoring compliance with the Food Act or determining if a risk to public health exists. An inspection order can require the authorised officer to take certain steps at the premises, including inspecting specified documents, articles and things, seizing or taking samples of those things, and taking photographs or recordings of them.

The inspection order provisions may interfere with the right to privacy, as authorised officers may collect personal or sensitive information when executing them. However, any interference will be limited by the scope of the powers. To give an inspection order, Safe Food Victoria must be satisfied that an article is being sold or handled for sale at the premises or place; and must determine that it is appropriate to give the order and require the doing of a thing specified in it, for the purposes of monitoring compliance with the Food Act or to determine whether a serious threat to public health exists. Safe Food Victoria must also consult the relevant council, except in urgent cases.

Further, the inspection order provisions serve the legitimate purpose of ensuring compliance with legislation that protects public health and safety and of monitoring risks to public health.

As such, so far as clause 181 interferes with the right to privacy, I consider the provision is reasonable and proportionate to the legitimate aim of the Bill and therefore not arbitrary.

Power to give information related to food or food premises

Clause 253 inserts a new provision in the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* which allows the Secretary to the Department of Health to give certain information to Safe Food Victoria, a Council, an authorised food safety officer or the Secretary to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, if the Secretary considers the information relates to a public health risk, or whether there is such a risk, involving food or food premises.

So far as the information provided may contain sensitive or personal information, the provision may interfere with the right to privacy. However, if the right to privacy is engaged, I am of the view that it will not be limited.

First, any interference will be limited by the scope of the provision, which is limited to the sharing of information obtained under or for the purposes of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* or regulations made under it, and only where the information is relevant to a public health risk, or the potential for such a risk, involving food or food premises. Secondly, the provision serves a legitimate public health purpose, enabling the Secretary to identify and act on potential risks to public health associated with food or food premises. Lastly, this information sharing provision will be subject to privacy principles, and any personal or sensitive information will be dealt with accordingly.

Right to take part in public life

Section 18(2)(b) of the Charter provides that every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to have access to the Victorian public service and public office. The right requires access to positions in the public service and in public office to be based on general terms of equality.

Appointment and removal of board members

Clause 14 provides for the appointment of members to the Board. A person is only eligible for appointment if they have knowledge, skills and experience in a field relevant to the Board's functions. In determining whether to appoint a person, the Minister is to consider the degree to which the person's knowledge, skills and experience are different from the existing Board members. This clause may be perceived as restricting a person's right of access to positions in the public office. However, the eligibility criteria continue to facilitate equal opportunity to access the public service based on general principles of merit, and ensure that members of the Board have the skills necessary for the proper functioning of the Board. Those criteria are objective, reasonable and non-discriminatory.

Clause 21 enables members of the Board to be removed from office on certain grounds. That clause may be perceived as interfering with the right of access to public service for existing positions. However, to the extent to which there is any interference, it is justified to facilitate good corporate governance, hold members of the Board accountable for their responsibilities and to ensure the independence and proper functioning of the Board.

Accordingly, I consider that clauses 14 and 21, are compatible with the right, and any interference is reasonably justified.

Right to property

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. 'Property' under the Charter includes all real and personal property interests recognised under the general law, relevantly including contractual rights and licences. This right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely.

Termination of chief executive officer contracts

Clauses 52 and 60 terminate the employment contracts of the chief executive officers of Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe, as if each contract were terminated by the employer giving written notice in accordance with the contract and with payment in lieu of notice.

Those clauses may be perceived as interfering with property rights (that is, contractual rights). However, to the extent that there is any interference, in my view this will be in 'accordance with law'. The clauses are precise and clear as to the form of termination to occur. The termination to occur will be in accordance with the provisions of the contract applying in respect of termination on notice by the employer where the reason for the termination is not based on any serious failure to fulfil duties and responsibilities. Further, the termination of employment of the chief executive officers of Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe is not arbitrary but is a necessary consequence of the abolition of those entities under the Bill.

Cancellation or suspension of declared food licences

Clause 91 extends the application of section 26 of the Dairy Act, which among other things, enables the cancellation or suspension of dairy industry licences on certain grounds. That section is extended to also apply to declared food licences.

While extending that provision could lead to a deprivation of property (that is, loss of a declared food licence), in my view the right will not be limited by the amendments. Clause 91 merely extends powers that are already in force to a new category of licence. Licensees are choosing to participate in a regulated industry and have a conditional right to a licence. In addition, the powers are clear, precisely formulated and subject to various safeguards.

Under section 26 of the Dairy Act as amended, Safe Food Victoria may only cancel or suspend a declared food licence on specific grounds. Many of those grounds are directed to circumstances which, if present, may result in a risk to public health and safety if the licence were to continue, meaning the ability to cancel or suspend is important.

The cancellation or suspension of a declared food licence will also occur in accordance with sections 27 and 28 of the Dairy Act, which provide for procedural fairness in the form of the right of review to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). A licensee must be notified of the decision to cancel or suspend and on what ground. If the licensee applies to VCAT for review, the cancellation or suspension does not take effect unless and until VCAT have determined in favour of Safe Food Victoria.

Accordingly, the extension of these seizure powers by the Bill is 'in accordance with law'.

General powers of authorised officers and orders in relation to food premises

As outlined above, clause 101 extends the application of section 45 of the Dairy Act, which gives authorised officers general powers for the purposes of administering and monitoring compliance with that Act. These include powers to enter and inspect dairy premises and vehicles used to transport dairy food and seize certain records, products or materials. Clause 101 extends those general powers so that they are available for monitoring compliance with declared food licences and so that they apply to declared foods and declared food premises.

Similarly, clause 102 extends the application of section 46 of the Dairy Act, which allows authorised officers to give notices in writing to owners of dairy premises, dairy food or related vehicles that are unclean, unsafe or otherwise not compliant, requiring certain actions to be taken. That section is extended so that the powers are also available in relation to declared food and declared food premises. Among other things, a notice under section 46 can order specified food to be seized, detained or destroyed.

By extending these powers, clauses 101 and 102 may interfere with property rights under the Charter. However, in my view the right is not limited by the amendments. Both clauses merely extend powers to seize and detain items that are already in force. In addition, the powers are conferred by precise legislation that contains various safeguards.

In relation to clause 101, the powers may only be exercised for the purpose of monitoring compliance with the provisions of the Dairy Act and licence conditions. In relation to clause 102, under section 46 of the Dairy Act an order may only be made where the authorised officer is satisfied that, or expects on reasonable grounds that, the premises, food or vehicles are unclean, unsafe or otherwise not compliant. Additionally, the order may only direct actions set out in section 46(2) which appear to the authorised officer to be appropriate in the circumstances (those circumstances being set out in section 46(1)).

When food is seized under section 46 of the Dairy Act, section 48 of the Dairy Act creates procedural safeguards and obligations relating to its storage, release and destruction. For example, an authorised officer is required to ensure the food is stored where it was seized or in another suitable place; a person may apply to the Magistrates' Court seeking its release; and, if no application is made within the statutory timeframe or an

application is refused, the food is to be disposed of in accordance with written directions issued by Safe Food Victoria.

Additionally, section 47 of the Dairy Act sets out requirements and processes for the destruction of food seized under either section 45 or 46 of the Dairy Act and which is decayed, deteriorated or putrefied, or where the owner consents to its destruction.

Accordingly, the extension of these seizure powers by the Bill is 'in accordance with law' and in my view does not limit property rights.

Orders to councils for inspection of premises

As outlined above, clause 181 inserts new inspection order provisions in the Food Act. Under those provisions, Safe Food Victoria may order a council to direct its authorised officers to enter and inspect specified premises for the purposes of monitoring compliance with the Food Act or determining if a risk to public health exists. An inspection order can enable entry onto the premises and certain steps to be taken there, including seizing specified things and detaining or removing them. This risks interfering with property rights.

However, I am of the view that the right is not limited, because the inspection notice powers are clear, are confined in their application and are conferred by provisions that are precisely formulated. To issue an inspection order, Safe Food Victoria must be satisfied that an article is being sold or handled for sale at the premises or place; and must determine that it is appropriate to give the order and require the doing of a thing specified in it, for monitoring compliance with the Food Act or to determine whether a serious threat to public health exists. An inspection order must specify the premises to which it applies, the purpose for which it is given, the steps directed to be carried out at the premises and the time period for compliance. In executing an inspection order, the authorised officer may only do things which the officer believes on reasonable grounds are appropriate to do for the purposes specified in the order.

Accordingly, I consider that clause 181 is compatible with the right to property.

Right to be presumed innocent

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

Evidentiary provisions

Clause 79 inserts new Schedule 1 into the Dairy Act, containing transitional provisions. Item 16(2) of that Schedule saves the operation of the evidentiary provision in section 59(1)(d) of the Dairy Act, despite amendments to it under the Bill. The effect of this is that the provision will still operate to remove the need for proof of the appointment of officers of Dairy Food Safety Victoria in proceedings, until evidence to the contrary is given.

Clause 110 extends the application of section 59(1)(a) of the Dairy Act, which provides for dairy food to be presumed to be intended for sale for human consumption in proceedings, unless there is evidence to the contrary. That provision is extended so that the presumption also applies to declared food.

The continuation and extension, respectively, of those evidentiary provisions may interfere with the right to be presumed innocent. The provisions reduce the evidentiary burden on the prosecution in respect of facts required to be proven to make out certain Dairy Act offences. However, in my view, clauses 79 and 110 will not limit the right. The evidentiary provisions being continued and extended are already in force. Further, the provisions do not transfer the legal burden of proof, and the evidentiary burden remains on the prosecution to prove the remaining elements of the offence. In relation to clause 79, the fact to be presumed is uncontroversial and, in relation to clause 110, the fact would ordinarily be peculiarly within the accused's knowledge. In relation to both clauses, the accused would have the opportunity to rebut the presumption with evidence to the contrary.

Offence to contravene production notice

As outlined above, clause 176 of the Bill inserts new production notice provisions in the Food Act. New section 19BF creates an offence for contravening a production notice, which contains a 'reasonable excuse' exception.

In creating a 'reasonable excuse' exception, the offence in section 19BF may interfere with the right to be presumed innocent, in that it places an evidential burden on the accused to raise evidence of a reasonable excuse. However, in doing so, the exception does not transfer the legal burden of proof. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, which will ordinarily be peculiarly within their knowledge, the burden shifts back to the prosecution to prove the essential elements of the offence. I do not consider that an evidential onus of this kind limits the right to be presumed innocent.

Criminal liability of officers of bodies corporate – new offence provisions

Clause 109 of the Bill amends section 55C of the Dairy Act so that it applies to the offence for failing to hold a declared food licence in new section 22(1A) of the Dairy Act inserted by clause 86 of the Bill. Section 55C of the Dairy Act deems officers of bodies corporate to be liable for offences committed by the body corporate. Section 55C(3) provides officers with a defence that they acted with due diligence to prevent the commission of the offence, and section 55C(4) allows a court to consider the officer's knowledge of the commission of the offence, whether they were in a position to influence the body corporate, and the steps they took or could reasonably have taken to prevent the commission of the offence. Section 55C(5) provides that an officer may rely on a defence available to the body corporate, and bears the same burden of proof to establish the defence as the body corporate.

Clause 179 of the Bill amends section 51A of the Food Act so that it applies to the offence for contravening a production notice in new section 19BF of the Food Act inserted by clause 176. Section 51A of the Food Act deems officers of a body corporate to be criminally liable for offences committed by the body corporate, if they authorised or permitted the offence or were knowingly concerned in its commission. Section 51A(3) provides that an officer may rely on a defence available to the body corporate, in which case the officer bears the same burden of proof to establish the defence as the body corporate.

In applying section 55C of the Dairy Act and section 51A of the Food Act to new offences, clauses 109 and 179 may interfere with the presumption of innocence. Those provisions operate to deem as fact that an officer has committed an offence based on the actions of the body corporate and place an evidential burden on the officer to establish a defence. However, I do not consider that the right to the presumption of innocence is limited.

First, in relation to clause 179, the prosecution must prove the accessorial elements set out in section 51A(1) of the Food Act – that is, that the officer authorised or permitted the offence or was knowingly concerned in its commission.

Secondly, in relation to both clauses 109 and 179, section 55C of the Dairy Act and section 51A of the Food Act only place an evidential burden on the officer to establish a defence, and the prosecution is still required to prove the main elements of the offence set out in section 22(1A) of the Dairy Act and section 19BE of the Food Act respectively.

Finally, the evidence required to establish a relevant defence will likely be peculiarly within the personal knowledge of the officer, and would be difficult for the prosecution to establish.

In my view, it is appropriate to extend those Dairy Act and Food Act offences to officers of bodies corporate, to ensure proper compliance with the declared food licence and production notice provisions of those Acts. A person who undertakes the role of an officer of a body corporate accepts that they will be subject to certain requirements and duties, including a duty to ensure that the body corporate complies with its legal obligations. Affected persons should be aware of the regulatory requirements and, as such, should have the necessary processes and systems in place to effectively meet these requirements. Finally, neither offence is punishable by a term of imprisonment.

Criminal liability of officers of bodies corporate – extension of existing offence provisions

Clauses 94, 96, 106 and 108 of the Bill extend the food safety offence provisions in sections 30, 36, 50 and 53 of the Dairy Act so that they also apply in respect of declared foods and declared food licence-holders. Section 55A of the Dairy Act applies to an offence against sections 50 or 53; section 55B of the Dairy Act applies to an offence against section 30; and section 55C of the Dairy Act applies in respect of an offence against section 36.

Section 55A of the Dairy Act deems officers of a body corporate to be criminally liable for offences committed by the body corporate, if they authorised or permitted the offence or were knowingly concerned in its commission. Section 55A(3) provides that an officer may rely on a defence available to the body corporate, in which case the officer bears the same burden of proof to establish the defence as the body corporate.

Section 55B of the Dairy Act deems officers of a body corporate to be criminally liable for offences committed by the body corporate, if the officer failed to exercise due diligence to prevent its commission. In determining whether an officer failed to exercise due diligence, section 55B(3) allows a court to consider the officer's knowledge of the commission of the offence, whether they were in a position to influence the body corporate, and the steps they took or could reasonably have taken to prevent the commission of the offence. Section 55B(4) provides that an officer may rely on a defence available to the body corporate, and bears the same burden of proof to establish the defence as the body corporate.

Section 55C of the Dairy Act deems officers of bodies corporate to be liable for offences committed by the body corporate. Section 55C(3) provides officers with a defence that they acted with due diligence to prevent

the commission of the offence, and section 55C(4) allows a court to consider the officer's knowledge of the commission of the offence, whether they were in a position to influence the body corporate, and the steps they took or could reasonably have taken to prevent the commission of the offence. Section 55C(5) provides that an officer may rely on a defence available to the body corporate, and bears the same burden of proof to establish the defence as the body corporate

In extending offences to which sections 55A, 55B and 55C of the Dairy Act apply, clauses 94, 96, 106 and 108 may interfere with the right to be presumed innocent. However, I do not consider that the right to the presumption of innocence is limited.

Firstly, the clauses merely extend the application of existing offences to which those evidentiary provisions already apply. Secondly, in relation to clauses 106 and 108 extending offences to which section 55A of the Dairy Act applies, the prosecution must prove the accessorial elements set out in section 55A(1) of the Dairy Act – that is, that the officer authorised or permitted the offence or was knowingly concerned in its commission. Thirdly, in relation to all clauses, sections 55A, 55B and 55C of the Dairy Act only place an evidential burden on the officer to establish a defence, and the prosecution is still required to prove the main elements of the offence set out in the offence provisions. Finally, the evidence required to establish a relevant defence will likely be peculiarly within the personal knowledge of the officer, and would be difficult for the prosecution to establish.

In my view, it is appropriate for the Dairy Act offences amended by these clauses to apply to officers of bodies corporate, as they are directed to protecting public health and safety. A person who undertakes the role of an officer of a body corporate accepts that they will be subject to certain requirements and duties, including a duty to ensure that the body corporate complies with its legal obligations. Affected persons should be aware of the regulatory requirements and, as such, should have the necessary processes and systems in place to effectively meet these requirements. Finally, the offences are not punishable by a term of imprisonment.

Right against self-incrimination

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled not to be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. This right is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid.

Information or document production notices

As outlined above, clause 176 of the Bill inserts new production notice provisions in the Food Act. New section 19BE enables Safe Food Victoria to compel persons to produce information or documents in certain circumstances. New section 19BF makes it an offence to contravene a production notice without reasonable excuse. New section 19BH provides that a natural person may refuse to provide information (but not documents) specified in a production notice if doing so would tend to incriminate them. However, new section 19BI provides for a use immunity in relation to documents that are produced. Under new section 19BI, a document produced by a natural person that would tend to incriminate them is not admissible against the person in a proceeding, unless they are required by law to keep that document or the proceeding relates to false or misleading information in the document.

So far as they relate to information, in my view, the production notice provisions will not limit the right against self-incrimination. The requirement to provide information in response to a production notice is subject to a reasonable excuse exception in new section 19BF. This exception is coupled with new section 19BH, which will allow the privilege against self-incrimination to be claimed by a natural person to enable them to refuse to give information if doing so would tend to incriminate them.

In relation to documents, new section 19BH of the Food Act provides for a limited abrogation of the right against self-incrimination. A document would be required to be produced even if it may contain evidence that would tend to incriminate the person.

However, this is the case in relation to pre-existing documents only. At common law, the protection afforded to pre-existing documents is considerably weaker than that afforded to oral testimony or to documents that are brought into existence to comply with a request for information. The compulsion to produce pre-existing documents that speak for themselves is in strong contrast to testimonial oral or written evidence that is brought into existence as a direct response to questions. Accordingly, any protection afforded to documentary material by the privilege is limited in scope and not as fundamental to the nature of the right as the protection against the requirement that verbal answers be provided.

In addition, the use immunity in new section 19BI provides an important safeguard by ensuring that any incriminating documents produced by a person are not admissible in evidence against them, except in very limited circumstances.

The weaker protection afforded to pre-existing documents at common law and the safeguard referred to above serve to reduce the extent of any limitation of the right against self-incrimination by new section 19BH. In addition, any limitation is reasonable and justified. The purpose of the abrogation in relation to documents is to ensure the effective operation of the production notice provisions and enable Safe Food Victoria to have access to relevant documents to facilitate and ensure compliance with legislation that protects health and safety. There is significant public interest in enabling this. In my view, there are no less restrictive means available to achieve the purpose of enabling Safe Food Victoria to have access to relevant documents to facilitate and ensure compliance.

General powers of authorised officers

As outlined above, clause 101 extends the application of section 45 of the Dairy Act, which gives authorised officers general powers for the purposes of administering the Dairy Act and monitoring compliance with that Act and with dairy industry licence conditions. These include powers to compel persons to produce records relating to dairy food for inspection. Clause 101 extends those powers so that they are available for monitoring compliance with declared food licences and so that they apply to declared foods and declared food premises. Extending the application of these powers may interfere with the right against self-incrimination, as a person might be forced to provide documents to an authorised officer that might contain incriminating material.

However, in my view the right against self-incrimination will not be limited by the extension of these provisions. Clause 101 merely amends powers that are already in force so that they are available in relation to new regulated activities. Further, the powers to compel the production of records only extend to pre-existing records, in respect of which the protection afforded by the privilege against self-incrimination at common law is weaker than for records brought into existence.

The Hon. Ros Spence MP
Minister for Agriculture

Second reading

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:45): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026 establishes a new consolidated food safety regulator – Safe Food Victoria – and makes other incremental but important changes to improve the way food safety is regulated in Victoria. These reforms will enable the continued protection of public health, a collaborative approach to achieving food safety outcomes with industry, while streamlining and simplifying the regulatory system.

The aim of the Bill is to implement the first stage of a two-stage reform program to consolidate food safety regulators in Victoria, as part of the Government's commitment in the Economic Growth Statement to halve the number of Victorian regulators by 2030.

The way that the current food safety regulatory system is structured is overly complex, with four Victorian Acts and two responsible Ministers. The system is currently regulated by Department of Health, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and 79 Local Councils.

This first stage of reform – implemented by this legislation – is focused on entity reform. Bringing together PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria; two regulators with similar remits; as well as some departmental food safety regulatory functions; into a new central food safety agency. Safe Food Victoria will enable more efficient regulation, better incident management, a paddock-to-plate approach to food safety that is better aligned with risk, and clearer food safety leadership including within Victoria, as part of Australia and New Zealand's bi-national food regulatory system and for our important export markets.

The purposes of the Bill are to:

- establish Safe Food Victoria and to provide for it to perform functions in regulating the Victorian food industry;
- abolish Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe;
- make consequential and related amendments to the *Dairy Act 2000*, the *Food Act 1984*, the *Meat Industry Act 1993*, the *Seafood Safety Act 2003* and certain other Acts.

A consolidated regulator can deliver benefits for businesses and consumers, while protecting public health. It will reduce the need for businesses to engage with multiple regulators and reduce compliance costs. Consolidation will improve efficiency and remove duplication which will lower the cost of regulation over time. This has been the experience of similar reforms made in New South Wales, Queensland and in most of our comparable international jurisdictions.

A consolidated regulator will also be able to balance important specialist capabilities with general food safety skills – better enabling it to respond to food safety incidents and work with industry to ensure the safety of consumers.

Once Safe Food Victoria is established, a further series of reforms in a second stage will be brought before the Parliament in the next term. This will further consolidate existing food safety legislation, modernising the licensing, compliance and enforcement laws. The second stage of reform will also consider new cost recovery arrangements and the role of local councils in regulating food safety. While we expect some regulatory benefits in this first stage of reform, this legislation will largely set the foundation for more explicit benefits as part of Stage 2.

The Government's vision is that these staged food safety reforms will deliver a regulatory scheme that safeguards public health, protects consumers and assures markets. It will provide a clear, simple and proportionate regulatory environment to support business diversity and economic growth. The legislative framework will be robust and responsive to effectively manage emerging risks, foster innovation and facilitate continual improvement. Finally, the scheme will facilitate a collaborative approach to identifying and managing food safety risks across the supply chain.

Reforms have been supported by an extensive engagement and consultation process over the last year involving more than 60 individual engagements with stakeholders and interest groups. This has culminated in an Engage Victoria process across September and October 2025. More than 120 unique submissions were received, with an overwhelming 91 per cent in support. This feedback included that the Bill, in creating Safe Food Victoria, should establish a regulator:

- capable of providing clearer food safety information and that can encourage greater consistency of outcome;
- that will be a "one-stop-shop" for businesses;
- that can support local councils and businesses with ongoing specialist expertise;
- that understands the balance between critical, non-negotiable public health outcomes while working with industry to address these efficiently; and
- importantly, has embedded stakeholder connections via consultative committees.

The Government is confident that the design elements of Safe Food Victoria are consistent with this feedback.

I shall now outline the major provisions of the Bill.

- The Bill provides for the creation of a new statutory authority – Safe Food Victoria – to replace PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria, as well as conduct the food safety regulatory functions currently undertaken by the Department of Health. PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria will be abolished.
- Commencement will be by proclamation, but my intention is for Safe Food Victoria to begin operation on 1 July 2026, pending passage of this Bill.
- Safe Food Victoria will be governed by a small Board of between 5 and 7 members led by a Chair and Deputy Chair. The Board will be appointed by the Minister responsible for administering the Act and will report to that Minister. It is intended that the Minister for Agriculture will be responsible for the Act and that Safe Food Victoria will exist in the Agriculture Portfolio.
- Safe Food Victoria will be led by a Chief Executive Officer, appointed by the Board, with power to employ staff.
- The Board will have the ability to form consultative committees for key sectors in seeking advice on the performance of functions of Safe Food Victoria – and I expect, for a start, this to include individual committees for the dairy industry, meat and seafood industries, public health and local government.
- Staff, property and assets from the existing regulators will be transferred to Safe Food Victoria as the legal successor. Staff will transfer on conditions no less favourable overall than they currently hold. This is to maintain the considerable industry expertise that has built up over the years in both Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe. Staff are being supported through this change process.

- Safe Food Victoria will be a largely cost-recovered entity and have a hypothecated fund to ensure funding remains with the entity. Some funding from government will be provided for regulatory functions transferring from the Department of Health.
- Safe Food Victoria will implement the existing regulatory frameworks under legacy legislation. This means that while the Safe Food Victoria Bill provides a legislative umbrella, the frameworks under the *Dairy Act 2000, Food Act 1984, Meat Industry Act 1993*, and *Seafood Safety Act 2003* will continue to apply. Minor amendments are proposed to these acts to ensure this new umbrella framework can function effectively.
- The roles attributed to the Secretary of the Department of Health under the Food Act will transfer to either Safe Food Victoria (for the operational provisions) or the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (for the policy-setting provisions).
- One notable addition created by this legislation is a specialised framework to support businesses engaged in food innovation, such as the production of cell-cultured foods. Safe Food Victoria will be the regulator of this new type of business in Victoria. This supports the Government's response to the recommendation of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Welfare of Pigs in Victoria to recognise the development of the lab grown meat industry in Victoria.

I would like to recognise the important interactions between the regulatory role of Safe Food Victoria and the central public health roles played by the Minister for Health and Chief Health Officer.

Reforms are a whole of Government endeavour, but I'd like focus on the important role that the Minister for Health and the Department of Health have had in these reforms. After all, Safe Food Victoria will continue to contribute to important public health outcomes. To enable this, the Bill includes provisions that ensure the Chief Health Officer has a role in the new framework. The Chief Health Officer may provide advice or information in relation to a public health risk, such as information about a particular food-borne illness or pathogen that may not be available to Safe Food Victoria. This may help Safe Food Victoria inform how it assesses or manages a situation. This legislative role will be supported by a new memorandum of understanding between the agencies. Food safety regulation is and will remain predominantly about protecting the public from the risk of contaminated food. Safe Food Victoria will improve how this occurs and reduce the overall risk of contaminated food. The Department of Health will also continue to support contributions to food safety policy and the Food Ministers' Meeting.

Before I conclude I would like to acknowledge the close collaboration that has occurred between portfolios including Agriculture, Health and Treasury. This is an important initiative arising from the Economic Growth Statement that will ensure the regulation of food safety in Victoria is easier and safer. This reform is one of the first in a broader effort by the Allan Government to make government services more efficient, accessible and simpler for businesses.

This Bill makes important improvements to the way that we set up food safety regulation in Victoria. It represents a critical juncture in the broader reform journey that I hope is completed over the coming years. This includes further consolidation of functions, such as those for primary production currently in the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. It also includes opportunities to consider the optimal role for local government in the food safety regulatory framework. These processes will be subject to further consultation and will not be progressed until the next term of Parliament.

I commend the Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:45): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 19 March.

Motions

Working from home

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this house condemns the opposition leader for failing to:

(a) stop the Shadow Treasurer's reckless campaign for mandatory five-day office return;

(b) condemn the Shadow Treasurer for spreading misinformation on working from home; and

(c) commit to Labor's plan to legislate working from home as a right for Victorians.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:46): I move:

That the word 'former' be inserted before the word 'Shadow' wherever occurring.

This is a really critical motion, the work-from-home motion. I know there are some over there that might interject already, but let us just say how important work from home is and how critical it is. Just in case those opposite, including the member for Warrandyte, do not know, the house condemns the opposition leader for failing to stop the reckless campaign to mandate five days of work in office. Where did that absolute truth bomb come from? Where did that one come from? That was from none other than the member for Brighton. The member for Brighton was very opposed to work from home, and then we saw the federal Shadow Treasurer, the member for Goldstein in the Sandringham electorate area and the Brighton electorate area, do a bit of singing this week. Did anyone see that routine? Member for Sandringham, I know you have got a bit of a baritone and a singing voice, but do not ever try that. But when did the member for Goldstein first roll up with some of the most crazy policies we have seen in opposition to work from home? This is where we see those opposite not on the side of workers, not ever on the side of flexibility.

We know that work from home is so critical to supporting people to return to the workplace or have that balance. But also it is a gendered policy: more women in our society, in our communities, have caring needs and load. It should not be that way. We are hoping to move the dial in the future to support women in the workplace. We see that, and so the flexibility that you get from the work-from-home policy means that more women can return to the workforce. The productivity commissioner said a blended model of work, where you have some from home and some in a workplace, is critical to health and wellbeing in our communities.

You wonder why, with such an evidentiary basis, those opposite are so opposed. Could it be, Deputy Speaker – I know you are an astute observer of some of the politics on this and on different things – that One Nation is so forcefully opposed to work from home? Could that be it? Could it be political expedience? Could it be that there are not enough people in that opposition room that speak up because there are so many blokes there? They still do not have quotas; they are still not supporting women in the workplace. Maybe if they had a clue about the gendered nature of the workplace –

Members interjecting.

Tim RICHARDSON: Those opposite interject around their leadership now, but how long did it take to get to that point? And how about the absolutely horrendous treatment of Sussan Ley federally? We step forward now with a work-from-home policy that is about supporting Victorians in their workplaces. It supports more participation and productivity because people can consider their arrangements when applying for a job: are they able to balance some of the care requirements that they might have? There is that flexibility of being around their community. We know it is good for small businesses in the community because workers are based in their patch. We saw some of those hallmarks back in 2020 and 2021, and we see now local businesses and the strip trading shops that are supported by work from home. It has so much flow-on benefit. There is the fact that so many people do the trundle on the train, on the bus or in the car, and having that flexibility with work from home lowers congestion overall in our communities and supports people. These are the hallmarks and why work from home is so critical. It is why from 1 September 2026 the Allan Labor government will bring it into law.

It will be of substantial benefit for so many in our communities, and you wonder why anyone would be opposed to that. You have got productivity benefits. You are reducing congestion in the community and the cost of living. You are not doing the commute, filling up the car. We know with some of the instabilities at the moment around the world we will see petrol prices rise and the impact of that, and then there is the mental load that families carry each and every day trying to make ends meet, with inflation and the cost of living. We are just taking a little bit more out of the saddle bags. If anyone

then is required to be in five days a week, we are lowering the congestion burden and the impact for those in our community as well. We see it at the tail ends of a week, the Monday and Friday, the commute in for tradies going into town, for the nurses at major health precincts, for those that need to be in the CBD or in the regions. It makes a massive difference. You are getting in in 40 minutes rather than an hour and 20 from my community, and that time is everything. Time adds up for someone who is seeing their three-year-old go through kinder for the first time and wondering if they will see those formative moments through their eyes at the end of the day. Time matters for a graduation that you need to get to on a Thursday afternoon, and you are desperate to see that one play. You have heard the same song over and over, and you have practiced it with your little one, but you do not know whether your work requirements and the 10-hour slog that you might do means you cannot get there at the end of the day. These are the types of things that matter. This is what time is, and this is the cost on people's lives and why a work-from-home policy benefits everyone. It is all 'a rising tide lifts all boats' here.

It is not that those that have to go are disproportionately impacted because they have benefited from a blended economy that has people moving around in different ways. It benefits productivity because we have greater participation, because we know so many women are out of the workforce with care responsibilities and that load that is disproportionately gendered. This policy sees them in their community, in our economy and says they have got a place to work in our communities. What makes so much sense in this policy are the Productivity Commission's findings that a blended model of this – the two days from home, it could be two days at work in the workplace, or it could be three days – brings productivity benefits across the board. We see sectors already doing it. But there is the lived experience of Victorians who have shared their work-from-home journey or have not even been able to raise that in their workplace for fear of repercussions or it not being an inclusive environment to even start that conversation and they feel like they cannot even raise that conversation. This policy says that the government, the Allan Labor government, is on their side. The Allan Labor government again is on the side of working people to have that flexibility in those critical moments.

I will just go back to that again. For many of us, we can go instinctively to those special moments in our kids lives, and there are moments and sacrifices people have to make. Shift workers have to make those sacrifices, people stuck in congestion, people who will not be able to get to those critical moments and I just think time is a big part of this policy. Time is everything. When you are thinking about how you will make ends meet, time is everything. When you are thinking about those formative moments in your child's journey or connecting with loved ones, or if you have got care responsibilities for an older parent as well, these are all moments when flexibility in work or not alienating people from workplaces because of the circumstances of their lives is so very critical. This is analogous to some of the childcare policy reforms. We did big reforms federally that were done on the back of Labor governments, and it always seems to be Labor governments fronting up to support working people in this space. We saw this with greater investment in child care, greater places in child care, and we saw more participation for women in the workforce. We are seeing the same here. This is such a critical frame to this. You wonder then why members of Parliament, like the Shadow Attorney-General and member for Brighton, are so opposed to working from home. They are so opposed and want to see lower wages it seems as well – EBAs, going after unions; we see all that as well – but lower wage outcomes for people and lower work flexibility outcomes.

You wonder why. Generally, you find it is blokes. It is blokes in conservative movements that are saying this. The member for Goldstein in the federal Parliament opposed it. What did he say work from home was? What was that? Anyone on that side can participate. Member for Warrandyte? Ovens Valley? Narracan? Narracan might know. He called work from home 'apartheid'. That is what the member for Goldstein, the Shadow Treasurer – Mr Karaoke himself; goodness me, if ever there was a cringe moment – said. He said it was apartheid. That was the description. From those opposite we want to know, with the One Nation masters that they are all pandering to at the moment, are these the circumstances that they find themselves in? Is it apartheid to have the flexibility to get to your kids pick-ups and drop-offs and have flexible work arrangements with your employer? Is it apartheid to lower congestion on our roads and get people home safer and sooner, because the blended mix of work

in our economy benefits everyone? Is it apartheid in our communities to have cost-of-living pressure reduced because you are not travelling and filling up the car as much, or you are not paying your yearly rate to go into town on the train system or the V/Line from rural areas? Is that apartheid? Because that is what the federal Shadow Treasurer said. The member for Brighton, with his strong opposition to work from home, is a key supporter of the Leader of the Opposition. We have not heard from the Leader of the Opposition about whether they are opposed to it or not. If they are not opposed at all, will they vote for and support our work-from-home policy?

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:56): I move:

> That after the word 'occurring' insert 'and after the word "Victorians" insert "and that this house notes how stale and political this sledge motion is"'.

The Deputy Speaker for the house has agreed that my amendment is in order. I say again to the house that this house also notes the further amendment proves how stale and political this sledge motion is. The raw, ruthless politics of this government has come to full display this morning. What has happened for the first two weeks of this year is the government has not wasted the Parliament's time until the end of a Thursday, when, in a ham-fisted attempt to play raw politics and be political, the Leader of the House has, at the end of a Thursday, moved to a sledge motion, two weeks in a row – not once. You would think that when you make a mistake once, you would learn from the mistake the first time. One would think that they would only make a mistake once, but the Leader of the House managed it twice. The Leader of the House managed to make the same mistake twice, which I think says quite a lot about the competency, or not, of the Leader of the House. But what the Leader of the House has done today is rearrange the notice paper to put the sledge motion up front. So we are now going to, under this government, waste a whole day on a sledge motion.

The rawness of the politics and the ruthlessness of the politics is on full display. There is no cover to it. There is no attempted cover for the house to do anything to start the day and then slip it in at the end to close off the week. What the Leader of the House has done is say, 'Don't worry about a full day of Parliament – we are just going to waste the Parliament's time with raw politics.' What this move has done is expose to Victorians that this government cares more about a sledge motion than the needs of Victorians, the wants of Victorians and frankly the priorities of Victorians. Because Victorians know that this government has not dedicated one minute of this chamber's time in recent weeks to the $15 billion of money that has been corrupted. Their money – taxpayers money, not Labor's money. It certainly is not your money, government members. It is taxpayers money – $15 billion.

So we are now debating a sledge motion, which follows – I think it is fair to put on the house record – repeated sledge motions each and every single week. That is why I move my amendment – to make it clear to this house through my amendment that this house is repeatedly being forced to debate sledge motions, as has been noted in my amendment, because this government is wasting the Parliament's time in doing so. I do want to make one point at the outset about the substantive motion in line (b).

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have checked the microphones. They are in working order. Could we have people stop yelling in the house repeatedly?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Point Cook. You are just going to annoy me.

James NEWBURY: You said what I was thinking, Deputy Speaker. I want to start my contribution in referring to line (b) of the motion, where the government notes 'spreading misinformation'. This week and in recent weeks we have seen a Premier and a government spread misinformation in a way that is damaging Victoria's confidence in our institutions – directly damaging Victoria's confidence in our institutions – because the misinformation they are spreading is beyond anything we have ever seen before in Victoria. This is a level of misinformation that has never been seen before. The sledge motion goes to it on working from home, but also on other matters in relation to political parties, on both issues, the Premier herself has been the chief misinformation spreader in this state. It is no wonder

she has no friends on social media. It is no wonder that she has to buy bots from overseas, because this Premier is spreading so much misinformation, as the motion itself speaks to. It is clear from this motion and what strikes me from it is that the Premier is the chief misinformation spreader. She is causing damage and causing distrust amongst our institutions. Shame on the Premier, who thinks it is appropriate to spread misinformation. We have said almost every single day that we support working from home. How clear is that? What the Premier has done in a –

Danny Pearson interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the minister at the table to refrain and the member for Brighton to continue.

James NEWBURY: We have said that we support working from home. We support working from home. How many times do I need to say it? We support working from home. We support working from home. And every single member –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: What the Premier has done is gaslight Victorians by not releasing draft legislation on this plan, and it is time that it was called out. The coalition has said we support working from home, so bring in the legislation. But the government will not.

Danny Pearson interjected.

James NEWBURY: The minister at the table has admitted the government does not intend to bring in the legislation because of politics.

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it is unparliamentary for the member on their feet to respond to interjections from the chamber.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member for Brighton to continue debating the motion that we have before us.

James NEWBURY: If the government members ceased interjecting, there would be less interjections to respond to. I again go to the point in the motion in terms of the government's legislation. The government has no legislation. It is gaslighting Victorians. The Premier is gaslighting Victorians. If the Premier had legislation, she would bring it in. We saw only this week a bill brought into this place that was drafted over a weekend. The government had the capacity over a weekend to draft a bill before bringing it in urgently for the house to consider. I would say in relation to the faux legislation which is pointed to in the motion: bring it into the chamber. If you have a plan, bring it into the chamber. We have seen successive governments put legislation into the chamber in the final week of a Parliament, designed to stop it passing the Parliament. This year the government has set out a legislative program that is short, that has us finishing in the early days of September for an end of November election –

Danny Pearson interjected.

James NEWBURY: Acting Speaker, it is unparliamentary for the minister to be screaming abuse. I do not know if he has had an early lunch, but the early –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Excuse me. Minister at the table, please hold your enthusiasm back a bit. The member for Brighton has the floor, and he is entitled to be heard. Member for Brighton, you have got to stop pointing. You have got to use your words rather than just pointing at him. What are you asking me to do when you point at him?

James NEWBURY: Acting Speaker, I think next door can hear the abusive language that is coming out of the minister's mouth. I am sure you can hear it. I do not think I need to make you aware of every instance where someone is abusive, and it is only reasonable –

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Brighton is reflecting very badly on the Chair, and I ask him to apologise to the Chair.

Brad Rowswell: On the point of order, I think you will agree, Acting Speaker, that the intervention by the member for Eureka is unnecessary and also untrue, and I am confident that you will rule accordingly.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I am going to ask the member for Brighton to come back. I am going to remind the minister at the table to allow the member for Brighton to make his contribution without assistance, and I call on the member for Brighton to continue to make his contribution to the motion before us.

James NEWBURY: As I have been, Acting Speaker. This is where we have descended to: a government that is shouting personal abuse across a chamber. That just goes to show the quality of the minister. The only thing I could suggest is that he has had an early long lunch, as he is prone to do.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Excuse me, member for Brighton. I am asking you to discuss the matters of the motion on the table and stop making character references about the minister at the table.

James NEWBURY: I appreciate that you heard my contribution. It seems that some contributions can be heard. On the motion, as I was saying in relation to the government's faux legislation, we have called for the government to introduce their legislation, not put out social media tiles about what they are going to do, not release press releases saying what they might do, because it is fair and reasonable to be concerned that with the timing of the parliamentary year it will not be possible for the government to put through their entire legislative program unless they map out properly what they intend to do throughout the remainder of the year. As I have said, the Parliament finishes in the early days of September. I understand from media reports the Premier said yesterday there is an intention to release legislation in July. Well, anybody in Victoria can go onto the Victorian Parliament's website and they can see that Parliament does not sit in July; it sits for two days at the end of July. Parliament is not sitting for the entirety of July, so the government has a window of a very, very short couple of days to try and finish their entire legislative program. I think every Victorian should start to ask about this, and they have seen this in the past when it has come to government previously. Governments have a habit of putting in bills at the end of a term with a known intention for it not to pass before the election – a known intention – and when it does not get through the Parliament because of a lack of time governments will say, 'It's not our fault. We intended to do it, but there was so much legislation we couldn't get it passed. It just couldn't get passed in time.'

I think every Victorian has a right to ask whether the government actually has an intention to legislate this policy. Do they have an intention? If they do, why would they not bring in the legislation? Is the government seriously suggesting that it is unable to introduce legislation? As I said before, early this week we saw a bill drafted over a weekend. It was brought in on Tuesday. It was provided urgent status effectively – not officially, but the house committed to do that. I requested on that instance for the house to consider the matter on the first day and for the house to consider that matter swiftly, and it was put through; the Council is considering that matter today. The government in that instance was very able to see that legislation dealt with and acquitted within one day and to have the Council considering it today. So the idea that the government have not got the capacity to legislate before July, when the Parliament is not sitting, their working from home legislation suggests to me –

Belinda Wilson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: relevance.

James Newbury interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Excuse me, member for Brighton. Just a moment. She can make a point of order. Now I am going to call you to respond to the point of order, but you should not be shouting while you are on your feet. Could you please –

James NEWBURY: Acting Speaker, you are reflecting on me.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I am.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, item 3 of the substantive motion talks about the legislative plan of the government, which is entirely what I am speaking about.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): There is no point of order. I ask the member for Brighton to continue to speak on the motion.

James NEWBURY: As I have been, and I will continue speaking about the legislative plan, or lack thereof, of this government. This government clearly, in my view, do not intend to put legislation to this Parliament and see it passed, because if they did, the legislation would be before the house today. I am saying not just that this government, because I think they know what they are doing by way of their gaslighting, but every Victorian should now ask the truthfulness of what this Premier has committed to. Truthfulness, because the coalition supports working from home, and we have said we want to see the legislation. Please bring in the legislation – that is what the coalition has said. We have said we want to see the legislation. We want the legislation to come in, because you cannot make new law by a Premier's press release. That is not law. The Premier's Facebook and Instagram posts to her African bots are not new law.

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: That is where the bots are coming from.

Nicole Werner interjected.

James NEWBURY: And South-East Asia. That is where the bots are coming from.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: Both.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I would ask the member for Brighton not to react to interjections and to continue to talk on the motion.

James NEWBURY: Where the bots are coming from was the point that I made, and an Instagram and social media post directed at the Premier's bots do not make law. Bills brought into Parliament passed by a Parliament make law. We would say that the government does not intend to pass this legislation and have it enacted before the end of the year. It is deeply concerning to Victorians that the government, and the Premier specifically, are being so political about this issue on when both sides of the chamber have said we support working from home. Both sides of the chamber have said it. There is an inherent mistruth and, as the motion says in line (b), a misinformation campaign, clearly, from this government, which is seeking to play politics with this issue. If the government intends to implement a policy, bring in a bill, bring in legislation. That is what the government needs to do. That is what this Premier needs to do. But the government is not.

This amendment that I have moved goes straight to the truth of this matter: that this motion proves how political and stale this sledge motion is. That is what it is: it is a sledge motion. It is nothing else. It is an attempted sledge on the opposition based on no truth. As I have said and as we the opposition have said over and over again, we support working from home. It is time for the government to bring in their legislation. I think Victorians are now starting to ask – because they know there has been no change in law. Victorians know the law has not changed. Victorians know that, and they know that we are now some six months after the Premier said people can work from home. Of course under their workplace arrangements many people are working from home, but Victorians are now starting to ask, 'Why hasn't the government attempted to change the law? Why hasn't the government tried to bring in legislation? Why hasn't the government brought in legislation? Why haven't they?' It is a very fair question, because the government only wants to play politics with this issue. They do not want to

legislate. The government does not want to legislate. If they wanted to legislate, they would. They could and they would. We have seen, as I raised earlier, an instance where the government was able to legislate over a weekend, but on this matter the government has not sought to legislate. In fact on the timeline the government has set out between announcement last year and some supposed introduction of a bill in July when Parliament is not sitting, it will have been some one year.

The government will not have legislated for a full year between the announcement and what they intend to do. As I said, legislation needs to be passed to change the law. It does not happen through social media. It does not happen through a press release. It does not happen when a minister stands at the back of Parliament and talks to the media. That does not change the law, which is why the coalition has consistently called for the legislation to be released. It is only fair and reasonable. In fact I think Victorians are now starting to ask, 'Where is the legislation?' I think they want to see legislation introduced. I do not think that Victorians think that –

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I will just point out that the member for Pascoe Vale has now reflected on the Chair three times in a row. I ask you to bring him into order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member for Pascoe Vale not to interject in this debate or reflect on the Chair.

James NEWBURY: As I was saying, I think Victorians are now starting to ask, 'Why isn't the government changing the law? Why aren't they doing that? Why won't they bring in the legislation?' As I have just outlined to the chamber, my concern on the legislative timeline of this year is Parliament is not sitting in July. Parliament is only sitting for two days at the end of July – two days. You cannot pass a bill through a parliament in two days. Even the bill we dealt with this week required several days to be put through both chambers. It did not just happen. It takes time to go through both chambers. So we would say not only do we support working from home but it is time for the government to stop playing games and introduce the legislation, because as we are seeing with this motion and as my amendment goes to, the government has been caught playing politics on this issue – gaslighting Victorians. That is what they are doing. If they had an intention to do it, they would.

Instead what the government wants to do is find any opportunity where things are not going well and use an announcement on this issue to take away from the fact that they have covered up corruption. That is what we have seen over recent days. The government is using working from home as a policy to cover up their failures on corruption. They are using this issue. How morally bankrupt can you be? Because the government could bring in the legislation and settle any question for Victorians as to what is being proposed, and the house could consider it, but they do not. They wait, they wait and they wait, because they know that if they hold the legislation back, they can make an announcement and try and deflect from the corruption that has occurred under their watch. That is shameful. That is political and that is shameful.

Anthony Cianflone: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member is not talking to the substantive parts of the motion. He is not being clear. Do the Liberals support legislating working from home? He is totally avoiding the question. He does not want to answer the question. I will draw you on relevance, please.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I am speaking to my amendment, which is entirely in order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Looking at the amendment to the amendment, yes, I can see that the member is speaking to his amendment.

James NEWBURY: I can understand why the government is concerned about me raising the truth of what the government's strategy is. I can understand why they do not want it exposed. The fact that this government is using working from home to take away from their cover-ups on corruption is

shameful, and that is what is happening. Instead of introducing legislation, the government is now holding it back so that they can use this issue to deflect from corruption under their watch.

How shameful, how morally bankrupt to use people's right to work from home – which the coalition has said it supports; we support working from home – to use that issue, and not legislate, purely to cover up what is happening under their watch in terms of a $15 billion corruption. That is what is occurring – and that is gaslighting. I say not only should the government introduce the legislation and introduce it now, but the government need to explain why they are using this issue for brutal, raw politics, trying to take away from the cover-up of corruption that has occurred under their watch. The parliamentary sitting calendar for this year shows how difficult it will be to pass that legislation, so I now question whether the government have the capacity to pass the legislation in the timeline they have set out. Bring it on now. They will not because they need a shield for their corruption. To use this issue in that way is shameful. That is what they are doing, and I think Victorians can now see it. They are using this issue to shield their failures in corruption. It is a disgrace and Victorians will see through it because this government will not introduce the legislation, and that speaks for itself.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (11:27): I am delighted to rise and speak on this substantive motion that has been put up by our side of the house in support of working from home. I note the member for Brighton is leaving the chamber the moment that I rise. He is happy to dish it out, but he just cannot take it, this guy. He can dish it out, but he just cannot take it at all. What we heard there from the member for Brighton is just as important as what we did not hear, because what he continued to say was that supposedly the Liberals support working from home. But he left out the key phrase, which was: do the Liberal Party support legislating the right to work from home? That is what he did not say. That is because they do not support legislating the right to work from home. That is why he has totally avoided the question. He has danced around the whole question and moved his amendment. Just to be clear, this motion says –

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, to the motion at hand, there was no question posed in the motion. It is simply a sledge motion. There is no question for the Manager of Opposition Business to answer.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): We have a broad-ranging debate that includes the words 'sledge motion' in it, so I ask the member for Pascoe Vale to continue.

Anthony CIANFLONE: The only ones that want to talk about sledging are the opposition. That is in their motion, not ours, because what our motion says is:

> That this house condemns the opposition leader for failing to:
>
> (a) stop the Shadow Treasurer's reckless campaign for mandatory five-day office return;
>
> (b) condemn the Shadow Treasurer for spreading misinformation on working from home –

which is exactly what he was doing in his reply –

> and
>
> (c) commit to Labor's plan to legislate working from home as a right for Victorians.

That is what our motion is about. On this side of the house we are very, very clear: we support the right for Victorians to have the legislated protections to work from home for at least two days per week. We are being very clear, we are being very open and we are being very transparent around our position, because we understand that supporting Victorians to work from home saves them time, it saves them money and it certainly allows particularly parents to have more time to work flexibly. It allows them to pick up the kids from school or from kinder, to go out on that little shopping run down to Coles or Woolies or the local IGA during the lunchbreak or to do the washing while they might be doing the Teams meeting at the same time. Whether you are a mum or whether you are a dad, working from home works for a lot of people. In my community of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West we have some of the highest proportions of people who do work from home. They work across all

sorts of sectors flexibly and happily, and they support that right continuing and to have it legislated and protected. But they know very clearly that the Liberal Party do not support legislating to protect the right to work from home. You do not need to listen to the gibberish from the member for Brighton and what he did not say in this chamber just now; all you need to look at are their federal colleagues. We have had the federal Liberal Party review finally tabled in Parliament. The secret Liberal Party review that no-one in the Liberal Party wanted to talk about was tabled by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and it made very clear some of the shocking policy calls and strategic calls that were made by the Liberals. One of those went to working from home.

Peter Dutton, the failed federal opposition leader, wanted everyone to return back to the office. That was very clear. But they still support that position. He may be gone, and I acknowledge his departure, but the current federal Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party Senator Jane Hume, who is a senator for Victoria, was the one leading that charge for people to return to the office five days a week full-time. The current deputy leader supports the abolition of working from home. The federal Liberals have no interest in it. The deputy leader currently in that chair, in that position, campaigned on it during the election. But it is also the member for Brighton's federal colleague, the member for Goldstein, the now Shadow Treasurer, who was the one – wasn't he the guy we all remember – that said it is modern-day apartheid, that working from home is creating a modern-day apartheid. This is not Peter Dutton we are talking about, who has left the Parliament; this is the current federal Shadow Treasurer Tim Wilson, the Liberal member for Goldstein – the federal member for the area where the member for Brighton is the state member – fighting the campaign to get rid of working from home.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, as is the member for Pascoe Vale's right, he raised a number of points of order relating to relevance. The member for Pascoe Vale is addressing matters pertaining to federal members of Parliament and the federal Parliament, which I do not believe are consistent with the motion that the house is considering. I would ask you to draw the member for Pascoe Vale back to the motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): It is a very broad-ranging debate, and we have seen that through the member for Brighton's contribution on this matter. I ask the member for Pascoe Vale to continue.

Anthony CIANFLONE: If the state Liberals do not want me to talk about the federal Liberal opposition to working from home, that is fine. Why don't we then turn back to the state Liberals, because the big missing piece in all this is: what does the current Liberal opposition leader believe when it comes to working from home? We have heard nothing at all – I have not seen the press release; I have not seen the members statement or the adjournment or the constituency question – from the current Liberal state leader, coming out to say yes, the Liberal–National opposition here support our plan to legislate the right to work from home two days a week. She has been totally silent. Is it because the Liberal opposition leader used to work for the Business Council of Australia, which is the cheerleading organisation that is fighting against our Labor government's plan to legislate the right to work from home? Is there a bit of a conflict of interest there, or is there a bit of a clue potentially in terms of her thinking and where her head is at in terms of this issue, and is that why they are being so tricky? The member for Brighton should write the next version of Kama Sutra, to be honest with you, with the amount of positions he has taken when it comes to working from home. He has got a hide on him, I tell you. He has got a hide on him to come in this place and claim that they support working from home but 'Let's leave out the legislation part' is the part that is going to protect working people.

Whether it is working from home or so many other big-picture items that our Labor government has been progressing, the Liberals have just always opposed them. They start off criticising whatever our proposal is. We then progress the proposal, we implement it, we deliver it, and they criticise it all the way through and beyond. If you had had the Liberals in office since 2014, none of the major things we have delivered would have ever come close to being delivered. We saw that during the Baillieu years from 2010 to 2014. Just look at the list of things we have delivered that they have opposed every step of the way. Working from home is just the latest chapter in that Kama Sutra edition of the member

for Brighton. The big infrastructure build – they opposed the West Gate Tunnel and the Metro Tunnel project. They opposed those two major infrastructure projects that we opened at the end of last year, which never would have been delivered under the Liberals. On the Education State, we are opening 100 new schools in this state – a tremendous milestone. Fifty per cent of the newest schools across the country have been opened in Victoria. When they were in office during the Kennett years, they closed 12 schools across my community of Merri-bek – unforgivable. Our community will never forget it. They closed the original Coburg High and Newlands High. They closed and decimated all 12 local schools. The new hospitals: the Footscray Hospital never would have been delivered, the Joan Kirner hospital, the Frankston hospital – the list goes on and on.

On each and every one of our cost-of-living measures, they have not committed, to this very day, to saying – where is the member for Brighton's statement saying the Liberal Party supports the retention of free kinder, the Liberal Party supports the hundred-dollar energy bonus, the Liberal Party supports free public transport for young people and seniors? They do not say these things, because they do not believe them and they will cut them. On major policy reforms – industrial manslaughter, legislating wage theft, major reforms that protect workers – they talk about claiming to be on the side of working people, yet every major reform we have introduced in this place to protect the rights and conditions of working people they fought against and campaigned against.

It is the same with housing. We want to put more young people into housing, and what do they do? The first major policy announcement from the current Liberal opposition leader is to slash 300,000 proposed homes in the activity centres. They want to abolish our proposed activity centres, including in Coburg, Brunswick and Sydney Road in my community. They oppose Plan for Victoria, the housing statement and the big social housing build as well, which is the biggest social and community housing pipeline in the country. We had the recent bushfires and natural disasters, yet every measure we take to try and combat climate change, they oppose. We have brought back the State Electricity Commission; they sold it off and they privatised it.

Members interjecting.

Anthony CIANFLONE: The member for Narracan knows that. He knows that. And if they ever got back in, they would sell it off again. In conclusion, the reality is that working from home is just the latest chapter in that whole debate where Labor stands on the side of working people and the Liberals want to cut, slash and burn.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (11:37): I feel like we need to take it down a couple of notches, as spirited as the member for Pascoe Vale's contribution was. Full credit for the way in which he presented it, setting aside the content of his presentation and the mistruths he peppered throughout – unchecked and untested untruths, which I will address during my contribution. The bottom line here is that all you need to do is look at this side of the chamber. We have got working families amongst us. The Leader of the Opposition herself –

Members interjecting.

Brad ROWSWELL: If you are laughing at working families and the circumstances –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Excuse me, member for Sandringham, please do not use the word 'you'. Direct your contribution through the Chair, please.

Brad ROWSWELL: I will do just that. The member for Warrandyte joins me at the table today, herself a working mother with a beautiful boy and a very supportive husband. I have two children myself. The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew, has a child herself – a beautiful boy, young Patrick. People on this side of the chamber are working parents. We understand the pressures that are placed upon the shoulders of working families. We get it because we are living it ourselves. We get it because we are living amongst our community. We are living in our communities. Our

friendship groups are, equally, working families who are experiencing the pressures that working families experience. I know from experience myself, from speaking to other –

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, seeking clarification, is he indicating he will support the legislation, because I am confused with his contribution so far.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I remind the house that we do not have a bill before us, we have a motion, and I ask the member for Sandringham to continue to contribute to the motion before the chamber.

Brad ROWSWELL: Indeed I will. We get it. We get the difficulties of being part of a working family. We get the pressures. We get the fact that for a period of your life you are in survival mode and certainly not thriving mode. There is a great sense of solidarity amongst working families, not just on this side of the chamber but resonating throughout our communities as well. With that as background, I just cannot understand for the life of me why, inside this place and outside of this place, and on the social media channels being infiltrated by the bots and whatever else, this government says time and time again, this Premier says time and time again, these Labor members of Parliament say time and time again, the ministers, the caucus members, the backbench members, the crossbench members and all of them say that we do not support working from home.

I want to say this really, really, really, really, really clearly, as clearly as I can. I get that sometimes it is a little bit hard for members of the government to understand words, so I will use clear words, simple words. I will say it as clearly as I possibly can, exercising articulation, diction and all those other things that will make it as clear as possible for government members: we support working from home. We support working from home – simple, period. Now that that has been said as clearly as I can, using as simple language as I can, hopefully somewhere between the ears on the government benches they would have recognised, picked up – at least thematically – something that I said just then. At least then they would know that henceforth whenever they tell these mistruths inside this chamber, outside the chamber, on their social media, whatever it might be, it is in fact not true that this side of the chamber do not support working from home, because we do. It is a circumstance where we recognise the need and the benefit of that for our communities. It is as simple as that.

This distraction has been brought on by the government because they do not want to talk about corruption on Big Build sites here in this state. They do not want to talk about some of the solutions that we have offered this week. They do not want to talk about any of that. One of the great injustices of the distraction the Labor government has brought on this week and last week is the fact that they are drip-feeding it. It is being drip-fed. They actually do not understand – they say they do, but in actuality they do not – the pressures and the demands on the lives, on the heads and the shoulders, that mental load that those working families experience, because they are seeing this through a political lens. They are seeing this as a political solution. They do not understand, because if they did, they would not drip-feed it. They would not drip-feed bits of information here, there and everywhere. They would be up-front, they would be frank, they would just get on with it. For goodness sakes, it was at the Labor Party conference – when was it? Last year? Last August? Silence from the government. Last August the Premier first announced their intent to bring this on, and we are now in, what is it, March. August, September, October, November, December, January – right, yes, I can count and it is less than 10, so I am all good. Eight months on and there is no detail. That is cruel.

Working families already have enough on, and they are trying to figure out how to support their kids, who have so much stuff being thrown at them at the minute – the increase in mental health concerns amongst our kids, the learning difficulties, the neurodiversity in children at the minute, the things that they are exposed to globally and around this state, the violence they see on television screens, via social media et cetera. That itself is a significant enough concern. Then there are the economic concerns. We have got a federal Treasurer who quite clearly cannot control inflation and keeps on spending, spending, spending and fuelling inflation, and the threat of the Reserve Bank again increasing interest rates. You have got the cost of education going up, you have got the cost of power

going up, no matter what the Minister for Energy and Resources says – 'Prices are going down, down, down.' How could we ever forget that from Minister D'Ambrosio when the truth and the reality of that is something else? Working families have enough going on without the cruel way in which this government, through a political solution – a distracting lens – is drip-feeding bits of information out. They first announced it in August. They are the government: get on with it. If in fact you are going to do this, if in fact you are so sure about it, get on with it. Was it Jerry Maguire or who was it? 'Show us the money' – was that Jerry Maguire? Show us the legislation. Show us the detail. That is what hardworking Victorian families –

A member: Don't start singing. Don't do that.

Brad ROWSWELL: No risk of that, Minister. Forgive my disorderly conduct, Acting Speaker. I think it is only fair that, with the significant mental load that working families are experiencing at the moment, this government cease and desist their cruel way, through the political framing and the distraction framing of this debate, and gets on and shows Victorian families the detail.

What this government does not want to deal with is the reality of the circumstance. What is on the minds of Victorians at the minute is the fact that they are not prepared to enforce the law, to chase the money and to stop the rorts on Victorian government building sites. That is on the minds of Victorians. And I will tell you why I am suggesting that: if Labor members, government members are curious as to what my source information is for that claim, check out the comments on your social media feeds. Honestly. I do occasionally, in a moment of absolute and utter insomnia, scroll through some of the comments on government members on their social media pages. Check out what they are saying, check out what Victorians are saying. Victorians want to know when their government will take responsibility for the $15 billion rorted on government building sites, on Big Build building sites. That is what they are interested in. They want their government to be accountable. They want their government to be up-front and frank. For as long as these sorts of motions are brought on, trying to wedge and trying to distract, frankly, we are not going to play ball. We support working from home. We proudly support working from home, and that is in fact the truth of the matter.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:47): I am a little bit confused by those opposite, because on the one hand they are protesting, 'Yes, yes, we really support working from home,' but 'All this is a waste of time and why are we talking about this and debating this motion in the chamber?' It is a little bit confusing as to their position, because it is one thing to say you support working from home. Do you support legislating working from home, because that is the matter that we are discussing today? But they also have said only this week that there has been too much spending by this side of the house on infrastructure and services for Victorians. You can see that with the way they consider Victorians, or perhaps disregard families et cetera, there is a thread, and this is why it is hard to actually believe them on this front. We know that federally, under the former opposition leader, they bombed on the whole working-from-home issue, and it was deemed to have been deeply alienating to the electorate.

I am going to pick up on that word 'wedge'. Why would we be wedging them if they actually were genuinely supportive of working from home? No-one is seeking to wedge anyone on this issue. This is about looking at the electorate, looking at their needs. We engage with families and other people in our electorate every day of the week, so bearing in mind long commutes and the challenges that they have to face paying for petrol or otherwise, it is actually about having that work–life balance. Because what is it: it is about work–life balance fundamentally, at the end of the day, and being able to balance the budget.

In my electorate there are literally thousands and thousands of people who work from home. And we are not going to apologise for having done a comprehensive survey on this issue, because I feel like there is also pushback, as if, 'Why did we have the audacity to actually ask Victorians about this topic?' We did because we care deeply for them and we want to make sure that they are able to balance all the needs of their families and their health and their budgets. We know that it really is a game changer, not only for families but also for the economy. We know, if we look at it financially, working from

home saves the average family about $110 a week, roughly $5300 a year. If the opposition are feeling wedged, that is their problem. I mean, if you say you genuinely want to support this, why would you say it is a wedge? Just be supportive of legislating it. So, yes, I got a bit confused by that comment because that really sends a signal as to what is deeply in their DNA, and that is, as they have been suggesting previously, to get all the public servants back into the office five days a week, as if somehow they do not deserve to have work–life balance either.

So thinking about this comprehensive survey, 36,770 Victorians responded to the survey. That is outstanding, and I really thank the Victorian community for expressing their opinions and their feelings on this issue, but it is also a testament to the fact that they care deeply and that this is really, really important to them. So yes, indeed, 74 per cent of employees surveyed said the right to work from home is extremely important to them, but over 3200 people told us they do not feel they can even ask their current employer for the option to work from home, hence the imperative to back in the workers and provide a legislative format for this important reform.

We know also when it comes to the 'why', why this is so important to people in our state, for some it will actually influence them choosing one job over another – that was actually 30,591 people, 88 per cent of those surveyed. Also, 88 per cent of participants say having the ability to work from home would make them stay in the job longer, 71 per cent said the ability to work from home would impact their decision on where to live and 83 per cent said they were more productive working from home in terms of both hours worked and milestones achieved. Certainly we can see the advantage for families, and I know there is this argument about, 'With certain professions you can't do it,' but if you think of a whole household, if one is a frontline worker but the other is able to work from home, then that provides a way of balancing all the needs of the family. The other point I was going to make, though, is that if you are not in a family and if you are single then maybe it might mean that at the end of the day you clock off, whether it is 5 or 6 o'clock, depending on your workday, and instead of spending an hour in the car you go to the gym or you catch up with your mates.

So when you are looking at mental health and wellbeing, this is about balancing that but also about reducing congestion, because obviously roads are only going to get more and more clogged – unless we of course have more and more people take PT, and of course we hope that they do take public transport. But otherwise for those who are commuting in the car there are a couple of days a week where they are not having to do that – saving on petrol, saving on emissions but also reducing congestion as well. There are many advantages for many in the community. I know some have said, 'Oh, well, you know, is it really splitting the workforce' et cetera, 'Does it only benefit some?' But of course if we are reducing congestion everyone benefits, and that is why this working from home reform is so very important.

I find it almost offensive that some people are saying, 'Well, we can only talk about one topic all week. We can't possibly in the Parliament juggle different motions and different debates.' I thought the purpose of Parliament was to be able to debate different matters, because suggesting that talking about this is a distraction therefore implies that they think that this topic really is not that important. If it is viewed as purely a distraction, that implies that they do not see it as a priority; however, on this side of the house we do see it as a priority. We are being very, very up-front about this, transacting it thoroughly, because it literally impacts thousands and thousands of Victorians. We know that there are, as I have said, thousands who are working from home already, so this will ensure that those who currently find it difficult or are not able to get that prioritisation through their workplace actually have a legislated backing to help support them.

I do find it curious, though, that those opposite think that we should not debate this thoroughly; it is a pretty major reform. I think that there is something to be said for actually having a really open and transparent conversation on something which arguably will have – and it already has proven to be the case with the many who are already working from home – a significant impact on quality of life. So I would hope that the opposition, instead of seeing debating this issue as just a distraction or labelling it as a mechanism to wedge or purely a political tangent, take it as much more important to Victorians.

We know that, because we have surveyed them thoroughly. No-one was forced to respond, but we had an overwhelming response and it was emphatic on many accounts, but arguably all the fronts that they led by were ones that I think good, reasonable human beings can understand: not wanting to be in long commutes, wanting to save money and cost of living and actually wanting to spend more time with family. I know from a lot of parents in my area the amount of time they spend in their cars getting their kids to and from sports. We want them to get them to and from sports; this is a really important thing. Certainly with our Get Active Kids vouchers we are all about keeping kids active and getting them into sport as early as possible, because we know how sporting clubs et cetera are so beneficial to the overall life of human beings. Sport certainly can encourage them into activities that they can take throughout their lives.

Bearing all that in mind, we know that this is about really striking a balance. There is certainly merit in that. Look, you do not have to take it from us, you can take it from Victorians themselves. Victorians have spoken loud and clear. We have given them that opportunity to do so because we value their input, so it is not just about the MPs in the chamber. Of course we are working hard for our communities and we are representing them here, but it is also about listening to them, and that is why we are driving this reform. But we make no apologies for having surveyed extensively and for transacting this in a very thorough way when we understand the far-reaching impacts of this, but we also know there are those who are not being supported, who are not being backed in and who need more assistance, hence the imperative for legislating this very important reform.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (11:57): We have heard from the member for Brighton and the member for Sandringham. They have both been very, very clear in their language on where the coalition stands in regard to working from home. The member for Sandringham said it three times very, very clearly. The coalition supports working from home. Very, very clearly it has been stated time and time again, and that is why the government has brought this – and it is a sledge motion; the wording of it is a sledge motion – into this Parliament. The government keeps saying 'Will you support it into legislation?' You have got to bring the legislation forward, because, as we know with this government, a lot of the time the devil is in the detail. It is hard to form an opinion on something when you have not seen the legislation. That is very simple. The member for Brighton leaned into it earlier.

I will reference the member for Albert Park before I go to the member for Brighton. The member for Albert Park just stated that we can do more than one thing at a time in this chamber. I agree. But it is interesting that when the opposition try to do more than one thing in this chamber the government tear up and get a little bit sooky. We tried to bring three bills this week into this Parliament to protect workers, to find $15 billion of taxpayers money and to make our construction sites safe for people, and the government voted every one of those down. The government complained that it was interrupting their business program, so why should we do that. That is what the government said this week. But now it is okay to bring a motion forward when we have not even debated the legislation. It is very hypocritical in my opinion. It is hard to debate something you have not read, and the motion itself is a sledge motion.

The reason the government has brought this forward today is because it is political – absolutely no doubt. The government this week is looking for deflection. That is exactly what they are trying to do this week. It is not going their way at the moment. It is not going the government's way. They are caught up in the scandal of losing $15 billion of taxpayers money, and now they want a deflection. That is why, rightly so, it has been a drip-feed all week. 'We've got to shift the focus. We've got to move it away from what is going on.' It is sleight of hand, and it is sneaky. It is quite sneaky. This is political. It is political because they are rightly under the pump. They just knocked back three bills in this chamber that would have found the money, got rid of criminals and everything to do with construction, and then they bring this motion forward to just deflect. They just need that deflection, because as popular as working from home is, they also realise that at least 73 per cent of Victorians want to know where $15 billion ended up. It was very, very clear. And the polls are not in their favour at the moment. It is very interesting, the sneaky tactics the government will use.

I do know the member for Tarneit. He supports working from home, absolutely 100 per cent, because he spends more time out of question time than he does in question time. The member for Tarneit takes it very seriously, especially between the hours of 2 o'clock and 2:45. That seems to be his sweet spot when he wants to work from home. That is his sweet spot.

I totally agree with the member for Albert Park. We should be debating more than one topic in a week, but do not cut debate when it suits you. Do not cut debate if you do not want to fix the construction sites. Cut debate if you do not want to find $15 billion. That is what the government has done this week, and of course this now is a deflection. In the motion they say 'Labor's plan to legislate working from home'. Where is the legislation? As the member for Sandringham rightly pointed out earlier, it has been eight months. I am wondering, is that eight months of drafting? What has happened? Is this paralysis by analysis? Is it ever going to come forward. We can have the debate. That is a fair comment. But they do not want to debate the things in this chamber that Victorians today are worried about. Even in this motion it says 'condemn the Shadow Treasurer for spreading misinformation on working from home'. I do not know if those on the other side listened to the member for Kew, who is the Shadow Treasurer, on the radio the other day. She was very clear where she stands on working from home. I think it was on Raf Epstein, from memory. She was very clear when she was asked the question. So that comment there, in itself, is misinformation in this motion.

Tim Richardson interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: It is interesting, I can hear my opposite number over the other side there. He is starting to sledge again. The problem with the member for Mordialloc is when there is a little grain of truth, he gets a little bit niggly and starts to bite. I would love to go fishing with him. It would be very easy to go fishing with the member for Mordialloc. He bites every time. This whole motion put forward is nothing more than a sledge motion, and it is nothing more than a political game when the government knows it is in trouble on its transparency and on its integrity.

I will tell you who probably would like to work from home: women on construction sites in this state. Women on construction sites in this state would probably really want to work from home because of what has gone on the construction sites. We have seen the footage on TV, we have heard the reports. What we were trying to do this week is fix this up, and the government did not support us on that issue, which I find pretty disappointing.

We should be protecting everyone on working sites. Again, this motion is purely to deflect and to move away from what matters to Victoria right at this point in time. Victorians are rightly angry that they have lost $15 billion to corruption in this state. I know that figure is subjective – that has been yelled out many times in this chamber. And I always say, well, if it is not $15 billion, have the investigation and let us find out how much it is. I think Victorians deserve to know. I think if it was $15 billion and you recovered 4 per cent of that, you could have built the West Gippsland Hospital. I know my community deserves good health care. That is a commitment the government made. It has not started yet, probably because there is not enough money in the budget. The cows are still on the site, and it was meant to start in 2023. Why not follow the money? Why not find out where it is? Why not recover some and actually put that back into what matters in this state?

Katie Hall: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, just on relevance, I think the member has strayed a long way from our working-from-home motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member for Narracan to continue to address the motion before the chamber.

Wayne FARNHAM: I will. In closing: if you want us to talk about legislating work from home, bring the legislation forward. It is really that simple. Bring it forward so we can have the debate. You cannot have a debate on thin air. Bring the legislation forward so we can form a position on it and so we can look at the detail. You have not brought anything forward yet. It is a fugazi; it is not here. It is in the ether somewhere. I will leave my debate there.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (12:07): I am absolutely delighted to speak about working from home, because I know in my community of Footscray, in Melbourne's inner west, we have a very large proportion of families who rely on the benefits of working from home. In fact I understand there are approximately 15,000 residents in my electorate who are working from home. During the pandemic of course we saw the emergence of some incredible women-led businesses and microbusinesses that were designed around the flexibility of working from home. You see every day at school pick-up that this flexibility works for families in the community, and I am enormously proud to be part of a government that is looking at these sorts of solutions to make life easier, safer and of course more affordable. I know that the local businesses in my community benefit too, because you see lots of people who are working from home now buying their coffees and their lunch at local cafes.

If you can do your job from home, I am very proud to be part of a government that will make that your right. If you can do your job from home, no matter the size of your workplace, we will ensure that from 1 September you will have a legislated right to do so. This is going to be transformative, particularly for women in my community, who often disproportionately carry the burden of school drop-offs and pick-ups and medical appointments and things like that to manage the family home. But I also know, and I think the Productivity Commission has confirmed this, that people are more productive at home. I know that on the very rare occasion where I have an opportunity to do some work from home, it can feel like you get a lot more done away from some of the distractions of the office. And it makes life easier. Not having to travel to work, to get those hours back in your day, takes traffic off our roads and also means that people have the opportunity to claw back some of that time in their day, which means that they can do something else, whether it is going shopping or picking the kids up. My kids are currently on strike from after-school care, so I know that it can be a very beneficial thing if you can get to the school gate and pick them up.

This is about fairness and flexibility, which can be less common in small businesses where more than 1.3 million Victorians work. I was listening recently to a Raf Epstein special on working from home on the ABC, and I heard a small business owner, I think from the electorate of Cranbourne, who owns a swim school. The owner of the swim school said, 'Well, certainly the people that do the administration can work from home.' I thought that was a really interesting way to think about it. I think that small businesses are understanding the productivity gains that can be accrued from working from home. Of course not everyone works for a big bank or a big corporation, and every day unions are hearing requests from people in businesses of all sizes to have reasonable work-from-home requests.

Across the country what we know and what we saw, certainly at the last federal election, was that the Liberal Party were absolutely tied up in knots over work from home. I heard the Leader of the Opposition yesterday again on the ABC unable to confirm whether the opposition would be supporting these endeavours to ensure that fairness and flexibility is embedded for workers when we bring the work-from-home laws into effect from 1 September. To make it happen we will introduce legislation in July, and the new right to work from home will be enshrined in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. This is the latest in the updates to the design of Labor's Australia-first work-from-home laws. It follows our update that work-from-home rights will apply regardless of the size of your workplace. As I mentioned, coming into effect from 1 September, disputes will go to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission for conciliation, and if conciliation fails, disputes will be heard at VCAT.

I will give some of the reasons that work from home works for families. More than a third of workers, including 60 per cent of professionals, regularly work from home. It saves families money, giving Australians back on average $110 a week or more than $5000 a year, which is so significant. I mentioned before the cuts to congestion. Victorians are saving more than 3 hours a week commuting, which can really feel like dead time for people who have so many pressures in their life, whether it is making sure that there is a load of washing on or there are groceries for the week. It gets more people working, it improves workforce participation, and that unfortunately is at risk, because we hear from

unions that workers are regularly denied reasonable work-from-home requests – we hear that, we know that. Whilst the opposition might say, 'Well, people are already working from home. Why would we need to legislate it?' it is because we know that reasonable requests are being denied. Flexible work should not just be a perk for the few. It should be something that working families across Victoria can benefit from, with the savings to the household budget, the workforce participation improvements and the family work–life balance improvements.

Our workforce participation rate is now 4.4 per cent higher than before the pandemic, in part due to this flexibility. We know that Victorian workers want and need their right to work from home protected, because we have surveyed them. We undertook a survey and received almost 40,000 survey responses back from workers across the state, and the message was clear. Seventy-four per cent of employees surveyed said that the right to work from home is extremely important to them. More than 3200 people told us that they feel that they cannot even ask their current employer for the option to work from home. Of those who cannot work from home but want to, most had requested it and were refused. Nearly all of them said that that refusal was unreasonable. So yes, this is a cultural shift for businesses, but it is a massive productivity gain for those businesses too. It does require a shift in thinking, because the labour market has evolved. Certainly the pandemic forced us to think in different ways about this kind of work, but we know that working from home works for families. I know that it works for families in my electorate of Footscray. I see it every day, and I am enormously proud to be part of a government that is going to make this happen for people who have reasonably requested to work from home but have been denied that opportunity. I commend the motion to the house.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (12:16): I rise to support the member for Brighton's further amendment: 'that this house notes how stale and political this sledge motion is'. It is clear in the house today that it is a political move from the Allan Labor government to talk about something that is not even legislated yet, something that we have not seen the detail of and something that they want to talk about and create a sideshow of instead of talking about the $15 billion of money that has been poured into the hands of criminals. It absolutely is political, as per the amendment, which is what I am speaking to.

Vicki Ward: Acting Speaker, my point of order goes to accuracy. I would caution the member to ensure there is evidence to back up her baseless claims.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The member for Warrandyte was being relevant to the debate.

Nicole WERNER: The government brings forward a sledge motion rather than legislation, instead of talking about the alleged $15 billion of taxpayers money they have poured into criminals' hands. On this side of the house we support work from home.

Vicki Ward: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I actually take offence at the statement that this alleged money was from the government. Suggesting that the government is engaged in this activity is scandalous.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): There is no point of order. The member was not talking about anyone specifically.

Nicole WERNER: We support work from home, as I was saying, as per this amendment, talking about how stale and political this sledge motion is. We support this amendment, as I have referred to. We are in a position where we have still not seen any legislation, and we know that this government is brazenly political. It leaves me to wonder what indeed is in this legislation. They want to talk about work from home, but they have not presented any legislation. We need to now think about what is in the legislation and then let us have a look at it. We know that this government is addicted to taxing Victorians. We know they have got a pet tax going, a school tax, the nation's highest property taxes and land tax for those who work from home – 63 new or increased taxes since they came to government. It is clear that the government have a $200 billion debt and that they are addicted to taxing

Victorians. We already know that this government charges land tax on those who work from home, and we have not seen this new legislation about work from home. Experts are already warning that the government's proposed laws could trigger yet another tax for Victorians. So I ask this question: is it the government's plan to legislate working from home just so they can sting Victorians with yet another tax? We already know they are charging those working from home with business land tax. It seems like they are coming after those who work from home next.

Under Labor's current changes, if a home-based business earns over $30,000 a year, the owner may be slugged with land tax, hitting startups, side hustles, freelancers, contractors and more. The *Australian Financial Review* reports that because of these changes more than 400,000 Victorians last year copped these bills for the first time. The government is already coming after those who want to make money from their own home. So I ask my question again: is it the government's plan to legislate work from home in order to be able to slug everyday Victorians with yet another tax? This would make for the 63rd or the 64th. It is these increased and new taxes that they love slugging Victorians with because they have absolutely indebted the state. We know the government is broke. We know that 46 per cent of Victoria's total tax revenue comes from property-related taxes, including land tax and stamp duty. We know that it is the highest proportion of any state and we know that Labor desperately need to plug their budget black hole, so they have tried to do that with tax after tax after tax after tax. So I ask again: is it the case that the Allan Labor government want to make people work from home so they can then slug them all with land tax?

Experts have been warning of it. Tax experts have been saying that these work-from-home laws could trigger another tax for Victorians. Again I say we support work from home on this side of the house, but what we do not support is taxing Victorians again and again and again like this Allan Labor government is addicted to doing. Home owners are currently exempt from tax on a primary place of residence, but the exemption does not apply where 'substantial business activity' is being carried out from home. This is where tax experts are saying permanent working-from-home arrangements could trigger the tax for workers, especially freelancers or contractors. In fact barrister Emma Mealy, an expert in state taxes who worked for the State Revenue Office, said there was definitely scope for employees working two or more days from home to be caught in this tax trap. I quote this expert:

> It appears that it makes no difference to the commissioner as to whether a person works from home for their own business purposes or as part of their employment …

I go on to quote:

> For home office arrangements, the commissioner –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The minister at the table, the Minister for Emergency Services, and the member for Polwarth will cease shouting across each other while I am trying to listen to the debate.

Nicole WERNER: I was quoting the barrister who is an expert in state taxes who worked at the SRO. She went on to say:

> For home office arrangements, the commissioner in the ruling focuses on the extent of the business activity carried on in the home office compared with elsewhere, such as the employer's offices.

I would not put it past the Allan Labor government to slug Victorians again with another tax. Again, we have not seen this legislation. Of course we are supportive of work from home. Again I say we are not supportive of another tax when they promised they would not increase or raise taxes, and here we are on the 63rd since they were elected to government. Here we are again on the brink of another tax so that they can tax every single Victorian all over again to plug their budget black hole.

Vicki Ward: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I do speak to accuracy. There is no compulsion in working from home, so I think that there is a great deal of confusion coming from the member in her speech that she really needs to ensure is accurate.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): We keep points of order short and succinct. The member is being relevant to the amendments that have been put forward.

Nicole WERNER: Again, to close my statements, the further amendment proves how stale and political this sledge motion is. This is the amendment put forward by the member for Brighton, and I rise to support it today. We see how political this government is. We see how political they are with this $15 billion of corruption money, which has taken place under their watch. Here on this side of the house, we have moved every day in Parliament this week a private members bill to clean up the corruption, to stop the waste, to stop the rorts and to find where this $15 billion of taxpayers money has gone, and yet again and again at every given opportunity they have voted it down. At every opportunity to stop the corruption, stop the waste and stop the rorts, they vote it down.

Katie Hall: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member for Warrandyte is not speaking to the motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The debate has been wideranging today. The member is still being relevant to the debate.

Nicole WERNER: It is because we are talking about how stale and political this sledge motion is that that side of the house, instead of talking about what is important to Victorians, wants to sledge the opposition. I mean, you have members of your own caucus saying to us that they are going out there and Victorians are asking them about the $15 billion of corruption. Your own caucus is saying that. Your own government members are saying that. It is so true, and so that is why this government needs to come clean and stop playing politics. That is why on this side of the house we have a plan. We have a plan to tackle this corruption, we have a plan to not misuse taxpayers money for corruption and we have a plan to enforce the law, to find the money and to stop the rorts. I commend the amendments from the member for Brighton to the house.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:27): Don't I feel privileged for getting the pre-screening of the latest reel from the member for Warrandyte – 3 stars. Those opposite talk about a sledge motion, but I think from what we are hearing from those opposite, it is obvious they are going to take a sledgehammer to working from home. The scare campaign has started. We see here the sketch of their campaign against work from home. Firstly, they are going to say there is not enough detail. We have seen that they have rejected legislation and improvements in Australia before based on that. I am really interested in the Shadow Minister for Home Ownership and Housing Affordability's comments on property tax. It is quite interesting that she put work from home as a tax grab. She said property taxes in Victoria are too high and their government policy would put more housing, faster, in the outer suburbs, when a large portion of the property taxes are for developers to pay for the infrastructure for people and new communities.

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, clearly the repetition of the wonderful and forward-thinking policies of my colleague, the shadow minister for affordable housing, do not constitute the debate that we are having today.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Polwarth, what is the point of order?

Richard Riordan: The point of order is on relevance. I encourage the member to come back –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): There is no point of order. The member was being relevant.

Nicole Werner: On a new point of order, Acting Speaker, it has been brought to my attention and has been raised with me that there was some mockery made of the statement that I made earlier. I

would seek your advice in cautioning members on their use of belittling or slandering the way that people speak in the house, particularly when it is the week that we are in, number 1, and then, number 2, particularly when there are people who for –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Please, members to my right, cease interjecting. I am trying to listen to what the member for Warrandyte is saying. Can you go to the specific issue that has caused you offence, and the person.

Nicole Werner: It has been raised with me that a member in the house made fun of the way that I was speaking, and I would seek your advice in cautioning –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Warrandyte, take your seat. I would caution all members in the house to behave appropriately when in the house. If this has occurred, and I am not sure where it came from because they cannot be named, I would ask members to refrain.

Lauren KATHAGE: It seems those opposite are very sensitive when we talk about their desire to rush development in the outer suburbs and at the same time to require less funding from developers for infrastructure. This is the great lie of those opposite. This shows us who they are. Their focus is on the people in the inner and middle rings. They want new housing all pushed out to the outer suburbs and they want reduced support from developers for the infrastructure.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Yan Yean is not speaking to the motion. She is not speaking to the amendment to the motion or the amendment to the amendment and I would ask you to bring her back to the actual motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The debate has been wideranging, but I would remind members to stick to the motion.

Lauren KATHAGE: I am talking about the scare campaign that is being launched by those opposite, a key part of that scare campaign being around taxes. The member opposite raised property tax as an example of that and so I wish to explain how I am seeing this very clearly as the bigger picture of those opposite, because they do not trust workers. They do not trust workers, they do not believe that workers will do the work from home. They do not want to support those workers in the outer suburbs for whom work from home is life-changing. I know that from my personal experience and from my community's personal experience.

We are obviously shy and retiring types as members of Parliament, and I held a pop-up at one of my local train stations and invited constituents who were catching the train to answer the question 'Why are you going into the office today?' by placing a ball into the different answers that I had set up. Do you know what a lot of people gave as the answer for why they were heading into work that day? Because their boss does not let them work from home. To catch the train from Mernda into the city and back again each day takes 2 hours from that person's time with their family because their boss does not let them work from home. Well, not only will we let them, we will protect their right to work from home, to spend more time with their family, to save money on transport and petrol, to eat healthier meals, and to be more of a part of their community through volunteering, through reading to the kids in the classroom and being an active member of the community, and those opposite do not like it.

I think part of it is their view of the outer suburbs. We are really seeing that clearly. They want to reduce what developers contribute for infrastructure – we just heard that from the member opposite – by a reduction in the property taxes. They want to increase and fast-track estates in the outer suburbs. Come and say that to our faces in the outer suburbs, because it is not what people want to hear. They are happy with the government's changes, with the horizon of staged precinct structure plans, meaning that there is reduced pressure on the infrastructure in the communities, which can keep pace with the development of new estates. That announcement was not massive, did not get a lot of media, but for

my community it meant a lot. In the same way, work from home means a lot for my community. It is not just my community. We heard from the member for Kew on the radio this week how much it means to her community as well and to her own personal networks. So this scare campaign that they are launching is not just from the member for Warrandyte. I do not know, he is not the Shadow Treasurer anymore. Is he the Shadow Attorney-General, the member for Brighton? I am not sure what his role is anymore, but as the chief scare campaign tactician he has put media releases out already, making this tax scare campaign about work from home because they are worried about the support it will receive from the community and they do not want to support workers in this way. They are not on the side of workers. I thank those opposite for making really clear what their strategy will be going towards life-changing legislation and protections for Victorians.

Those opposite – we heard from the member for Sandringham – say that they support work from home. We have also heard them say that they support schools, and what did they do to schools when they were in government? We have heard them say that they support TAFE, and what did they do to TAFE when they were in government? They said they support cheaper housing, but we have seen the policy from them on housing and what that means for our communities. So when they say, 'We support work from home,' we know that they are hollow words. We know that they are not wanting to commit to work from home because in their guts they just do not agree. They do not agree because they are not on the side of workers.

We are on the side of making life easier for families, making life cheaper for families. If you pair working from home protections with things like kinders on school sites, the morning run for mum and dad to the school and the kinder is easier and faster and there are also the cost-of-living elements with that child going to free kinder and less time for mum or dad on the road getting around and not having to then get into the city or to where they work either on the train or with petrol and the costs associated with that. This is a government that understands families, that values and trusts workers and that is looking at ways of improving family life and improving community life. This is just one of the examples of how we are doing that. Those opposite do not like it; they are going to try and stop it. Do not believe them.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (12:37): I rise today to contribute and to support the member for Brighton's motion that we amend the government's reckless amendment and we move that this house also notes that the further amendments from this government prove how stale and political they are in acting. Acting Speaker, I know you know as well that the upper house in this place and this chamber with the Greens and the Liberals and the crossbenches have all supported the fact that we need to debate and have a proper discussion for the Victorian community about the $15 billion corruption allegations. The upper house has tried, and we have tried to bring forward three bills this week so that the people of Victoria can have confidence and faith that their hard-earned dollars, their hard-earned taxes that they have paid here in Victoria, have actually gone into the pockets of the construction industry and to the builders and to the workers in an honest, fair, transparent and decent way. This government, every step of the way, has done whatever it can to shut down that debate.

We see in this motion put forward by the government again today on the third day of debate this week, a day when we should be having conversations about where the $15 billion is; why the fact that the people, for example, who live down the Warrnambool line in great electorates like Polwarth and South-West Coast are left with train seats – 6124 fewer seats each week on the train; why we have train stations where all the safety docks and the all-ability access areas are closed; why people are left completely without reliable public transport, for example, in regional Victoria. That is what we have not got money for with that $15 billion. We have been denied basic services right across the state because the government will not put a legislative agenda forward here that makes sense.

One more really important example that is crushing the confidence in my own electorate is the fact that for four weeks now my 24-hour police station has not been able to open its front door. Why hasn't it been able to open its front door? Because they have not got enough money to fix it.

Vicki Ward: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I respect your rulings earlier that this has been a wideranging debate, but I do believe that the member is in fact really straying from the debate at this moment.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): I would ask the member for Polwarth to come back to the amendments in front of him. I ask the member for Polwarth to come back to the debate.

Richard RIORDAN: Thank you for your guidance there, Acting Speaker. Of course what I am attempting to do for the benefit of this Parliament and the great constituents of Polwarth is to highlight the fact that we are wasting time in this Parliament on this frivolous, highly political sledge motion where the government wants us to talk about a piece of legislation that none of us have seen. This government is trying to divert attention from the fact that we are so broken and despotic in this state today that we cannot even fix the front door of a police station – a brand new police station too, I might add. Somehow, for four weeks communities have been denied access to police services in my entire electorate. This is a really important issue. This is an issue we should be debating, not having a sledge motion that is wanting the opposition to make commentary on some imaginary policies that this government may wish to put forward.

Take, for example, the work-from-home legislation, which the government is very keen to talk about. They have been talking about it for nearly a year, but they have not given anybody any indication. No-one has seen it. Members of this chamber have not seen it, including members on the government side, unless they have all got copies and they are sitting on them secretly and not wishing to devolve them to us, which must be the case – I am looking at the member for Mordialloc, for example; he seems to know what is in this legislation. But my colleague the member for Warrandyte raised some very important issues before. Why would we as an opposition even begin to think about an imaginary piece of legislation when we know the track record of this government? As my colleague pointed out, 63 new taxes have been snuck in in legislation by this government over the last 12 years. Why would we for a minute not expect that there is a tax hook on this other piece of imaginary legislation that they are bringing in? And what would the tax hook be? We know, for example, land tax can now be charged on people who do substantial work at home. They are already charging that tax. I am not prepared for one minute to say I support anything that I have not seen, because if it means this government is going to send people back home to work and then tax them, who would support that legislation?

We know, for example, they are going to put in windfall gain tax. At the moment a windfall gain tax would not be applicable on a private family home, but if that private family home is now apportioned as a partially commercial enterprise and incurs land tax, it may also incur windfall gain tax. This government has been very, very, very quick to talk about that they are going to pay for their Suburban Rail Loop through charging uplift windfall gain taxes right throughout the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The member for Ringwood up there the government is looking to replace, and we are talking about Box Hill and we are talking about all these other suburbs out in the east. They are all going to have to pay for the Suburban Rail Loop because, guess what, the government has not got any money in the coffers to pay. But imagine the scenario where they say, 'Oh, you're now working three days a week. That's substantially a commercial enterprise. You now owe some land tax. But, hey, because a portion of your property is in fact commercial, you're also going to get the windfall gains tax.' This could be a double whammy tax hit by this reckless government against the most vulnerable working families. We have heard imaginary figures that they have got no backup for. The government is talking about saving people $120 a week. And that would be great if we can help average families save any dollars a week. Anything that makes people's lives better is a good move, but it is a sneaky, dangerous, terrible move if it just means we are going to tax people. They have form in this area; they have form.

Vicki Ward interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: The minister at the table is actually the biggest offender of this. She told all the CFA volunteers, 'We're going to give you new trucks, but we're going to make you pay for them.' That is what these guys do: they tax the people they are trying to help.

Vicki Ward: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, absolutely accuracy is always important in this place, and the member knows that it is (a) legislated that all funding from this fund goes to emergency services –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Points of order need to be short and succinct.

Vicki Ward: Secondly, volunteers are exempt.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): That is not a point of order.

Richard RIORDAN: Volunteers are exempt? I would welcome a visit from the minister out to my electorate to talk to those exempt families that are still waiting nearly 12 months to get their exemption. No, these people have form. This government has form. They will sneak a sneaky tax wherever they can on the most vulnerable people. It is as obvious as night follows day that this is imaginary legislation that these people have kept secret now for nearly 12 months. They have talked the big talk. They get out there and they sort of strut their stuff and blow a few trumpets about how wonderful it is going to be, but they have not yet shown anybody what they are talking about. The amendment today that the member for Brighton has moved is quite clear. This Parliament is sick of imaginary debates that this government dreams up to waste time rather than allow this Parliament to discuss the important issues of the day. Where is the $15 billion? Where is all the money that we are slugging people with on the CFA tax? Where is all the increased land tax going? How are we going to recoup all that windfall gains tax from the eastern suburbs, all the homes and small businesses right throughout the eastern suburbs with the windfall gains tax? I guess we have got a little sneaky hint coming through. This legislation is being hidden till the very last minute before the election. They have had a year to bring it out and they have not even given us a hint. That is because buried deep inside this is most likely a big new greedy 64th or 65th tax slug against the hardworking families of Melbourne and Victoria.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (12:47): I am delighted to rise to speak on the working-from-home motion. I find it interesting that those opposite are so riled up and telling all sorts of stories about what this is going to mean. I think they know this is a great policy. It is a great piece of legislation that will come before the Parliament. You often hear them claim that there should be more consultation, there should be more time spent on bills and there should be more time spent on policy. Well, we have given them the time. We have just had a whole consultation period where almost 37,000 Victorians responded to the government's survey about working from home, so the claims that they have been making today are just ridiculous.

I take note of the member for Yan Yean's comments today about their history in terms of stopping housing and stopping developers' contributions and all the half-baked ideas that we have coming from the opposition. This is legislation that we know the Victorian community want. I know that in my electorate of Geelong people are really excited about this, particularly those whose employers say, 'No, you can't work from home. You have to be in the office five days a week.' People are really excited, in particular women. So many women have spoken to me about this issue and its importance for them and for their family where they can actually have the opportunity to work from home for two days a week, which creates all sorts of advantages for them, particularly in travel. There are thousands of people that commute from Geelong to Melbourne every day. For those women to not have to get on a train – and for those men too, but I know that it is disproportionately women that are most impacted by their working hours – and to be able to have two days working at home, there is a cost factor in terms of their travel and also the hours. I know, as a woman myself, being time-poor is a big issue, particularly when you have got young children, in being able to drop the kids off at our free kinders or at school, depending on what age groups these families have. I also hear from men about

the fact that they think it is fantastic that if they cannot work from home then their partners can and about the advantages that that brings to the household.

Those opposite are being disingenuous in their contributions today. We know, given the survey that was done about working from home, that Victorians genuinely see that as an advantage. Families are facing more and more new challenges every day. We know the cost of living is a big one, but this bill that will come before the house will actually support the cost of living. It will actually support those families, particularly around the cost of travel but also with child care and all the things associated with leaving home to travel to work and then travel back from work. This is really significant. On this side of the chamber we have more than 50 per cent women in the caucus, and it is that 50 per cent women that are bringing these issues to the table and are being listened to and heard. These sorts of issues – the cost of living and working from home – are all really important. I know during COVID many people said, 'Working from home will never happen, it's too hard.' Well, people pivoted very well to working from home. We know many big companies have many of their employees working from home, and they have no issue with it. In fact they promote it. For those people that can work from home, having those two days will be a huge advantage to them and their families. We know that unions have raised this issue for a long time. They have workers who have been denied working from home for no real, justified reason. We are not saying you have to work from home. This is a choice. Some people may choose to go to work five days a week, but to have the option of having two days working from home is really important to those families.

Nearly 37,000 people responded to the survey. That is a huge number of people, and the biggest benefits that they identified were saving time, saving money, having more opportunity to do the morning drop-offs at our free kinders and at our schools and having time to maybe chuck on a load of washing or put the dinner on. Many people will say they feel that they are more productive doing that at home. So there are huge benefits to this. 13,300 respondents said their one-way commute took over an hour. This gives them an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening, or whenever they knock off work, back in their life, back with their family. 9200 said commuting costs them $25 to $49 a week in transport or fuel.

Tim Richardson interjected.

Chris COUZENS: I am not dancing to that. 28,700 said they were more productive when they were working from home. The most common arrangement people want is the two days a week from home, which is a balanced model our government supports. The message is really clear from Victorians, there is no doubt of that. When 94 per cent of people say that the two days of working from home would be life-changing for them – saving them money, saving them time with their families – I think you cannot ignore that. Those opposite need to be listening to their own communities, because I am sure in their communities people are saying the same thing. This will be a really important bill that will come to this house. Maybe those opposite need to be reading the responses from employees. There were just over 2000 employers that also contributed to that survey. 19,774, or 57 per cent of participants, were female and 40 per cent were male.

As I said earlier, women tend to be more impacted by working five days a week – the travel, the cost, being able to put a meal on the table when they get home from work, all those things – than men. But as I said, in talking to my community there were many men saying to me, 'This is great. This helps my family.' I spoke to a couple of families where the man was working in Geelong and the female partner was working in Melbourne, so the male partner was home well and truly before the female partner was, and it took up to 2 hours out of their lives together with their children to spend time together. To get that back two days a week, anybody would be doing that, surely.

I think there are so many benefits to this bill. I am really pleased that we have taken this position, that we will debate the bill in the house moving forward and that it will be implemented on 1 September this year. That is really important to all those families, to their children and to others who are carers as well, who have to go home and then care for elderly parents. Being able to do that with two days

working from home is a huge benefit. Checking in on elderly family members – all those sorts of things – makes a huge difference to people. I do know that many, many families in my community are really excited about it. They know that they will be taking up that option of the two days. But I will say again: it is not compulsory; you do not have to do it.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:57): It has been a very interesting debate, listening to both sides on notice of motion 2, the amendment from the member for Mordialloc and the amendment of the amendment by the member for Brighton and talking about the possibility of a bill coming forward, as the government has said, giving people the right to be able to work at home. But we stand here in the chamber today with just a motion with nothing substantial behind it. I think this is what the people of Victoria want to know: what is actually in the bill? We should be standing up here debating the bill, if they want to talk about working from home, to give people clarity so that the workers that are going to be working from home but also the business owners know where they stand and what the rules and regulations are going to be. Instead of being here wasting our time talking about a motion, we should be walking into the chamber, sitting down and actually discussing the bill, because I think every Victorian, whether you are a worker or whether you are a business owner, wants to know what actually is going to be in the bill. We need to be able to have the choice to be able to debate it, and we cannot do that today because it is only a motion. As the member for Brighton said, it is more of a sledge motion against the coalition than anything else.

By stealth, work from home might be happening at the moment in the electorate of Morwell. I would love my office to be open every single day of the week so people can come in. There is another parliamentary office there that is only open a few days a week, because we have people coming in complaining that it is never open, so maybe by stealth the government has actually started to do their data collection from there – 'If we only open it two days a week, is that going to work?' Well, it will not happen in my office; I would hope it would not happen in my office. It should be open five days a week. I am not sure if it goes on around the state in other offices, but the people coming into my office tell me that another political office in the seat of Morwell sometimes is not open every day of the week, and maybe the government is in there just testing the waters to see if this can work from home or whether we need that face-to-face contact 100 per cent of the time.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier: why did it take questions in Parliament for the government to cobble together a statement on M1 Trades & Labour when it has been known since mid-2024 it is linked with underworld figure Mick Gatto?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Clearly members are not keen on staying in question time today. There will not be any warnings. Members will be removed.

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Speaker, was the Leader of the Opposition this concerned about organised crime when the member for Bulleen was dining and having lobster with a mobster?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I am concerned about the member for Essendon's behaviour in this chamber today.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): I am very pleased to answer this question from the Leader of the Opposition and to answer it first and foremost by saying: it did not. The proposition she put in her question is wrong. It is false. It is incorrect. I am delighted to provide the Leader of the Opposition with the facts, and the facts are these: the Labour Hire Authority has the powers it needs to take strong action, and it is taking that action, as evidenced by the fact that it has issued a notice of intention to cancel the labour hire licence of M1 Trades & Labour as a result of an extensive investigation that has taken many months. So the assertion that the Leader of the Opposition has put in her question is wrong. This is further evidence that in having zero tolerance for alleged criminal behaviour we have taken strong action and it is working. There was action being taken by the police as recently as yesterday.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. The member for Polwarth is warned, the member for Rowville is warned, the member for Mordialloc is warned, the member for Frankston is warned and the member for Eureka is warned. From now, members will be removed without warning.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual, and yesterday she said she did not know anything about these allegations.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Again, I remind the Leader of the Opposition that the claim she has put is wrong and is incorrect and that the Labour Hire Authority is doing its work. Not only has it issued that notice to cancel the licence of this organisation, it has also cancelled a further 147 licences and blocked another 47. Victoria Police are making arrests and charges, including as recently as yesterday. There is strong action now to stamp out this criminal behaviour on worksites. Action is being taken now, and it is working.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): Can the Premier guarantee that there are no other underworld-linked businesses that still hold a labour hire licence in Victoria?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): I again remind the Leader of the Opposition that if she has an allegation to make the Labour Hire Authority –

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.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The question was quite specific, and the Premier is clearly debating it.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the Premier has been on her feet for 9 seconds. The Manager of Opposition Business is quick to jump up and claim frivolous points of order from our side of the house. I suggest that he have a look at the questions he is asking.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on her feet for a short time. I will give her an opportunity to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Labour Hire Authority have the powers they need to take the strong action necessary, as evidenced by the fact that they have already cancelled 147 construction industry licences. They have blocked a further 47. They issued a notice to cancel another organisation's licence just yesterday. If the Leader of the Opposition is fair dinkum about taking real action, any allegation she has to make should be made immediately to the relevant independent authorities who have the power to act.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier continues to debate the question and is being evasive.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: Formula One Australian Grand Prix

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:08): I rise to update the house that last year's Australian Formula One Grand Prix, if you missed it, was the biggest ever in Albert Park's history, and we are on track this year again to beat that record in 2026. In fact this year tickets across Friday, Saturday and Sunday sold out in record time – the quickest they have ever sold out in the history of the event. If you have not got a ticket, we want to welcome all Victorians to the fan zone at Fed Square – free fan zone, 10 am till 10 pm, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, live on-track broadcast, racing simulators, entertainment, driver appearances. It is going to be incredible at Fed Square. I want to thank the Albert Park community for their patience and for welcoming us and welcoming people from across the globe. I want to also thank the incredible member for Albert Park for her leadership of her community but also for her leadership in relation to this major event. This event showcases Melbourne and Victoria to 70 million people watching around the world – a global audience – and now with the new Anzac station open tens of thousands of people will be able to access this major event very, very easily.

Under this Premier this event has grown by 25,000 people in just two years, and we are set to beat that record this year. In fact under this Premier we have broken records on almost every single major event in the last 12 months: the Australian Open grand slam, 1.36 million people under this Premier; the Australian Open golf, 113,000 people, the biggest ever in the tournament's history, under this Premier; Formula One, 465,000 people last year and ticket sales this year have gone better than last year, and we will have the final figures in a few days; one of the biggest AFL finals series in the history of the AFL; and the Kusama exhibition, the biggest ticketed event ever held in the NGV's history, because we are not a one-trick pony in Victoria. We are not just about sport, we are about culture as well. But all of this is at risk. When the Liberals go hunting for their $11 billion black hole, all of it is at risk.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that it is not appropriate to hit the table when they are making a contribution.

Construction industry

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. There are a further two companies linked to Mick Gatto that hold a labour hire licence today: M1 Security Services and M1 Traffic Control Goulburn Valley. Why has the Premier failed to take any action against them?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): The member's question has a reference in it that is incorrect. As I have said earlier today in the house and on previous occasions, the Labour Hire Authority has the powers it needs to both undertake these investigations and take action. If there are allegations of illegal or criminal behaviour, the Labour Hire Authority has the powers and it is taking action.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question simply asked whether and why two companies still had licences. The Premier is debating that.

The SPEAKER: I know the question, member for Brighton. It is in front of me. The Premier was not debating. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I reject the invitation by the opposition to interfere with the independent investigations of independent investigative bodies. That is what the Liberal Party want us to do. We reject that approach. The approach we are taking is supporting those investigative bodies with more

powers and more resources, and that action is working – Victoria Police making arrests and charges as recently as yesterday and the Labour Hire Authority cancelling licences and blocking others. If there is further information to be provided to these independent investigative bodies, I would invite those opposite to make that information available to those organisations because they not only have the power to act but are doing so.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:13): The nominated officer for M1 Security Services' labour hire licence is one Stephen Kyriacou. In 2022 Mr Kyriacou was banned from managing licensed premises after a woman was found dead in the basement of Dreams Gentlemen's Club. Her cause of death was multidrug toxicity. Why does the Premier consider Mr Kyriacou to be a fit and proper person to hold a labour hire licence?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): This question says a lot about the Liberal Party. I reject the allegation that the member for Sandringham has made in his question. The Labour Hire Authority and Victoria Police have the powers they need to investigate individuals like the member for Sandringham has referred to. They have the powers to test the fit and proper person test that has been provided to the Labour Hire Authority.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, the question was quite specific. The Premier is debating the question. I have asked why she considers Mr Kyriacou to be a fit and proper person to hold a labour hire licence.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is responding to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Perhaps the member for Sandringham did not hear the start of the answer to the question. Not only do I reject that claim, I do not. Further to that, the Labour Hire Authority has the powers it needs, as evidenced by the actions it is taking to deal with these issues. If the member for Sandringham has any further allegations to make, he should be making them to the Labour Hire Authority, who have the tools and powers they need.

Ministers statements: International Women's Day

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:15): I want to wish everyone a very happy International Women's Day week and say how our government is backing women in the growing renewables industry. Our energy transition is creating 67,000 jobs in Victoria, and we are helping more girls and women to get into this industry and get those good jobs and conditions and pay. Whether you are an electrical apprentice who helped build the SEC's Melbourne renewable energy hub in Plumpton, like Jayla, who the member for Sydenham and I met just last year, or Samira at Specialized Solar & Electrical, installers with the SEC's one-stop shop program – I and the member for Narre Warren North met Samira, whose business is helping households slash their bills with energy-efficient upgrades – or one of the 217 women who so far have been upskilled through the free and subsidised Solar Homes training programs, it is these women and many more who are powering our state and inspiring other girls and women to do the same. That is not to mention the member for Laverton promoting the power saving bonus at the Duke Street neighbourhood house in Sunshine, which saves families $100 off their energy bills, or the member for Northcote working on securing a community battery in Alphington, or the member for Mulgrave, who has been promoting careers in renewables with the SEC's schools program. Jess Wilson's opposition will stop all renewable energy projects from being built, will slash the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) and the Solar Homes program and will send energy bills –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker: correct titles.

The SPEAKER: Indeed. Minister, I ask you to refer to members by their correct titles.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: The current Leader of the Opposition and her opposition team will slash all of these and kill off all renewable energy projects. None will get built. The renewable energy targets

will go. The VEU, the Solar Homes program and all of these training opportunities that are helping keep Victoria's power bills low for every Victorian and training women and girls for the new energy jobs of the future will all be gone.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, you cannot just attribute whatever rubbish you like to a member unsubstantiated. It has to be done by a proper motion.

The SPEAKER: That is not the way to raise a point of order.

Construction industry

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:18): My question is to the Premier. Since the Premier took office, two more Gatto-linked business, including M1 Traffic Control Greater Bendigo, have been added to the government's list of accredited traffic management companies. Why should motorists on the McIvor Highway, the Midland Highway or the Calder Highway be directed by underworld-linked traffic control because their local member is disinterested in corruption on government construction sites?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): I was just reflecting. The National Party used to be a party of substance. They used to be the voice of country Victoria. They used to represent country workers and farmers, and this is what they have been reduced to.

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

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I will. I will remind the leader of the once glorious National Party that the Labour Hire Authority has the powers it needs and has the tools it needs to take strong action, and it is strong action that it is taking. I remind the Leader of the National Party and the Liberal–National opposition that they opposed the creation of the Labour Hire Authority, who are now taking this strong action, who are cancelling 147 construction licences and who have blocked a further 47. We will continue to be focused on taking strong action. I will also say this to the Leader of the National Party: he mentioned workers, and I want to thank those workers on worksites across Victoria – worksites that deserve the best conditions and worksites that deserve the best representation, which is why we are determined to take this strong action. There is no place for allegations of criminal behaviour –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, once again on the question of relevance, I did not ask about workers, I asked about motorists. For the benefit of the Premier, it is not the Labour Hire Authority that accredits traffic management companies.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Pascoe Vale withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, a point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. The Premier was answering the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I want to finish by acknowledging the workers who go to work every day. We will back their right to have a safe workplace, to get paid well and to go home safely to their families. We know that the Liberal–National parties want to undermine this every step of the way. Well, we reject that.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, sledging is not relevant.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:21): There are now six M Group companies accredited for traffic management. Why has the Premier failed to act since the release of the Watson report to remove M Group companies as accredited traffic management companies?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:22): I again remind the member for Gippsland South that the Labour Hire Authority –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: My apologies. I dutifully doff my hat to the Leader of the National Party. I dutifully doff my hat to the leader of the once glorious National Party. The Labour Hire Authority, which was established by our government and opposed by those opposite, has the powers it needs to deal with construction licences and deal with the cancellation of licences, which is exactly what it is doing through the –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the requirement for the Premier to be factual, it is actually the department of transport that accredits traffic management companies, not the Labour Hire Authority.

The SPEAKER: It is a requirement of all members to be factual.

Jacinta ALLAN: Again, I know the Leader of the National Party – I will get his title right – is a bit sensitive about opposing the Labour Hire Authority. It has powers, and it is taking action.

Ministers statements: International Women's Day

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:23): I rise to mark International Women's Day and celebrate women and their remarkable achievements. To the amazing women who sustain Victoria's health system, I say a big thank you. Women make up almost eight in 10 of our public health workforce and deliver care every day with skill and compassion. On IWD we honour the dedication of these women in caring for Victorians when they need it most.

But we all know that actions speak louder than words, and for many years feminised workforces like nursing and midwifery were undervalued and underpaid. Quite frankly this is unacceptable. That is why our government, the Allan Labor government, delivered a historic 28.4 per cent wage increase for nurses and midwives, acknowledging this historical gender undervaluation and strengthening gender wage equity. We are also investing in building new and expanded hospitals and ensuring that we are creating jobs well into the future for our nurses, midwives and other women in our healthcare system. Whether it is at Frankston, Footscray, Maryborough, Cranbourne, Phillip Island or Craigieburn, these new hospitals built by the Allan Labor government are creating jobs and opportunities. It is one reason why under this government our healthcare workforce has grown by more than 50 per cent.

Victorian women know and healthcare workers know that when you have got an $11.1 billion black hole you will not be able to sustain the health workforce as it is at the moment, so on International Women's Day I call on the Leader of the Opposition to come clean and let Victorian nurses know how many of them she will sack. Is it 16,000? Is it 17,000? Is it 18,000?

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, attacking the opposition is a misuse of a ministers statement.

The SPEAKER: It is indeed. The minister has concluded her ministers statement.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:26): My question is for the Minister for Health. The government proposes to absorb the health promotion agency VicHealth into the Department of Health in order to save money. Much of VicHealth's budget is spent on small grants to community groups like sporting

clubs, encouraging participation of women and girls in healthy activities like sport, for example; on campaigns like SunSmart; on programs like the kitchen garden program in schools; and on a recent study into the benefits of opening school grounds to the community after hours – the subject of a press release this week by the Minister for Education. What VicHealth activities will the government be cutting to achieve these savings?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:26): I thank the member for Brunswick for his question. There is no doubt about it: when VicHealth was established more than 40 years ago, it was world leading, but times have changed significantly. Its original remit was to buy out the tobacco sponsorships that existed at that time in sport and theatre and arts and so on, and of course it was very successful in driving down smoking rates, and that driving down of smoking rates has been sustained. But there have been significant changes in Victoria's health prevention and promotion landscape since that time. Many more organisations are now involved with health prevention and promotion, including many that are funded by our government. I point to the $40 million that is invested in the community health promotion program through our community health services and NGOs so that they can undertake important health promotion and prevention work. We are very pleased to be able to deliver more than $6 million to Diabetes Victoria for their very successful Life! program. It is why we have directed $9.5 million of investment to Cancer Council Victoria for their important work, including – as I know is very important to the member for Brunswick – the SunSmart program, which is another very important health promotion program. But we also invest in our Aboriginal community controlled health organisations. We have established the local public health units. The landscape has changed significantly.

Will Fowles: My point of order is on relevance, Speaker. The minister is explaining what the government is spending money on but not explaining what the government will no longer be spending money on.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Another significant investment, which I know the member for Brunswick will be well aware of, is our leading investment – the largest single investment ever made in preventative health care in this state – in Smile Squad. We know that poor oral health is the leading cause of preventable hospital admissions in under-10s, and our Smile Squad program is targeted at those kids that need it most. It is clear that new problems need new solutions, and that is what the government is absolutely focused on. My department will continue the coordination and leadership that is necessary to shift the dial when it comes to preventative health care in this state.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:29): It seems as though VicHealth is still relevant when the member for Tarneit and the Deputy Premier are issuing press releases about its achievements even this week. In fact so many Victorians with an interest in promoting public health have called for VicHealth to continue. They include former ministers Nicola Roxon and David White, immunologist Gustav Nossal, multiple former chairs of VicHealth, the CEO of the Heart Foundation, Women's Sport Australia, VCOSS, the Public Health Association of Australia, the International Network of Health Promotion Foundations and the European Public Health Association. Will the government now abandon its plan to dissolve VicHealth into the department?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:30): No, we will not, and the reason is, as I have already tried to outline, that new problems need new solutions. The greatest public health challenge that we face at the moment comes to poor diet and obesity. Quite frankly, it is this government, through the leadership that we have shown at health ministers in striving to mandate the health star rating system, which will be a leading impact in tackling this issue. Also, as the Minister for Community Sport reminded me, our government's record investment in community sport and the healthy active kids vouchers are making a real difference, ensuring that kids are getting active. These two things,

helping support healthy diets and encouraging kids to stay active, are what will shift the dial on public health care in this state.

Ministers statements: International Women's Day

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (14:31): This week we are celebrating International Women's Day, recognising the incredible contributions that women make in our communities. Yesterday I hosted inspiring multicultural women who are making their mark. More than a third of small business owners in Victoria are women, and they are kicking goals in business, health and education while caring for children, parents and families. Yesterday we heard from the Minister for Women and many others, and a shout-out to the members for Broadmeadows, Geelong, Pascoe Vale, Narre Warren North and many others who attended.

The message from these women was clear: juggling family, work and life is challenging, and that is why flexibility matters. Working from home helps women unlock their full potential. I am proud to be part of a government that will protect workers' right to work from home. We will introduce legislation this year, and small businesses will have until July next year to prepare. This is a commonsense approach. If you can, you should be able to work from home. We know it is delivering a boost to small businesses in our suburbs and creating new opportunities across our state. Suburban cafes and small businesses are busier than ever. Less time commuting and more time with family is our priority. We know that all this is now under threat. We know what the Liberals in Canberra think about work from home, and those opposite are no different. On this side of the house we are backing families.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again a minister is using a ministers statement to attack the opposition.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there are rulings from the Chair that make it very clear that it is appropriate to compare and contrast the policy positions of the government with those who seek that office.

The SPEAKER: References to previous administrations are allowed, but not directly attacking the current opposition. The minister to come back to her ministers statement.

Natalie SULEYMAN: I will be very clear that on this side of the house we are backing families. We will always fight for fairness and a right to work from home, and this is why it will be law – with or without you.

The SPEAKER: I do hope, Minister, that you were not reflecting on the Chair. I remind the minister and other members that the use of 'you' is a reflection on the Chair.

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:34): My question is to the Premier. The Minister for Transport Infrastructure has confirmed that Gatto-linked M Group currently have a presence on the North East Link. How much taxpayer money has gone to underworld-linked companies operating on Big Build projects?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35): Again, as I have said previously in answers to questions of this nature, criminal activity and allegations of criminal activity on worksites are a serious issue, and they must face the full force of the law. They require strong and immediate action, which is why we have taken that strong and immediate action.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question specifically asked how much money the Premier has given crooks.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, that is not what the question was. It was similar, but not those words.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, on the point of order, the Manager of Opposition Business is consistently defying your very clear rulings that points of order are not an opportunity to restate the question. I ask that you ask the members of the opposition to desist from doing that when making points of order.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is a serious matter because workers on those worksites deserve to go to work every single day, engaged through the private companies that employ them, and they deserve to have safe and secure workplaces, which is why in providing Victoria Police with additional tools and powers and the Labour Hire Authority with the powers that they need we are seeing strong action on this front, with Victoria Police having laid multiple charges and arrests as recently as yesterday and a Labour Hire Authority, opposed by those opposite, that is taking strong action and cancelling licences.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the question. The Premier is not dealing with the substance of the specific question and is responding generally.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to respond to a question. The Premier is being relevant. She was referring to underworld-linked companies operating on Big Build projects.

Jacinta ALLAN: As evidenced by the actions from the Labour Hire Authority and Victoria Police as recently as yesterday, these agencies have the powers they need and they are using them.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:37): Why is the Premier so disinterested in finding out –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Premier! Attorney-General! The member for Eureka can leave the chamber for an hour and a half. I would appreciate it if you did not use unparliamentary language.

Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.

Jess WILSON: Why is the Premier so disinterested in finding out how much taxpayer money has gone to underworld-linked businesses that she will not call a royal commission?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:39): The Leader of the Opposition is absolutely wrong in her claim. When it comes to being interested or otherwise in policy matters, there is something that has been missing all week from the contributions of the Liberal Party to this place: not a word about the housing policy.

Members interjecting.

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

Minister for Transport Infrastructure withdrew from chamber.

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

The SPEAKER: I do ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: My government is focused on taking strong action now, and that is action that has been taken and is working. When the Liberal Party calls for a royal commission, it means cutting

into workers' wages and conditions and going after the good representation that those workers deserve, and we will not stand for that.

Ministers statements: International Women's Day

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:40): As we have heard, this week we are marking International Women's Day. It is a reminder of something that many Victorian women know all too well: that women with kids in this state are some of the most time-poor people in Victoria, and it is no surprise when they juggle school drop-offs, work, child care, caring responsibilities and everything that keeps a family running. So when we talk about progress for women and supporting women, we also have to talk about time, because when you give women more time back in their day that helps them stay in work – great for the economy – builds their careers and also helps them to continue to support their family. Of course one of the ways to give more Victorian women time back in their day is to protect their right to work from home, because working from home helps families manage all of those challenges and juggles, reduces commutes, makes it easier to balance family and work life, keeps more women in the workforce and gives them the opportunity to increase their working hours. It also saves money. It can save families more than $5000 a year, and we know workers across Victoria understand this. In Northcote – the member for Northcote and I were reflecting on this just yesterday – 43 per cent of workers say they work from home some of the time. The number is the same in Albert Park. In Ashwood and Footscray we see thousands of people working from home, and of course they love it in Kew, where 39 per cent of people work from home. They love it because it works for them and it works for their families. These workers also know that it is only a Labor government that will protect Victorians' right to work from home by protecting it in law.

Constituency questions

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (14:43): (1548) My question is for the Attorney-General. Can the Attorney-General provide information on what the Labor government is doing to close the serious legal loophole in Victoria's assault emergency worker laws? In September two uniform female paramedics had commenced their shift and intervened to calm a dispute in Mornington, where 11 females were assaulted. One paramedic is Kathryn McCormack, who was severely injured and kicked and is still awaiting surgery. Yet the charge of assault emergency worker was withdrawn because the paramedics were not considered on duty as they were on a break and not treating a patient at the moment of attack. The issue lies in the definition of 'on duty' in the Sentencing Act 1991, which for paramedics relates to hands-on patient care. In December I wrote to five ministers for Kathryn. I am still waiting three months later for a response from all five ministers. The law needs to urgently be changed to cover emergency services personnel whenever they are in uniform.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:44): (1549) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Safety regarding community safety in my electorate of Wendouree. Everyone in my community deserves to be safe and to feel safe in their homes, on our streets and in places where we work, learn, play and socialise. I welcome the actions of the Allan Labor government, which has strengthened laws to ensure that there are consequences for behaviours that are causing serious concern in my community. I also welcome support being provided to young offenders, particularly those through the work of the violence reduction unit, which is focused on early intervention and reducing harm. My question to the minister is: how is the violence reduction unit working with local communities to reduce crime and strengthen safety across the Wendouree electorate and more broadly? Community safety is not only about policing numbers, although I note that Victoria continues to have the largest police force in the nation. I look forward to the minister's response.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:45): (1550) My question is to the Minister for Emergency services on behalf of Leshya Perkins of Markwood near Wangaratta. The information that I seek is: will the minister prioritise Markwood on the disaster recovery funding arrangements schedule? I note Goomalibee, which also had a bushfire on 18 December, nearly one month earlier than the much larger fires on 9 January, has been included and added to schedule B. There are four categories in the disaster recovery funding arrangements funding. Longwood and Ruffy, which were hit the hardest, are category D, and Goomalibee now is a category B, which is emergency relief payments and council support. The two homes in Markwood, which lost everything in this bushfire, deserve government assistance as well.

Ripon electorate

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (14:46): (1551) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Minister, how is the Victorian government ensuring that families can access free firewood from designated collection areas this autumn? In communities across Ripon, many families rely on firewood to heat their homes, particularly around Maryborough and Mount Cole. For them firewood is not a lifestyle choice, it is a necessity. Normally residents around Maryborough have access to nine firewood coupes. In recent months that number has dropped to zero. This has caused real concern in our community, especially after last year's protected industrial action by Forest Fire Management Victoria, which prevented the felling of trees for firewood. I am very pleased that this industrial action has now ended thanks to a hard-fought agreement secured by the Australian Workers' Union, delivering better pay and conditions for the workers who keep our forests and communities safe, but families are still worried about supply. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with them.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:47): (1552) My question is to the Minister for Police. When will the minister and the Allan Labor government provide Victoria Police with urgent additional resources to ensure Rowville police station opening hours are restored to seven days a week, following the deeply concerning recent decision to cut operational hours back to only two days per week? Numerous angry local residents have contacted my office, deeply concerned and appalled at the cuts to the Rowville police station's public counter opening hours back to only two days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays between 10 and 6. This disturbing decision seriously threatens local community safety in my electorate, particularly for those who seek a safe haven fleeing from domestic violence incidents or other violent crimes and go to the Rowville police station and find it closed. Extra resourcing must be urgently provided to Victoria Police to deploy more police officers to allow Rowville police station to resume seven days a week.

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:48): (1553) My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, what is the latest information on the upgrades to Diggers Rest Primary School in my electorate? As the minister is well aware, this is a more than $13 million project that is going to deliver a terrific new hub and great new facilities at Diggers Rest Primary in my electorate. As I am sure all members have the opportunity to do, visiting local schools is one of the best parts of this job. Indeed I want to take the opportunity to thank every single teacher and staff member who works so very hard at Diggers Rest Primary School. This government has of course made significant investments in local schools since having had the opportunity to be in government. I want to again take the opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of the minister, and I look forward to his response.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:49): (1554) My question is for the Minister for Water. The Birrarung weaves through my electorate. In parts it is so polluted you would not dream of swimming in it. But what if we could make the Birrarung swimmable again? Our updated flood maps have caused

distress for businesses and households, but there is another silent victim of increasing flooding. Stormwater is the number one threat to the health of the Birrarung. It drowns platypuses, it sweeps pollutants into the water and it strips banks bare. The drains beneath our cities are not just concrete channels for waste, they are capillaries of a living system. We can do more to stop flooding and to filter the water that returns back to our rivers. While the planning scheme provides for new private developments, there is no consistent plan or funding for retrofitting our public system at scale – rain gardens, water tanks, permeable paving. Will the minister commit to ongoing funding to make the Birrarung swimmable again?

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:50): (1555) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. As the minister knows, last week we announced we are delivering Melbourne Airport rail stage 1, the West Footscray to Albion rail upgrade. We also released concept designs for the Sunshine superhub. First, we announced that we will rebuild Albion station and give locals there a fantastic modern station. Then we announced the Sunshine station superhub, a critical piece of work that will untangle one of the most complex rail junctions in Melbourne, and now it is time for Tottie to join the list of modern upgraded stations that Labor is delivering for folks in the west. This is why I am thrilled that as part of this overall project we will be delivering a brand new and rebuilt Tottenham station. For folks in Melbourne's inner west, this is not about a lick of paint or a facelift, this is about creating a new station they can finally feel proud of. My question for the minister is: what will this new rebuilt Tottenham station mean for commuters in my electorate who rely on this station to get in and around Melbourne?

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:51): (1556) My question this afternoon is for the Minister for Police, and my question is: when will the doors of the Colac police station be opened? The Colac police station is supposed to be a 24-hour service to the local community. Earlier this year it was announced that it would be cut back to business hours only – 9 to 5, Monday to Friday. That police station services my whole electorate of Polwarth, but since 12 February the doors of the police station have been locked. First of all, the excuse was that the police had to be diverted to help with protests in the city due to the visiting Israeli President. There is now a sign that says the door is broken. I received this correspondence from police command only yesterday:

> I agree this is very frustrating regarding the door for all involved.

Yes, it is, Minister. It is very frustrating. The people of Colac and district deserve to be able to get a police presence when they need it.

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:52): (1557) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and my question is: how is the Allan Labor government supporting energy efficiency upgrades in rental properties? In answering that question, we would be particularly interested in any details about the different rebates for owner-occupied properties and rental properties and how the government is ensuring low-quality appliances do not enter the market and end up in rental homes. This inquiry comes from a number of conversations we have had locally, including recently with Glenn, a Preston resident who is working with his landlord to upgrade their rental property. Glenn did note some of the differences in eligibility between owner-occupied properties and rental properties. We have chatted about some of the additional complexities. We certainly do not want to be subsidising wealthy property investors who then claw back all the benefits through rent increases anyway, and we do means test a lot of these programs. Any information that the minister could provide about how we are effectively supporting good energy upgrades in rental properties would be greatly appreciated.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to adjournment matter 1431, which I asked on 19 November last year for the attention of the Minister for Police, which has not yet been answered and is therefore overdue.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:53): I have reviewed the constituency questions from Tuesday and Wednesday of this week. On Tuesday the member for Glen Waverley asked the minister for an action, and I therefore rule the member's question out of order. Guidelines for questions on page 143 of the current *Rulings from the Chair* state:

> Questions should not seek opinion, particularly a legal opinion …

On Tuesday the member for Brighton asked whether the Premier will admit that she was wrong, which is seeking an opinion, so I rule that question out of order. Yesterday the members for Bayswater and Mornington asked two or more questions each of ministers. Members must only ask a single question during their constituency question, and I therefore rule those members' questions out of order.

Motions

Working from home

Debate resumed.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:54): I rise once again, as I was fortunate enough to get up to talk on this motion just before the lunch adjournment. We were going through why we are standing in here debating a motion on working from home when, realistically, we should be talking about the bill coming forward. We would love the opportunity to be able to debate the merits of working from home, not only for those individuals who will have the opportunity to be working from home but also for the operators of businesses that need to have it clear in their heads what the process is going to be moving forward for this to be achievable and what are going to be the roadblocks. We know that sometimes when bills come in there are unintended consequences. We have had it previously when the timber industry was shut down; the unintended consequence was losing the white paper manufacturing from Maryvale near Traralgon, my hometown. What are the unintended consequences going to be here?

We can have a motion which is probably working out to be a sledge motion against the coalition on this side, but we really need to be spending our time debating the pros and cons so that if this is going to go ahead we do get it right and know the issues that may come up. We need to know so we can actually have a harmonious transformation to be able to head that way, if that is what it is going to be. But we do not know, because all we have is a motion coming forward that there will be a bill coming in to enable work from home – something nice and shiny that the government can hold up, but once again with no substance. We need to know what is going to be in there and whether the government have once again just done a release to say they are going to be enshrining in law that you can work from home but they have not got any of the legalities about what it is going to mean to be able to achieve that.

If people are going to be working from home, are they going to be hit with the burden of another tax, because they are spending two days a week – compulsorily or if they want to – working from home? And small businesses need the opportunity not just for this bill to pass but to digest what this means for the workforce right across the lands here in Victoria. I know as a former small business owner and plumber, it will be very hard for a plumbing business to have people work from home a couple of days a week. You might be able to have your office staff work from home, but what does that mean? What is going to be the impact? Are we setting ourselves up, by being able to work from home, to make some of these jobs become redundant because bosses, in their wisdom and in their future planning, think, 'Do we actually need this workforce?' These are relevant, valid questions that we should be asking in the chamber – not putting up a sledge motion and wasting everybody's time in here.

I think the government side of the chamber has lost interest in it. I think this side of the chamber has lost interest in it, because we need to be spending our time wisely. The Labor government tells us that we should be debating motions on their merit, but here we are once again standing in the chamber on a Thursday debating a sledge motion, when we should be being very proactive. This does not affect a lot of us in here, I would not think, because we need to make sure that we are out on the beat engaging with our community. But it probably affects every single Victorian that has a job and is working, whether it be from home or whether they need to go into work.

Is it going to mean that my local coffee shop barista has two days working at home? Am I going to have to drive past the barista's driveway and have him run out and give me my coffee in my car? Does it mean that? We do not know. Will I have to wait for his toasted sandwich maker to do my croissant? We do not know. This is why we need to debate these things. Yes, they are frivolous and silly things to say, but these are questions that may pop up – the unintended consequences of what we do in this chamber. I know that I cannot run a plumbing business from home. I need to be out and about in the community to be able to do it. We are getting to the point where we do need some clarification and have the bill come in. We want to debate it. We need to debate these bills coming in because they do have merit. There are going to be pros and cons in doing it, so we need to make sure that we are ticking all the boxes as we go through.

But as I said, once again on a Thursday we are wasting the chamber's time. I feel that we are wasting your time having to sit in the chair and listen to frivolous debates, going from one side of the chamber to the other, Speaker, when we could be doing real work that is going to make our Victorian community's life easier to partake in, whether it be at work or at home. As I said, we have Tuesday, we have Wednesday, we get to Thursday and we have one of these motions put up. I know the government always says, 'Why aren't we debating what's on the government business program?' We have got the TAFE motion, which I am sure a lot of colleagues on this side here would love to talk about. I am sure on the other side too they would love to talk about TAFE and what that means. We need the opportunities to be able to stand in this place and talk about things that are going to matter to the Victorian public and talk about what it is going to mean for my constituents in the Latrobe Valley. We need the opportunity to be able to do that. What matters in my community and what matters in other people's communities is not a sledge motion against the coalition. Speaker, even though it is International Women's Day and I do wish you a happy International Women's Day, we should be debating something else.

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (15:01): I move:

> That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

> That this bill be now read a second time.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (15:02): Bob Hawke originally opened Broadmeadows TAFE in 1986, and it has changed thousands upon thousands of lives since, including my mum's. She went back to school when were kids to do a VCE bridging course. Her original intention was to upgrade her nursing qualifications. But TAFE opened up her world and her choices, like it does for so many others, and she went on to achieve a degree in social work at La Trobe and

enjoyed a successful career helping people at Broadmeadows Hospital. Labor governments have always valued our TAFE system, and we know that those on the other side do not. It was heartbreaking when they closed 22 campuses across the state, sacked 2000 teachers and cut over a billion dollars from TAFE, and we never want to see this happen again. That is why I am so proud to support this bill, which secures our TAFEs into the future through legislation and through guaranteed funding.

I cannot tell you how proud I am of our Labor government's investment in the Kangan Institute in Broadmeadows. Everyone was so excited watching the building go up and seeing Labor's massive $60 million investment in our community. If you have not already, check it out and see the incredible result – a magnificent state-of-the-art health and community centre of excellence, the jewel in the crown of Broadmeadows. It was so wonderful to be there again last week with the Premier and Minister Tierney. It is not just us who are proud of the building and the opportunities there. Everyone we spoke to felt so proud and valued to be learning and teaching in such a truly impressive space, with world-class labs, a fully functioning hospital ward, aged and disability simulation suites and kinder rooms, training people in the highest quality facilities for the jobs we need most. There is even a pathology lab where you can take blood from a dummy.

We met Darren Pearce, teacher of certificate III in individual support. He introduced us to students who had just started their free TAFE journey, including Alana Weir, Sophie Stokes and Sarah Kennedy. They shared inspirational stories about what motivated them to upskill, stories of care they had provided to loved ones in their lives and how fulfilling this was for them. They spoke of their desire to contribute further and to care for others in the community, to ensure a life of comfort and dignity for everyone. As you know, I love the north. The people here care deeply for each other, and there is a strong desire to give back, to contribute and to help others. I believe we are the most caring community in Australia. At Kangan you can turn those values into skills and jobs, and you can do it for free with our nation-leading free TAFE program. Labor is helping with the cost of living and making sure everyone has the opportunity for jobs and skills. You can feel Darren's passion for teaching and caring, and his success rate was phenomenal. Last year 22 people started his certificate, 22 people completed it and 22 now have jobs. The students we met were women, all at different stages in life – school leavers, career changers and those returning from work after caring responsibilities or raising families.

Free TAFE is a proven pathway for women, with almost 60 per cent of free TAFE students being women – another thing we can celebrate in International Women's Week and yet another thing Labor governments have delivered for women. Free kinder is great for everyone but particularly helps women take the opportunity to study and go back to work as well as giving our kids the best start in life and helping families with the cost of living. In the early years learning area we met more students, including Penni Sekeris and Olga Salles das Neves Pereira, who are both really enjoying the course and being able to study so close to home.

Bernie Dunne, early childhood education and centre program lead, talked about the huge difference the learning space made to her ability to teach, and she was so proud of the enhanced learning opportunities she was able to offer – so proud in fact she referred to the whole centre of excellence as 'my building'. And that is a level of ownership the students felt too. They really loved learning there, they felt valued and supported, and the exceptional environment helps to attract students to the many jobs in early education that have been created with our Labor government's strong focus on early years and free kinder. That is what free TAFE does – it values our community, it values our hands-on skills and it provides for the future, giving people the skills they need for the jobs they love.

Diploma of nursing students Emily Gosev, Aaliyah Boomgaard and Jaylen Sahinka shared similar stories of turning their personal caring experiences into skills and jobs and were really loving the hands-on experience at the hospital ward. Unpaid carers give so much to our community, and I give them a shout-out here. It is wonderful to see so many of them turning their values and experience into qualifications and jobs and giving even more of their beautiful hearts to the community by expanding the number of people they care for, and I thank them sincerely.

The Health and Community Centre of Excellence complements the other fabulous facilities at Kangan in Broadmeadows. The new Trades and Skills Centre was completed in 2021 and features state-of-the art plumbing training spaces, including a multistorey plumbing tower, a sandpit, welding bays and a gas equipment fitting room, as well as catering for electrician appliances and so many others – more real-life learning in high-quality facilities. The commercial cookery section hosts the marvellous Richards Restaurant, where I have enjoyed many a high-quality meal. I encourage locals to support our students and grab a delicious lunch on Wednesdays and Thursdays during school terms and experience for themselves the top-notch food and customer service there. Of course there are also the adult migrant English program areas, where so many people start their learning journey in Australia and so often make lifelong friends. There is also the beautiful Gunung-Willam-Balluk Learning Centre, the horticultural area and orchard and so many other hands-on learning spaces.

They have fabulous apprenticeship support officers too. It was such a pleasure to meet then with Minister Tierney last month when we celebrated five years of Apprenticeships Victoria and the help they have given over 80,000 apprentices to complete their qualifications and obtain a trade paper. Only Labor is making sure apprentices have all the help and support they need from day one. We are also bringing in the Apprentice Helpdesk, a one-stop shop for both apprentices and parents that provides advice and support, including information about wages, entitlements and health and wellbeing at work. We provide the apprentice employee assistance program, providing free confidential support for mental health and personal issues, difficult workplace situations and financial concerns. And now in its third year, Tradie Bootcamp supports women going into trade apprenticeships through a mix of classroom learning, worksite experience and skills development. We loved meeting the apprentices who had benefited from this support, including local mother of five Talitha, who was in her fourth year of construction management and very keen to become a building forewoman. She was really loving the job but also particularly proud that her children have witnessed her empowerment through training, working and being financially independent.

I also take this opportunity to give a shout-out to an amazing local Sally Caruana, founder and CEO of Sheforce, the first female-led labour hire and recruitment social enterprise, bridging the gender gap in industries such as construction, transport and manufacturing. Her vision, just like mine, is a world with equal, inclusive workplaces where everyone is valued, respected and supported. On this side of the house we believe everyone deserves the right to work and learn, and free TAFE gives people these opportunities, especially in my community.

Completion rates at Kangan indicate 27 per cent of students have a disability and over 50 per cent of students are culturally and linguistically diverse. Our Labor government have invested more than $16 billion in new and base funding into our TAFE and training system since 2014, and Victoria is the nation leader for free TAFE. It has been a game changer since its introduction in 2019, with over 80 free courses across the state. It has been so successful that the Albanese Labor government has now rolled it out Australia wide. The free courses on offer this year at Kangan include building and construction, engineering, nursing, early childhood care, cybersecurity, IT, animal studies, vet nursing, dental assisting, youth work, commercial cookery, aged care, disability care, health, justice, community service, logistics and accounting and bookkeeping.

My daughter has just started her year 12 journey and wanted me to look over her tertiary preference form last night. How fabulous was it that she could also add a diploma of nursing, a diploma of community services and a certificate IV in engineering to her form, all of which lead straight into jobs or alternatively provide credit towards bachelor degrees, all for free and 5 minutes from home right here in Broadmeadows. We have also got the new university study hub in Broadmeadows in partnership with La Trobe. That sure beats the 3 hours of travel time I used to waste daily trying to get from Glenroy to Bundoora by public transport. The tech school on the Kangan site is close to completion, set to open in the next few months, giving more than 20,000 students from 28 local schools high-tech and hands-on science, technology, engineering and maths programs. It will have a focus on STEM-related career options, such as advanced manufacturing, automation, health care, data

analytics, construction, transport and logistics, and with the renewable energies program students will also learn about solar, hydrogen and smart energy systems, with a focus on environmental impact and the supply challenges we face.

While we were there with the Premier we got to see the cranes in the air, with 120 new social homes being built across the road on Coleraine Street, including purpose-built homes for people with a disability. Only Labor governments deliver real action on housing. These homes represent the biggest ever investment in Broadmeadows – a whopping $80 million partnership between the state and federal Labor governments, which I am so proud of. Enrolments at Kangan are up 20 per cent, and the TAFE had nearly 10,000 enrolments last year. It is no wonder Kangan has won so many industry awards. I want to thank chair Sharan Burrow and all the board members for their vision and commitment, as well as the new CEO Laura Macpherson, the former CEO Sally Curtain, all of the fabulous and dedicated staff and the wonderful head of campus Melissa Tinetti, who I worked closely with on the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (15:12): I also rise to address the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026. I am grateful to the Shadow Minister for Jobs and Skills, the member for Evelyn, for her leadership on this bill, for guiding the opposition team through understanding what the government is proposing and for hosting us at the government's briefing on the bill et cetera – a briefing that I attended and engaged with as actively as I could. The bill before the house today enacts what was the political promise of the Labor Party to guarantee free TAFE, and that is what they are doing today. That is the headline. I would like to address that and some other details during the course of my contribution.

It is one thing to have that headline of 'free TAFE', but it is another thing to actually deliver the outcomes that the state needs and the state's economy needs for this to be as impactful as it could be and as it should be. I suggest that there is a difference between the intent of the title and the political promise of this bill and the outcomes. Something which I raised during the course of that bill briefing provided by the government and departmental officers was in fact that: it was to say 'Is there an opportunity within this bill to put some guardrails or a framework around the headline "free TAFE" title but also to ensure that Victoria has the skilled people that it needs for our Victorian economy to grow?'. I am sure I do not need to share with you nor with members present today just the dire economic circumstance that Victorians find themselves in.

That phrase 'Invest anywhere but in Melbourne' is doing the rounds of boardrooms. Certainly when I served in a previous shadow portfolio of Treasurer, that was the message that was given to me by large companies and smaller companies as well. They did not have the confidence to dip into their own pockets to work up the necessary capital to invest further in Victoria. The reason why they were not prepared to do that, or did not have an inclination to do that, was because of the high-taxing environment created by this Labor government. That is a serious concern because it actually holds back potential investment.

The other thing that they raised with me at the time too was the fact that on the government's numbers, the skills pipeline –

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, he has strayed a long way from talking about working from home.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): We are actually on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026, so I will say the member is relevant.

Brad ROWSWELL: Minister Brooks at the table suggested to the member that it was a good point of order. It was a shocking point of order, and it has been recorded for all eternity in *Hansard* that the member for Point Cook does not know which way is up, but there we are.

Okay, back to main broadcasting. The opportunity here is to actually address what the government has also identified as a skills shortage, and on the government's own numbers, that skill shortage is quite alarming.

A member interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: Well, it is, and it is a barrier to the private sector putting their hand into their own pocket and working up that capital to grow our economy. I think that there is an opportunity to link the aspiration for a greater skilled workforce and for an increase in the amount of skilled workers in this state to this bill as well. It is one thing for it to have the window-dressing of free TAFE, but it is another thing for it to actually have a practical, deliverable outcome. As I suggested during that bill briefing and in conversations afterwards, I think that there is a missed opportunity here to address that.

I am also concerned by some of the TAFE completion rates. I think there is an awful lot of Victorian taxpayer money being invested into students who do not complete those courses, and they are –

Members interjecting.

Brad ROWSWELL: I am sure Hansard will pick up some of the disorderly interjections from members of the government. Acting Speaker, you would have heard them too: 'What do we do? Do we refund them?' Well, hold on a minute. If the government is bringing a bill to the Parliament that enshrines in law free TAFE guaranteed, I would have thought that members of the government would have actually considered what those options are through the prism of being responsible custodians of hardworking Victorian taxpayers money. Some of these subsidies are not chump change for a lot of Victorians. Some of the courses, for example –

Members interjecting.

Brad ROWSWELL: Well, again, government members are being disorderly and interjecting. They have asked me the question: do I support free TAFE? There has never been a question about whether I support free TAFE or not. It is a lovely rhetorical question to ask –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Members on my right will cease interjecting and let the member for Sandringham speak. Member for Tarneit, cease interjecting.

Brad ROWSWELL: For example, the diploma of building and construction (building) had a commencement of 2819 students, but only 917 completed – a completion rate of 33 per cent – with a maximum subsidy per course of some $16,000.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on his feet is misleading the house. The vice-chancellor of Federation University has called out the notion that is misleading the house. Completion rates do not mean a waste of money. In fact people often go on to other degrees or other courses.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): There is no point of order.

Brad ROWSWELL: The total typical maximum subsidy per course is $16,125 for that particular course. I am not suggesting it is wasted money. What I am suggesting is that through the prism of free TAFE – through the prism of delivering a pipeline of skills that will benefit our state, benefit our economy, grow our economy, help us grow our way out of the terrible economic circumstances this government has got us into – the Labor government should have thought of in this bill a mechanism by which taxpayer money is better used. That is all.

In the short time I have remaining I refer to a newsletter, the *Australian TAFE Teacher* of spring 2012. It is from the union actually, the Victorian branch vice-president of TAFE and adult provision of the AEU. It says that the AEU Victorian branch's 'TAFE for ALL, All for TAFE' campaign was launched in 2008 when Jacinta Allan, the now Premier, the then Victorian Labor minister responsible for TAFE,

undermined the public TAFE sector with a disastrous piece of public policy. It goes on to talk about the funding that was threatened by the then minister responsible, the now Premier Jacinta Allan. So, in the 47 seconds I have remaining I raise this because we hear all too often members of the Labor government saying that members of the house on this side do not support free TAFE, we do not support TAFE, and they wax lyrical about all of that when it is in fact here. The AEU Victorian branch has called out the then minister responsible, the now Premier, for the disastrous piece of public policy in relation to TAFE that she introduced herself.

Michaela Settle interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The member for Eureka will come to order.

Brad ROWSWELL: The truth of this matter is I think this bill was a missed opportunity. Of course we are not opposing it, but it could have been so much better.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Before I call the next speaker I remind members in the chamber to have respect for the people on their feet. I cannot remove members from the chamber who continue to interject, but if you would like me to call back the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker to do so, I will do that. If I have called you to order, please cease interjecting.

John LISTER (Werribee) (15:23): In rising to speak on this bill I want to reflect on my experience, particularly as one of the teachers at my former school that was in charge of career planning and running the year 10 careers program, and I would like to wish all those staff and students out there in term 2 a very happy career action planning lesson season. This is the term when in year 10 classrooms across our Victorian government schools, as well as in our independent schools, their career action planning is done. This is when many of those 15- and 16-year-olds start thinking about 'What is it that I can do in my future?' This Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026 makes it clear to all of those students who are sitting there in classrooms today and throughout this week in this term, heading into term 2 with career action plans, that there is a viable secured option for them to be able to continue their learning, not necessarily in a university setting but still in a tertiary setting where they can get a really good degree. So it is important to make sure that as these students are doing that planning they know for certain that this Labor government has made it law that free TAFE is part of our structure for tertiary education here in Victoria, that they will be able to access those different priority courses, the 80 qualifications and short courses that we have in our free TAFE program, so that they can continue that learning journey that they have been on and get into good secure work. This is particularly important for the students that I taught and the younger people in my electorate of Werribee.

We have over 5000 students enrolled in TAFE courses. Some of those students are still completing their schooling – they can do a preapprenticeship, so they will be in a different TAFE course as part of their last two years of school – but a lot of them have finished school or taken an early pathway to a TAFE course. Some of the most popular courses that we see are the cert III in individual support, the certificate III in information technology, the diploma of nursing, the cert IV in accounting and bookkeeping and the cert IV in training and assessment. I will come to training and assessment in just a moment and why that is so important for the state more broadly. Some of those courses are all about caring for other people in our community, and it is important to make sure that they continue to be offered free of tuition fees so we can get more people into those different care industries. It is also particularly important when we think of information technology. It is that way to prepare people for the jobs of the future.

When I speak to friends who are teaching at high schools, their students are very worried about what their jobs might look like into the future. It is not only the security of what that job might be or the changing landscape of the market, particularly with the rise of artificial intelligence, but also whether or not they will have the guarantee to get into their course and be able to complete it. That is why this bill is particularly important for those students.

Free TAFE has also meant that we have been able to have more people qualified to deliver TAFE courses. One of the great things about free TAFE is that it helps perpetuate itself. We have people who are trained in training and assessment who can deliver those TAFE courses with that industry experience. Training and assessment is also particularly important I know for our emergency services, particularly our volunteer emergency services. Having this free TAFE training and assessment course that volunteers can access – it does not matter if you are leaving school or if you are 30 years old and wanting to assist the brigade – means that you can be one of those people who signs off other firefighters or SES volunteers to complete their training. It is particularly important and something that I look forward to working with the Minister for Emergency Services on and continuing to encourage.

Free TAFE is vital for growing communities across the state, just like my own. We have fought for free TAFE and fought for the TAFE system since 2014 when the Labor government was elected. It is not just about the qualifications that come out of it but the cost-of-living support. University and further training can be really, really expensive, and Labor governments throughout the years have provided different initiatives to help students get to these different courses and be part of these courses. It saves Victorians an average of $3000 per course. I know it was always really hard when we were doing career action planning – especially once we got to the end of year 12 and students had to make that final decision about which way they were going after December – to look at the course fees and the costs associated, especially in communities like mine. That was the difference between a kid continuing on to tertiary education to get a better job and not. We usually found them quite decent work, but it was not that further training that could get them into a job that could take them further.

One of the driving factors behind the low socioeconomic indicators in my community is that further education. A lot of families in my community have very low educational attainment when it comes to tertiary level. Free TAFE is quite often one of the first times that families, particularly around the central Werribee area, have been able to do tertiary-level study. Sometimes I walk down the street past the Gordon Institute, which is in Watton Street, and I bump into some former students, or I am at the train station and I see them rushing to take the train to Kangan or to VU or to any one of our other fantastic TAFEs. I bump into them and ask them what they are doing, and they say, 'Sir,' – they still call me 'Sir', which is very weird – 'I'm doing a cert III, and I'm halfway through. I'm really looking forward to getting it finished because it means that my boss will be able to give me more hours. It means that I'll be able to take on those extra duties at work.' For some of them finishing a cert III or a diploma can mean they can start their own business.

I was shocked the other day to see on Facebook an ad for one of my former students who is finishing up his diploma in building and construction. I cannot quite remember the code. One of the other quirks of the TAFE system is the number of codes you have got to remember. He is advertising a handyman service around Werribee. He got this course for free, and now he is able to use it to make some coin for his family. He is also one of the first in his family to finish a tertiary qualification. I will not necessarily name him because he will probably get embarrassed, but I will be sure to share that business far and wide, because this is what free TAFE does. It creates not only opportunities to learn but also opportunities to do better and to do better for the community.

One of the other really important parts of our TAFE system is nursing, particularly our diploma nurses. Whenever you go to places like the Werribee hospital or our community health centres or up to the urgent care clinic, a lot of the people who will be at your side, in and out of the room, will be diploma nurses. Having this option means that those students who might not necessarily have gotten that ATAR to get into a bachelor of nursing have that stepping stone to get into the nursing profession. A lot of students from our Karen community as well, who have a lower attainment of English when they first start schooling, are sometimes locked out of those bachelor degrees because of the English language requirements. But a diploma is available to them, so they use it as a stepping stone.

The small-l liberal champions over there talk a little bit about the cost of free TAFE and the cost of students dropping off. Well, one of the amazing things about the way our TAFE system works is that as people complete different competencies and meet those different standards for the different levels

of certificate, we can sign them off for that certificate. It means that they can essentially leave early from that diploma but still have a cert I or II. It is one of the amazing things about having this flexible TAFE system. We may see those numbers when we look at a diploma, but I know those kids are going out into jobs, into work and into running their own businesses. They may pick up their diploma in a few years time before the credits expire. This is a really important flexibility that communities like mine need. We do not need penny-pinching from those opposite. We need to make sure that we have a solid TAFE system and a guarantee for all those students who are out there right now thinking about their career action plans in the classroom, looking at the PowerPoints and doing the Morrisby testing. To have that option there, guaranteed in law, is something that Labor is championing. We are championing the protection for these sorts of courses, and education for all, to make sure that everyone can go ahead and run those businesses or be one of those first people in their family to finish a tertiary qualification. I commend this bill to the house.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (15:33): I rise today to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026, and I do so in two capacities: as the member for Prahran, which is an electorate built on hospitality and small business community, and also as the Shadow Assistant Minister for Tourism, Hospitality and Major Events. The workforce crisis in this sector is not a matter of public abstraction; it is a matter of empty kitchens, closed dining rooms and Victorians who cannot find the trained staff they need to keep their doors open. The Liberals and Nationals support a strong VET system, and we have never opposed free TAFE. We believe a vocational qualification is a pathway to genuine dignity and economic opportunity, every bit as valuable as a university degree. We will not allow Labor to say otherwise. This government is very good at naming things; it is not as good at delivering them. This bill deserves honest scrutiny, though, and we intend to provide it.

In substance there are three things this bill does: (1) it legislates the government's existing practice of publishing a list of free courses each year, (2) it legislates a 70 per cent funding floor for TAFE institutes and dual-sector universities and (3) it substantially expands ministerial control over TAFE operations, budgets and governance. We do not oppose the first two in principle, but the so-called guarantees are somewhat hollow. The free TAFE guarantee creates no legal rights; it cannot be enforced in court – the bill says so explicitly. All it requires is for the minister to publish a list of free courses. The number of courses on that list is entirely at the minister's discretion. The government could reduce it from 80 free course to 20 tomorrow and remain fully compliant.

A guarantee that cannot be enforced is not a guarantee at all; it is a press release with legislative letterhead. The TAFE funding guarantee, the 70 per cent floor, simply replicates what is already required under the National Skills Agreement with the Commonwealth. TAFEs received 73 per cent of VET funding in the 2023–24 period and 80 per cent in the 2024–25 period. The government is legislating a floor it has already been exceeding, with a three-year averaging window built in to allow it to dip below when convenient. That is not a guarantee, that is a minimum dressed up as a promise.

The Productivity Commission's report on government services released in February 2026 makes for uncomfortable reading. On this government's watch TAFE provider locations in Victoria have collapsed by 71 per cent. Real recurrent VET expenditure per annual hour fell 18 per cent to $9.44, the lowest in the nation. Victoria has the lowest rate of VET qualification completions per capita in Australia, and student satisfaction is at or below national averages. After years of Labor managing our TAFE system, Victoria is last – last in completions, last in expenditure per hour and last in the nation. And that is not a record to legislate, that is a record to fix, in my view. As to the finances, Box Hill TAFE recorded an $8.3 million loss in 2024–25; Chisholm, $4.8 million; and William Angliss, $1 million. Only five out of 12 TAFEs achieved a net surplus without one-off government capital grants. The Auditor-General has warned that the long-term financial stability of these institutions is at risk. The Silver review described the system as having:

> … continued skills shortages in priority industries, completion levels lower than the national average, and student satisfaction at or below the national averages.

Yet only five pages of this 45-page bill address free TAFE. The remaining 40 pages expand ministerial control. The government's response to a system in distress is not investment, it is control.

I want to dedicate proper time to the part of the training system this bill most seriously ignores, the independent registered training organisation sector. ITECA, the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia, is the peak national body representing independent tertiary education and training providers, and they were not even consulted on the bill. That alone speaks volumes in my view. Just before Christmas 2025 the Allan Labor government informed 58 high-performing RTOs that their contracts to deliver government-subsidised training would not be renewed for 2026. These were organisations delivering in construction, in engineering, in health care, aged care, food processing and community services. Staff faced job losses and students faced disruption, and that was nine days before Christmas. The government handed 58 RTOs a pre-Christmas sacking letter and then introduced a bill that does not even mention them once. ITECA's concerns about this bill are precise and absolutely substantive. The TAFE funding guarantee concentrates taxpayer investment in a single provider type without evidence that it produces better outcomes. It undermines competitive neutrality in the skills market and it systematically reduces genuine student choice.

The data does not support the premise that public TAFE always mean better outcomes. Let us consider it. Independent RTOs support more than 88 per cent of student enrolments in Victoria's skills sector, and over 61 per cent of Victorian employers chose independent providers for their nationally recognised training in 2024. National Centre for Vocational Education Research data shows students with independent providers reported higher satisfaction levels across all 10 outcome measures compared to public TAFE. Funding to the independent sector was cut by $7.3 million from 2018 to 2024, and non-TAFE providers now receive just 25.5 per cent of VET funding. When the government directs funding overwhelmingly towards public providers while the independent sector demonstrably serves the majority of students and enjoys higher employment confidence, it is not making a quality argument, it is making a political argument.

Students know quality when they see it, and the problem is that this government keeps narrowing their ability to choose. There is no funding guarantee for independent RTOs in this bill – none. If we are genuinely serious about student outcomes –

Members interjecting.

Rachel WESTAWAY: I find it extraordinary that the government laughs at this when this is about students who actually should have choice. There is no funding guarantee for independent RTOs in this bill – none – as I said before. I want to speak plainly about a sector being failed by this training system.

There are 56,305 restaurants and cafes in Australia. Victoria is home to 31.7 per cent of them, and the sector employs 706,500 workers and generates $2 billion in annual revenue. Yet according to ARCA, the Australian Restaurant & Cafe Association, profit margins have fallen to 2.8 per cent for restaurants and 2.6 per cent for cafes. It would be better to put your money in the bank. CreditorWatch confirms that 10.6 per cent of food service businesses closed in the past year, which is nearly double the national average and the worst closure rate in any sector in Australia. ARCA projects one in nine venues will close in 2026 and that, my colleagues across the room, is not a laughing matter. In an electorate like Prahran, on Chapel Street and Greville Street, in South Yarra and in Windsor, that is not a statistic; this is a neighbourhood changing beyond recognition. One in nine hospitality venues is predicted to close in 2026. That is not a market correction; it is a community losing its identity.

We are training 2575 chefs a year for a country that needs 50,000. Every year that gap widens. You just need to look at the jobs on seek.com to see how many jobs there are in that sector, and we do not have enough people to actually fill them. Every year another venue closes, another kitchen goes dark and another community loses something, and it will not get it back easily. When the government talks about hospitality training, it talks almost exclusively about commercial cookery apprenticeships, the back-of-house chef pipeline. But that pipeline, as I have just shown, is in absolute freefall. The

complete neglect is of front-of-house qualifications as well. The cert III in hospitality is a recognised training pathway for service staff, floor supervisors, baristas and the tens of thousands of workers who face the revenue-generating core of our restaurants and cafes. Priority funding has been absolutely stripped from it.

We support this bill, but we will move an amendment in the Legislative Council requiring that the minister's annual report include student completion rates for all free TAFE courses. This is not a complicated task; it is the most basic test of whether public money is actually achieving a public outcome.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (15:43): Dear, oh dear. Is it any surprise that the party that cut $1 billion from our TAFE system, closed 22 TAFE campuses and sacked 2000 workers does not support guaranteeing public TAFE funding? It is absolutely no surprise. As they say, when somebody tells you who they are, believe them. I am not surprised by what the member for Prahran just said, because I have a long memory. When the other side were in power and I was running to become the member for Bentleigh, I remember what their TAFE cuts meant for my electorate. Of course, my electorate is home to the Moorabbin campus of Holmesglen TAFE, where 100 staff lost their jobs and 100 TAFE programs were axed – what a disgrace.

This bill today, the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026, represents the starkest contrast between the cuts of those opposite and the investments of the Allan Labor government. It is an important bill, a practical bill, but most of all a values-based bill, because at its core the bill says something very simple, which is that in this state public education matters, TAFE matters and opportunity should not be reserved for those who can most easily afford it, and that is what this legislation is about. It is about protecting access to free TAFE. It is about protecting public investment in our TAFE system, and it is about protecting the future of vocational education in this state for the next generation of Victorians. The bill matters because Victorian families deserve a high-quality public education and training system that they can rely on. At a time when cost-of-living pressures are real, when households are watching every bill and every expense, free TAFE provides genuine relief.

It saves students an average of around $3000 per course. That is not a slogan, that is not a token gesture, that is real money back into the pockets of Victorian families. It is the difference between taking up a course or putting it off, it is the difference between retraining now or never and for many Victorians it is the difference between being stuck and getting ahead. My interest in TAFE is twofold. Firstly, as the member for Bentleigh, as I said, the Moorabbin campus of Holmesglen TAFE is in my electorate and it is a campus that specialises in health care, in hospitality, in trades. But secondly, as Minister for Local Government I recognise that TAFE is the ballast that holds up local government, because there are 57,000 Victorians who work for local councils in this state, and many of those Victorians are TAFE-trained Victorians. Essentially it is our TAFE system that is training these Victorians to work in local government to support their local communities.

This bill does three core things. This bill will guarantee continued access to free TAFE. Secondly, it will guarantee that at least 70 per cent of vocational education and training funding goes to TAFE. Thirdly, it will legislate our Victorian TAFE network so that public providers can collaborate for the benefit of students, industry and local communities. This is what makes this bill so significant. It is not just about today, it is about locking in the reforms that have rebuilt TAFE in this state so they cannot be unwound by future cuts, future neglect or future ideological attacks on public education by the Liberal–National–One Nation coalition. Because we know what happens when TAFE is not protected. We know what happens when those opposite get their hands on the TAFE system, and I went through it before: a billion dollars in cuts, 22 campus closures, 2000 TAFE workers sacked. Those opposite left our training system wrecked and run-down, and working people, regional communities, young people and career-changers paid the price. By contrast, the Allan Labor government has made a deliberate choice to put TAFE back at the centre of Victoria's training system. Since 2014 our Labor

government has invested more than $16 billion in new TAFE funding, including more than $660 million into 45 new and upgraded TAFE campuses. This is what real support looks like, this is what rebuilding looks like, and that is what this bill now seeks to protect in law.

If we look at the outcomes since free TAFE began in 2019, more than 225,000 students have benefited, and that includes 129,900 women – a clear majority. When I think of the Moorabbin campus of Holmesglen TAFE in my electorate, the Holmesglen Institute is the only TAFE institute in Australia that offers the bachelor of nursing, and we are very proud of that because it is offered locally in Moorabbin. But we also offer the diploma of nursing at Holmesglen Institute, and that is, thanks to our government, a free TAFE course. Every time I visit that simulated nursing training environment over at Holmesglen, every time I visit Holmesglen in Moorabbin, I meet the students, and I have met countless women who have said, 'But for free TAFE, I wouldn't be training as a nurse today.' That is the real difference.

This also benefits 57,000 regional Victorians, and it includes more than 22,300 Victorians with disability. Those figures matter, because they are real people who are going to have the dignity of work thanks to our government. It is also for the single parent returning to study, for the apprentice learning a trade, for the worker retraining after an industry change, for the regional student who wants opportunity without having to leave their community behind and for the Victorian who simply needs a fair shot. The areas that free TAFE covers are not abstract workforce categories. These are the nurses who care for us, the tradies who build our homes and schools, the early childhood educators who help give our kids the best start and the support workers who provide people with dignity and independence. These are the skilled workers who keep Victoria moving, and it is no accident that 70 per cent of Victorian apprentices are public TAFE trained. Apprentices and employers choose TAFE because of the quality of training, because of the expertise of teachers and because of the world-class facilities that this government has backed. This is the difference public investment makes.

In my electorate of Bentleigh we can see exactly what that looks like, as I said, through the Holmesglen Institute, and Holmesglen is not just a training provider, it is a cornerstone of opportunity. It is where students gain practical skills, real confidence and a direct pathway into meaningful work, and it is now set to play an even bigger role. The Home and Community Care Centre of Excellence is coming to Moorabbin. Through a joint investment by the Victorian Allan Labor government and the federal Albanese Labor government, $50.6 million is being invested to establish two TAFE centres of excellence. That makes Moorabbin one of just 16 TAFE centres of excellence across Australia. That is a major vote of confidence in Holmesglen, a public TAFE, and in the skills base of the south-east. The Home and Community Care Centre of Excellence at Holmesglen will help ensure Victoria's care economy workforce is equipped with the digital capability and practical skills needed to deliver high-quality, in-home and community-based care. Students will have access to immersive hands-on learning environments, including a smart house fitted with adaptive technologies so they can train in settings that reflect the real world they will enter after graduation. That is exactly what modern TAFE should be – practical, responsive and connected to real jobs.

Let me say as Minister for Local Government I am proud that many, many, many of the students who will graduate from that centre of excellence will work for their local councils – very proud of that. Of course the same is true of nursing, as I just outlined, because when we invest in TAFE we are not just funding courses, we are building capability, we are building confidence and we are building the workforce Victoria will rely on for years to come.

Free TAFE also supports sectors that are sometimes overlooked but absolutely essential to community life – local government workers, as I have said. For example, let us list some of them: horticulture, park management, conservation, library services, early childhood, business administration, civil construction, surveying and trades such as building and plumbing – all local government jobs, all TAFE trained. These are the people who maintain our public spaces, support our families and deliver frontline community services. We are investing in our public TAFE system. Unlike those opposite, we invest in our public TAFE system. They cut it to the bone. I commend the bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (15:53): The previous speaker talked about investing, but as I read this bill there are no guarantees about anything in this bill. There are no guarantees at all about TAFE or about the free courses that will be there in the future in this particular bill. But in starting off, I suppose we are of the generation where the old trade schools actually provided real workers for the economy in Victoria, and I would hope that the TAFE can do that into the future. People were well set up for their careers with the tech schools, and a lot of people bemoan the fact that the tech schools are no longer there. We would like TAFE to be more like the tech schools than some of the things it is actually delivering at the moment.

In my electorate I am fortunate to have at one end of the electorate SuniTAFE, with a campus in Swan Hill that delivers a great heavy automotive course that trains people for trucks and heavy farm machinery and earth-moving machinery and is a standout in the state. It has a building component that you would appreciate. That, again, is a great learning facility there for the trades for the building industry, and it also has a very strong healthcare sector in what they train for the healthcare sector there. But at the other end of my electorate we have Echuca, where Bendigo TAFE has a campus notionally. It is a TAFE drought. We might have had a good autumn break, plenty of rain in recent times, but when it comes to TAFE we have had a perpetual drought when it comes to delivering courses in the Echuca region by Bendigo TAFE. I note that the minister can actually set out the objectives of the TAFE network and has the powers in relation to what the TAFE network does. I urge the minister with the powers that will be given to her under clause 1 of this bill that maybe she might want to have a look at what Bendigo TAFE are not doing in Echuca and have them actually deliver a lot more courses into Echuca. With those particular powers that the minister is going to be granted under clause 1 of the bill:

> to provide for the objectives of the TAFE network; and
>
> to provide for the Minister's powers in relation to the TAFE network …

I would probably go to the comments that Helen Silver made in the Silver report, who found that there was considerable scope for financial efficiencies to be realised in the TAFE sector, notably by accelerating shared service reforms.

Silver found that each TAFE had its own student system, meaning there was duplication in costs and processes which impacted adversely on service delivery and student experience. Silver recommended that TAFE should pursue shared service reform and consider mergers, or all TAFEs merging into a single entity. This bill gives the minister the opportunity to carry out the recommendations from the Silver review to make TAFEs have shared services. Where have we heard this whole story before? With the health system in Victoria. 'We'll create networks, we'll have mergers, we'll actually put everyone together because it is more efficient.' Helen Silver has recommended that TAFEs could consider mergers or being put into a whole statewide single entity. This bill gives the minister the power to do that and to direct TAFEs to start to do that. She says that the single entity may result in up to $200 million in savings. We know how broke the government is; I am sure $200 million would be very attractive to the government through merging all the TAFEs into the future.

Silver also found there was a significant underutilisation of assets across the TAFE network and recommend these assets be sold. The rhetorical question to the other side of the house is: what TAFE facilities are you going to sell. They are very loud in their criticism of this side of the chamber, but they have actually got the Silver report in their hand that is recommending that TAFE assets should be sold. Apart from the $200 million in savings if they actually merge, Silver is estimating that those assets that potentially could be disposed of are $525 million. This bill sets it up so that the minister, the Labor government, can actually force mergers of TAFE and can then ask those TAFEs, under the statement of expectations, to dispose of assets. As you would know, Acting Speaker Farnham, when the government sells assets like $525 million worth of TAFE assets, that goes into consolidated revenue. It does not go back to the education system, it goes to Treasury. And Treasury, no doubt, has this huge black hole that it wants to fill because of the debt that the state has. This bill is a Trojan Horse, in my view, for the potential mergers of TAFEs, potentially one whole statewide TAFE, and

for the disposal of TAFE assets. I go back to being parochial with my electorate. I think SuniTAFE is probably very safe because it is doing a great job with its Swan Hill campus and the courses it delivers there. But when I look at the footprint in Echuca, which is absolutely underutilised, that fits into the description of what Helen Silver talks about. There may be a risk that the minister decides Echuca and Bendigo TAFE campuses are not delivering many courses: 'We'll sell it. We'll put that money into consolidated revenue to pay debts into the future.' Silver also recommended increased reporting requirements for the minister – again, an opportunity for the minister to find out where the money is and what can be done with it in the future.

In the time left, I want to talk about part 3 of the bill, the free TAFE guarantee – the title of the bill, of which the meat is on one page, on page 38, of a 43-page bill. We have got to get to page 38 of the bill before we actually talk about the title that is in the bill, which is the free TAFE bill. In my mind, if you were talking about a free TAFE guarantee, you would actually have a list of the courses that were being guaranteed. If you had a prescriptive piece of legislation, you would have a list of all the courses that were going to be guaranteed by the free TAFE guarantee. But all the all the free TAFE guarantee does is say that the minister must determine in each year a list of courses of vocational education and training that are to be provided by TAFE institutes and dual-sector universities free of tuition fee. So every year the minister gets to choose what courses qualify for free TAFE. There is nothing in this bill that says there has to be one course, 10 courses or 100 courses. This is all about giving the minister total discretion. There is this illusion being created that there will be all these free TAFE courses, but in reality all this bill does is give the minister the power to determine each year what courses will be on that list. New section 3.1.1A(2) says:

> The Minister must determine a class of vocational education and training student who is eligible to undertake the list of courses of vocational education and training determined under subsection (1).

Not only does the minister have the power to determine what will be free TAFE in any given year but the minister also has the power to determine what class of vocational education and training student is eligible to undertake the courses. Is that course going to be means tested in the future? We know the government is out of money. Are they actually going to means test those courses into the future to ensure that a certain class of students will not be eligible for the free TAFE part of that course into the future?

It says that the minister must cause a list of courses determined under new section 3.1.1A(1) to be published on the internet site of the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions. Again, you have got to go to an internet site to find out what determination the minister has made each year as to what is free and what class of people will qualify for those courses into the future. Just saying something is available on a website is a very easy catch-all for everything, because it is not that easy to find sometimes. By the time people navigate their way through websites, it is not easy to find necessarily. It can be buried a long way in, through quite a few links before you find what courses might be available into the future.

It also says this section does not create a legal right to any person or give rise to any civil cause of action, so there are actually no guarantees at all in this. There is a catch-all at the end that says yes, the minister determines what courses will be free on an annualised basis. The minister determines what class of student will be able to undertake them, so it could be means tested into the future, and then the catch-all at the end says there is no right to a legal recourse if people do not get what they want out of this piece of legislation.

This piece of legislation sets up a mirage that there is going to be free TAFE into the future, but the detail of it says the minister does not have to do anything. The minister can have one course that is free, that only a few people are eligible for, and that would qualify under this legislation. I believe this is a political stunt in an election year to try and shore up the government's failing support in the Victorian community.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (16:02): I am pleased to have the opportunity to make what might be a relatively short contribution on the bill before the house this afternoon and to follow on from the comments of those on this side of the house who have made significant and important reference to our TAFE sector. I have sat back and listened to some of the commentary through the course of debate on this bill and I want to go to some of the references that have been made in the context of the important history that occurred in this state between 2010 and 2014.

Speakers on this side of the house have outlined those significant cuts – more than $1 billion cut from TAFE, the sacking of more than 2000 workers and the closure of significant campuses. We have changed that since coming into government in November 2014 and have had the opportunity to invest in the skills and the training and the people, most importantly, that work so very hard in our TAFE sector. The opportunity to invest and to allow people to find new skills and new training is something that I know is incredibly important to the minister and those on this side of the house.

At the back end of last year I had the opportunity to have the outstanding minister in my electorate for our next milestone of the delivery of the Sunbury TAFE partnership with Kangan. It is a more than $25 million investment.

Steve McGhie interjected.

Josh BULL: I will take up the interjection from the fantastic member for Melton, who I know is also very excited about the delivery of TAFE in his community. Not too far from both of us is of course the investment in the Broadmeadows campus as well. That, if you like, forms that northern or north-north-west triangle of investment in training opportunities in TAFE, and I know how hard the member for Melton worked to secure that commitment. I also want to give a shout-out to the outstanding member for Broadmeadows, who did terrific work in the delivery of, I believe, a more than $60 million investment in that TAFE. What of course we know is that the opportunity to invest, whether it is in Melton, whether it is in Broadmeadows or whether it is in Sunbury, from early 2028 goes to training opportunities that provide for growing communities and make for those skills and investments that we so desperately need.

The government right across all portfolio areas is delivering a significant amount of reform and providing for not just the opportunity for training and upskilling but the opportunity for people to then go on and get a terrific job in a workforce that is growing, which is something that is really, really important. When you compare and contrast that to what we saw from 2010 to 2014 – and I know that the member for Bentleigh went at length to detail some of that history – I am certain that this government's investments have not just shifted the dial but in so many ways revolutionised the way we deal with training opportunities and skills in this state. That is something that is incredibly important. That is something that I think as government members we are very proud of, but the work is certainly not yet complete nor done. We know we need to keep partnering with TAFE, like Kangan and other providers, to make for better skills and opportunities. I can see the support from this side of the house, and that does not surprise me one bit. Compare and contrast this side to what we saw from over there, with those gates up, padlocks on fences and tumbleweeds going through the TAFE institutions that were there previously. I heard the member for Bundoora make some comments about this this week and others as well, and this is significant and important. What we know is these are really important investments.

I understand that there is some other business to deal with in the house. I did say these comments were going to be fairly brief, and with those reasonably short comments I commend the bill to the house.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (16:08): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026. Let me start where Victorians start, with the real economy. Housing, infrastructure, care, energy and manufacturing all depend on skilled people – electricians, plumbers, builders, fitters, aged care workers, early childhood educators, cyber technicians and much more. Most of these pathways run through vocational education and through

TAFE. One example I give as the member for Mornington is the Chisholm Institute, which services both Frankston city and the Mornington Peninsula, which has campuses both at Frankston and at Rosebud. The Frankston campus delivers vocational and further educational courses from certificates to diplomas across trades, health, business, IT, hospitality, early childhood education and allied health. The Rosebud campus ensures Mornington Peninsula residents have closer access to high-quality TAFE training locally, supporting apprentices, school leavers, career changers and small businesses. Where people are educated locally they are also more likely to stay, build their lives, get jobs and start families locally. That is why this side of the chamber supports a strong VET system with TAFE at its heart, and it is why our test for this bill is simple: will it help more Victorians get skills, finish their qualification and move into work?

On the bill's substance, part 3 inserts a free TAFE guarantee. The minister must determine each year a list of VET courses to be provided by TAFE institutes and participating dual-sector universities free of tuition fees and must determine the class of students eligible to undertake those courses. The list must be published, but the bill is explicit that this provision creates no legal right and gives rise to no civil course of action. In other words, students get a published list, not an enforceable entitlement. Part 4 inserts a TAFE funding guarantee. It requires that at least 70 per cent of training and skills funding in a target year be paid to TAFE institutes and dual-sector universities. Of course I note that no TAFE is actually free – in this situation it is taxpayer-funded TAFE. The bill deems the guarantee met if the average across a three-year window – year before, target year, year after – equals 70 per cent, and it defines the first target year as the calendar year commencing 1 January 2028. In addition, public reporting is delayed, and the bill again includes a no legal right and no civil course of action clause.

There are a number of issues, though, with respect to this bill. We need to note the fact that, for example, Jobs and Skills Australia projects that employment for technicians and trade workers will increase by about 195,000 nationally over the decade to May 2025. There is a massive skills pipeline challenge in front of us, and meeting demand depends on the throughput of the systems we have in place. We need a system that ensures that people are not just enrolling but actually completing their courses. The evidence is showing a significant lack of completion of courses in the system at the moment. The qualifications completed per 1000 people aged 15 to 64 in Victoria was 15.9, below the national rate of 20, and higher only than the ACT. Student satisfaction sits below national levels too. In 2024, 87.6 per cent of Victorian government-funded qualification completers reported being satisfied with overall quality, compared with 89.5 per cent nationally.

We want to push a number of amendments to improve this bill. These are constructive amendments that push for a stronger policy direction. The first is to mandate transparent course-level reporting. The second is to lift funding intensity to match the task. The third is to set explicit completion and workforce targets in priority areas aligned with demand, such as construction, electrical trades, care and clean energy pathways, and fund the supports that keep students and apprentices in training. Fourthly, we want to protect regional access, and finally, we want to keep quality and capacity across the whole training market. TAFE should be the anchor, and it should be a standard-setter. But Victoria will not build and fill the gap of skills shortages by sidelining high-quality non-TAFE providers that can fill gaps, particularly in niche and regional delivery. Funding should follow quality and outcomes under strong regulation.

In conclusion, the government says that the Liberals are anti TAFE. This is simply untrue. We back TAFE and we back affordability, but we will not accept guarantees that are drafted to avoid accountability. We will not accept a system that celebrates enrolments while failing to publish the data that tells Victorians how many people actually finish and move into work. That is simply more waste. If the government wants bipartisan support, then it should accept bipartisan accountability. That is the guarantee we should legislate: that Victorians deserve a training system that turns enrolments into qualifications and qualifications into skilled workers.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (16:13): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert) (16:14): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 9 insert –

   "(ba) to amend the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** to make further provision in relation to the compulsory acquisition of easements which are, or may be, required for the purposes of erecting or laying power lines (or both) and maintaining power lines; and".

2. Clause 2, line 20, after "5," insert "section 12A,".

3. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 12 –

   '**12A Power to acquire easements with approval of Governor in Council**

   (1) In section 86(1) of the **Electricity Industry Act 2000**, after "easement" **insert** "which is, or may be, required".

   (2) After section 86(2) of the **Electricity Industry Act 2000 insert** –

   "(2A) Nothing in section 8C(1) of the **Environment Effects Act 1978** prevents –

   (a) the Governor in Council approving an acquisition of an easement under this section; or

   (b) the acquisition of an easement under this section.".'.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (16:15): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

We know that climate change is having an increased impact on our lives and our infrastructure. We have seen it just this summer. In January alone we experienced widespread bushfires, a flash flood and record temperatures over several days. These extreme and catastrophic conditions have impacted our electricity distribution network – the poles and wires at street level, down the roads of farms and right across all communities – causing a higher than usual number of power outages, more outages, in fact, and for longer. The events of this summer are just the latest in a series of extreme weather events that have led to widespread and prolonged power outages.

The bill creates obligations for electricity distribution businesses to publish five-yearly resilience plans. These plans would be submitted to Energy Safe Victoria, who will ensure that the plans are being implemented. This will force distribution businesses to spend money efficiently on upgrades that reduce outages, improve convenience for Victorians and keep the lights on. We are at a critical stage of the transition to renewable energy. Our coal-fired generators are increasingly unreliable and are set to close. We must deliver the replacement electricity capacity to keep the lights on and keep power bills as low as possible. To make this happen we must build critical new transmission infrastructure.

The amendment will enable the compulsory easement acquisition process for transmission projects to run in parallel with the environment effects statement process. The amendments do not change either process and do not take away any rights of landholders. The EES will remain a robust and independent assessment of the environmental, economic and social impacts of major infrastructure projects. However, the changes will create more certainty for landowners and bring forward completion dates for critical transmission infrastructure. We know that the sooner we connect low-cost renewables, the lower power prices will be for all Victorians. Delaying the Western Renewables Link, for example, would add more than $200 to the average household bill by 2030. Everybody pays that.

The changes will bring electricity infrastructure in line with road, rail and water infrastructure that we already have in place here in Victoria and have had for many, many years and also the longstanding arrangements that exist in New South Wales for electricity infrastructure. To be clear, it is the government's expectation that every effort will be made to obtain voluntary agreements with landholders before compulsory acquisition is triggered. We know from the experience of New South Wales that the vast majority of easements are acquired on a voluntary basis once the compulsory acquisition process is triggered.

I would also like to acknowledge the collaborative contribution of the Victorian Greens, the Animal Justice Party and Legalise Cannabis Victoria in supporting the overall bill and these amendments, and I commend the amendments to the house.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (16:19): Let us be clear: from the coalition's point of view – we will oppose these amendments – these amendments are not about climate change; they are about completely disrespecting country Victorians. There is no doubt about it. The government are saying that they need legislation to walk onto someone's land and begin a process of negotiation. Telling a landholder from the very start that whatever they say, at the end of the conversation there will be an acquisition process that will take place is not a level playing field. That is not treating regional country Victorians with respect. It is saying to landholders in country Victoria, who have gone through much under this government – much in the way of disrespect – 'Your rights and lands and opinions don't matter. Whatever you say, at the end of the conversation we are going to do what we want.' That is not a process to make people confident that what the government wants to do is being done for the right reasons.

I submit to you, and so does the coalition, that if the government was serious about engaging country Victorians and if the government was serious about bringing country Victorians on as part of this process, then putting this kind of amendment in at the last minute, when we were told in the bill brief that there would not be a compulsory acquisition amendment or power or facilitation like this put into the legislation, shows a complete lack of respect for country Victorians.

I think country Victorians have come to know this about this government. I could talk about many things in relation to respect for country Victorians. It is outside the bill, so I will not, but I will just reference very quickly points about Murray Basin rail, which was promised and then not delivered; removing the Bunyip River railway bridge, which was promised and then not delivered; Torquay rail, which was promised and not delivered; and country roads, promised and not delivered. Potholes in country roads are the worst in Australia – promised to be fixed, not delivered. We can talk about the Commonwealth Games being promised and not delivered. Country Victorians are living with a great level of disrespect from a government who, frankly, could not care less about their points of view and could not care less about their rights as landholders. I just submit, as a metropolitan MP, that this Labor government would never put forward legislation like this for people in the metropolitan area of Melbourne. They would never –

Lily D'Ambrosio interjected.

Matthew GUY: No, I am sorry, Minister. I take your interjection up. You would never put forward legislation to say, 'We're just going to walk onto your land' – out in some of the larger areas, near

your electorate or north of your electorate – and just say whatever you think. 'It's all over. We're coming on with a big stick to put in very large pieces.' These are not small pieces of infrastructure. We are not talking 2 or 3 metres high. We are talking about a government that has systematically undermined through the energy policy from day one of coming in, taking away planning rights, whether it is solar, whether it is wind, whether it is whatever. I mean, at least involve country Victorians in the system. At least give them a voice in the process. But this government has said from the start, 'No, sorry. We've got an agenda, and we're going to keep to it. You don't matter.' This is just yet another example of saying to country Victorians under this Labor government that they do not matter to their point of view. All we say over here is to honour what you said at the very start of this process and this legislation, which is that compulsory acquisition powers would not be necessary in this legislation. That is what the government said.

Lily D'Ambrosio interjected.

Matthew GUY: Well, Minister, if you did not say that, why is it coming through as an amendment? I pick up the minister's interjection and say that the minister says that is not the case. I simply point to the evidence of the fact that this is an amendment. It is not in the primary bill. If it was in the primary bill, then the government would have good reason to say, 'We told you from the start.' But they did not. And they did not tell country Victorians from the start, because it is an amendment. An amendment tells you it is a product of something after the primary legislation has been drafted, been discussed, been taken through a stakeholder process and gone through country Victorians and country members of Parliament – actually having a discussion with people who this might impact – and then been brought to the Parliament. That is not the way this amendment has come through. It has come at the last minute into the Legislative Council, moved by a minister up there and thrown in here at the last minute, at 2 minutes to midnight, or close enough, on a Thursday sitting, which says the government wants to ram it through. Come hither, it does not matter; they are going to do it. We say very clearly that we oppose this amendment. I know a number of my colleagues want to speak, and rightfully they will, because at the end of the day country Victorians have lived with a decade of disrespect, and it is time that ended.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:23): It does not surprise me that those opposite do not believe in the science of climate change. I am aghast, because we know that actually it is people in regional and rural areas that cop it worst. We know that. We have absolute conviction in knowing that we want to make things better for them, let alone everyone else in the metro area. I say that candidly as someone who lives in a metro area. We know that when there are widespread bushfires, as we have had, and flash flooding and record temperatures, it is people in regional and rural areas who particularly cop it, and they cop it hard. It is all the more imperative to look after them and to make these changes. We know that catastrophic conditions have impacted on the electricity distribution network – even though those opposite do not want to know about it – causing a higher than usual number of power outages.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a debate about the amendment to the bill, not about climate change. I ask you to bring the member back to the bill and the amendment before the house, please.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): I ask the member for Albert Park to return to the amendments before the house.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes. Case in point: they do not believe in climate change. It has just been affirmed, and we can take that quote into the future.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: He said it is not about climate change; it absolutely is, and it is absolutely impacting the distribution network. We have a difference of opinion on that. We will go with the science; you can go with thoughts and feelings if you want.

This bill will force the distribution businesses to spend money on upgrades that reduce outages – surely that is a good thing. I might quote the member for Lowan:

> I suggest to the government … to get on with it – that if you are going to get on with it then just do it. Have compulsory acquisitions of land and make it quick and make it fair so our people can move on … I call on Premier Allan: please, if you care about regional people, go out and do compulsory acquisition, as you would for a Melbourne project, and let our people deal with this, because the uncertainty is dividing families.

That is all the more imperative to drive these reforms forward, because giving people on the land certainly surely is a good thing – certainty for landowners – as is bringing forward completion dates for critical transmission infrastructure. I should say that the amendment moved by our government will enable the compulsory easement acquisition process for transmission projects to run in parallel with the environment effects statement process. These amendments do not change either process. We are very much considering the impacts of changes, and the EES will remain a robust and independent assessment of the environmental, economic and social impacts of major infrastructure projects, not forgetting the importance of certainty for landowners. And we know that the sooner we connect low-cost renewables, the lower power prices will be for all Victorians, not just metro but regional and rural. Delaying the Western Renewables Link will add over $200 to the average household bill. Contrary to what is proffered over there, we are thinking of all Victorians, believe me.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:27): What a performance that was from the member for Albert Park, telling us what is good for us in regional Victoria. If this is so good and it is so good to bring certainty to transmission lines and everything, why isn't the government proposing wind towers in Port Phillip Bay and then transmission lines right through Albert Park?

Nina Taylor interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: You want to do that, member for Albert Park? Well, why don't we get it happening then? This is the thing we get from this government all the time. We get this all the time: 'Isn't it wonderful, all the transmission lines, the solar panels and the wind towers.' It is all easy for them to say, because they never have to put up with it in their electorates. All the costs are borne by the country and the benefits all flow to the city, and this legislation, this amendment, is appalling. For the government to spring this on the Parliament this week, to bring in compulsory acquisition powers before an environment effects statement has even been completed on a transmission line, is a disgrace.

I sat there at the bush summit in Ballarat last year, where both the Prime Minister and the Premier stood there and said to the people of regional Victoria, 'We acknowledge we've got it wrong. We have been disrespectful in consultation processes on renewable energy transmission and transmission lines.' They did that the day after they passed the VicGrid bill that threatened farmers with $12,000 fines for having the temerity to stop people coming onto their land. Now, in the dead of night we get this legislation, this amendment – this amendment that was not part of the VicGrid bill last year, that was not part of this legislation – and we get a day's notice, member for Albert Park, that you are going to bring in these compulsory acquisition powers. What a disgrace from this government. If there is nothing to hide, why was this brought in at this short notice? If there was nothing to hide –

Tim Richardson interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: No, member for Mordialloc. I am not settling down, because people are angry. People are angry in regional Victoria.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): Order! Member for Mordialloc, I have called for order. The Leader of the Nationals will direct his comments through the Chair.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am angry about this because the government is taking regional Victorians for fools. They are saying this is about providing certainty. Certainty – they do not want certain death to their farms and their communities from some of this stuff. If this was so important, Minister, why

wasn't it part of the bill when it was brought in? We asked that question in the briefing yesterday, and all they could give us was 'internal government processes'. All they could give us was that. Why was the amendment not thought of before, Minister? That is the question. This is just a –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): Order! Leader of the Nationals, I have asked you to direct your comments, when speaking, through the Chair in accordance with the standing orders. I ask you to do so again.

Danny O'BRIEN: I did that, and I am picking up the comments from the minister at the table and the things that she said in her speech. The member for Albert Park and the minister are trying to say this is about climate change when it is about compulsory acquisition before an environment effects statement has even been done. They are expecting country people to agree to listen to them, to listen to their views. 'Please put a submission into the environment effects process, but we're still going to go ahead and compulsorily acquire your land' – that is the disgrace that this government is doing with these amendments today.

It stands condemned. If there was nothing to hide, why was this not part of the bill last year? If there was nothing to hide, why was this not part of the bill to start with? They have hidden this and tried to sneak it through in the last couple of days, and it is no surprise that regional Victorians are going to be angry about this. The Victorian Farmers Federation has already called it out, as they should, and the government absolutely stands condemned on this.

This is a government that is running roughshod over Victorians. We have seen them already – they are boasting about how they are fast-tracking renewable energy and transmission lines in regional Victoria through the development facilitation process. What does that process do? It takes away the rights of regional Victorians. It takes away their rights to appeal these things at VCAT. Some will say that does not mean anything. I can tell you from personal experience that someone in my community appealed one of these wind farm projects at VCAT, and VCAT found in their favour because the department and the proponent had messed up. They had done the wrong thing, and the department and the government did not even pick it up. That is why VCAT is important. That is why people should have the right to oppose these things and to go to VCAT. The government took that away.

Then they brought in the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 last year and said if you do not let people do tests on your land, you will be fined $12,000. This is the day after the government had said it needed to treat these people with more respect, and now we get 24 hours notice that we are going to bring in compulsory acquisition even before an environment effects statement has taken place.

This is completely disrespectful to regional Victorians. It is consistent with the government's approach over many years. Members like the member for Albert Park can stand up there and say it is all about cheaper power and climate change and all of that; there is no respect for regional Victorians on this. There is not a single chance this Labor government would do this if it was through the middle suburbs of Mordialloc or Albert Park, but they do not care about it when it is in Lowan or Ripon or outer areas in regional Victoria where the people are providing the food and fibre for this state and this nation. This is completely disrespectful, and the Nationals and Liberals will oppose this every day of the week.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (16:33): Here we go, Walshy. You have belled the cat with some of the things you have said, but what an extraordinary performance that was. The aggression shown towards a female minister who has moved that amendments be agreed to was absolutely extraordinary. The behaviour from the member for Bulleen last night and the behaviour from the member for Gippsland South has been outrageous.

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

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): There is no point of order, but I ask the member for Mordialloc to address his comments through the Chair, as I have asked other members in this debate to do.

Tim RICHARDSON: The notion that there is not compulsory acquisition in this state or in members of Parliament's electorates – we constantly have compulsory acquisition in Mordialloc. I will say my points, because the aggression coming across here, the level of –

Members interjecting.

Tim RICHARDSON: I am literally trying to speak to the amendments put forward here. The compulsory acquisition powers that we have in our state have applied in the Mordialloc electorate. The notion that there is not compulsory acquisition, as put forward by the member for Bulleen, does not stack up in any circumstance.

Jade Benham interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: How many times has the compulsory acquisition law been used? In one part of my electorate it was 36 homes that we saw go, 36 homes from the community. The notion that there is no compulsory acquisition in the communities we serve – we had to manage those processes. We had to delicately support those people through those times, because they were their homes – they were literally their homes. The nuance in going through an environment effects statement (EES) like we have had in my electorate before, to go through a really difficult process – and where we have compulsory acquisition and the environment effects statements might change outcomes or alignment of critical infrastructure, sovereignty of our power in our state is what we are talking about here. We are not talking about just a phantom project that is thought up. We are talking about the sovereignty of power and assets in Victoria.

One of the most fundamental things to our future existence is ensuring power outcomes for our state. This is a sovereign risk going forward for Victorians that we need to manage. That goes directly to the heart of this issue. The compulsory acquisition frame and the journey that people will go on is a difficult process. There is a narrative that we have not experienced that. I have fronted up with my constituents that have lost their homes to major infrastructure projects. It is something that we absolutely care about. That is why we are going through the rigours and requirements of an environment effects statement. In my community that had federal oversight all the way through to maintain the highest levels of rigour and integrity in that process, and the acquisitions that people went through in that time were significant. But that is why fair compensation and support for anyone that confronts that is really important. That is what compulsory acquisition through the well-worn pathways of the state goes to. But I will go back to this as well: we cannot be in a situation in a state where for years we outsource the risks to our sovereign power needs into the future. States have to act and the Victorian government has to act, and the minister has brought that forward.

I want to read into *Hansard* a really important and timely comment that was made in this place. Those opposite might clue on to who this was as I go through. It was in September of last year:

> I suggest to the government … to get on with it – that if you are going to get on with it then just do it. Have compulsory acquisitions of land and make it quick and make it fair so our people can move on … I call on Premier Allan: please, if you care about regional people, go out and do compulsory acquisition, as you would for a Melbourne project, and let our people deal with this, because the uncertainty is dividing families.

To the member for Lowan, I could not agree more. To the member for Lowan: this is exactly what has been asked for by someone who is powerful and has the leadership to stand up and realise that people need certainty and that the politics of this need to step aside on the compulsory acquisition, the EES, the support and the certainty for families going forward. Do you know what, I think the member for Lowan said it better than anyone.

Rather than the routine that we just got before from the Leader of the Nationals, maybe the true leader and the heart and soul of the Nationals, the member for Lowan, might stand up here and be able to give a bit of context to what was an extraordinary, aggressive outburst on something that the member for Lowan has categorised exactly in the words of the minister. I mean, what are we really doing here when we have that kind of behaviour on display and when a member of the Nationals – a leader no less, a shadow minister representing a third of the state or 40 per cent of the state – brings that forward? Did the member for Bulleen get briefed on those comments before coming in with that rant about how compulsory acquisition never happens anywhere else? Did the Leader of the Nationals –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: Leader of the Nationals, I am happy to read out the quote again. I am happy to give you the quote right here, because the 'what about' about it –

Matthew Guy interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Bulleen is saying that this from *Hansard* is out of context. Okay. That is the most extraordinary whataboutism, turn of phrase or spin that we have seen. That is the most extraordinary position we have ever seen.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, to assist the house I would ask the member for Mordialloc to table the entire speech that he is quoting from.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): There is no point of order.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Gippsland South has been here for a little while. I will give him the book of *Hansard* if he wants. I mean, this is extraordinary – the absolute humiliation. The red has drained from the face into then just white horror for the member for Gippsland South. He realises just how extraordinary that outburst was and how unhinged it was. The fact is that these right here are important amendments. We support the position that was put by the member for Lowan to create certainty for regional Victoria. We support the minister. I just ask those opposite in the final few seconds of my contribution: reflect on the standards you bring to this place and how you carry yourselves, because the aggression, the anger and the intimidation are absolutely outrageous. I think the Leader of the Nationals should do better.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (16:40): I rise to also oppose the amendments that the government has quietly, at the last minute, slipped into the Parliament, amendments that were only added to the bill after it had already passed through this house and everybody had made their contribution – and after being told at the bill briefing that the compulsory acquisition parameters would not be affected by the reforms that had already gone through the lower house in this bill. The answer we got at the bill briefing was a clear no, but that is not the case. This amendment takes away people's ability to have fairness of process. They can now have their land compulsorily acquired before an EES, and environment effects statement, has been done. Where is the fairness and reasonableness in that? Here we are asking why this was not included in the original bill. Do you know what the answer was that we were given when we asked this just yesterday when we had this thrust upon us, after giving us reassurances some just weeks ago that it was not going to happen? They said it was due to internal government process. What the hell does that even mean? I reckon it is code for 'We are not even going to bother to tell you.' Victorians deserve better.

Regional Victorians do not need to be consistently ridden roughshod over by this government with this overreach, this sidestepping of checks and balances. What is the point in safeguards, environmental studies and so-called consultation if they are simply being ignored or bypassed. Decisions are being made about communities, not with them, and that is exactly why the community is so anxious in regional Victoria, because it is exactly what we are seeing. We saw it happen in South-West Coast when the federal government announced in Warrnambool and Port Fairy the offshore wind zone would be happening in 2023 before any environment effects statements had been

undertaken. Now that is exactly what this state Labor government is doing as well. It is legislating down the same path, willing to ride roughshod over communities and bulldoze through anything that stands in its way. It is yet another example of a government more focused on meeting targets, which they know they are falling short of, than protecting the land that produces our food, or safeguards the whales and their migratory pathway, or their whale nursery where they give birth. This is a failure of environmental responsibility and betrayal of community trust. No wonder people are sceptical. They want to acquire land and then think about whether it is environmentally reasonable to do so.

The Liberals and Nationals will restore confidence in integrity. The member for Mordialloc talked about this being part of this amendment, helping with the highest level of integrity. I am sorry, it is the exact opposite. We have been clear, as Liberals and Nationals, that Labor's planning changes, which centralise decision-making into the hands of the minister, must be reversed. These projects should not be controlled by Spring Street. They actually should be managed locally, where the effects are felt, and they need to be done with proper oversight and accountability. Planning amendment VC261 will be repealed. We have already sought that. We voted against it in this house once, and we remain committed to ensuring it is overturned when we get into government. We have also committed to requiring a full environment effects statement for every single low-emission energy project. If elected in November, that is exactly what we will do: a full and proper and rigorous environment effects process for each project, with no shortcuts, no exemptions. Our plan is to restore integrity, and we will give that confidence back to communities. It is essential to protect the agricultural land and the oceans and ensure that the environment and the community outcomes are genuinely considered, not treated as an afterthought.

It seems renewable energy targets are being placed above the environment, above the economy and above our whales and above our essential services. Victorians are missing out on food production. The findings from the *Rotting from the Top* report only confirm what communities like mine have felt for years: accountability has gone, standards have sunk, and the voices of ordinary Victorians are treated with contempt. We will oppose this amendment because it is wrong to trample all over property rights and treat farmers and landowners and producers of food with such contempt. It is a disgrace.

John LISTER (Werribee) (16:44): I rise to briefly contribute on this amendment and just to remind the Don Quixotes over there who like to tilt at windmills just how much their policies have put back our state in the past. When they banned those developments of wind farms, we got put back years. Now we are making up for it. And when they brought in the planning changes, it put us back years – Don Quixote over here tilting at windmills. We are here making sure that just like every other –

Members interjecting.

John LISTER: They are a bit sensitive over there. They have been called out on contradicting their own party members, and now they are a bit sensitive at being called Don Quixote for tilting at windmills, banning wind farm projects for so long that we have been put behind. This legislation and this amendment are important to make sure that the environment effects statement process and compulsory acquisition are done concurrently, to make sure that we can get these projects online sooner and give that certainty to the regional communities the member for Lowan represents. I know a lot of those communities. I used to live there and teach there. I know these projects very well. They are coming online. We need the transmission pathways to get it to where the users are, which is in the city and around our regional areas. It is important to have this process done concurrently, so we can make sure these projects come online quicker.

I think those opposite need to have a chat within whatever they have – they do not have caucus, whatever they call it; it is not much anyway – to talk to each other and get their story straight. If they care about regional communities, maybe talk to each other and do not contradict each other. I commend these amendments to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (16:46): Acting Speaker, I know there is trepidation in your voice because my reputation precedes me, as it should on this topic, because, yes, regional Victorians in my community are absolutely outraged. But I am going to stay calm. I know that is against my personality. First of all, I want to address a couple of things. To sit here and be lectured on compulsory acquisition for transmission lines for renewable projects in regional Victoria by the members for Albert Park, Werribee and Mordialloc is absolutely offensive in this place. It is as offensive as these amendments – absolutely ridiculous.

Second of all, I would like to address the comments that other members have made about the member for Lowan's comments that were made in September about the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025, that these amendments should have come through then, but because it has been so hard to get through, this is the 'break the glass in case of emergency' legislation that they need to trample over regional Victoria. The preceding paragraph for the member for Lowan's comments was that:

> I asked the government – and this might be something that is unexpected from me – to please, for the mental health of our community, provide more mental health supports.

That is why they would not give it context and have taken the member for Lowan out of context, because of the uncertainty around what is happening with these projects in my region and in the member for Lowan's region. I even had messages today from friends down in Daylesford who are outraged. These are probably traditional Greens voters. They are ready to sign up with the Nats because they are so angry at the lack of consultation and the mental health damage. The suicide rate in regional Victoria is at an all-time high already with everything farmers have to contend with. I mean, honestly, who would be a farmer? The stress and the uncertainty. We always thought it would be drought. Farmers for Climate Action have been saying for years climate change could be the biggest threat to farming – the prices for fertilisers and the prices for any of the overheads. We know and farmers know that the biggest threat to farming in this country is the Labor government. It is the single biggest threat to farming right now and to farmers' mental health. That is why the member for Lowan made those comments, because she is incredibly concerned about the people out there. It is not about retaining power and trampling over regional Victorians with a care for nothing else. I do get a bit fired up.

The minister when she presented this amendment thanked the Greens, Animal Justice and Legalise Cannabis, and mark my words, regional Victorians will remember that. They will remember all of this and what deals have been done with those parties. What have they sold regional Victorians out for? We will never know. This is the biggest issue to get this over the line. I heard a staffer say before, 'It's not that bad. It's not that bad.' Meanwhile his mate said, 'I live in Fitzroy, and we're NIMBYs.' To stand in here and be lectured by metropolitan MPs is offensive. Meanwhile this government continues to trample over regional Victoria and disguise it as energy reform, meanwhile being incredible hypocrites and compulsorily acquiring land before the environment effects statement has been done – and the Greens agree with this? What on earth is going on? It could be the full moon. I am not sure. This is absolutely outrageous. It is more than the vibe of the thing with this level of compulsory acquisition. This is utter contempt for regional Victorians, for food and fibre producers.

If we are talking about being more efficient and being able to transmit renewable energy, a solution has been presented. There is plan B: use existing easements. Put projects closer to where the power is needed and use the easements there. They already exist. It will cut costs. It is actually much more cost-efficient. The curtailments are far less. Why on earth wouldn't you do that rather than build an entire new network whilst trampling over food and fibre producers in this state and just adding another thing on their stress register? Because honestly, the amount of stress that food producers already have – no rain, too much rain, now the price of urea and fertiliser because of the shipping lanes that are restricted, the price of freight because of rail freight – all of this stuff – and now you have neighbours pitted against neighbours for these renewable energy projects that this government claims is for climate change. No, it is not. It is for power. I cannot even work out the logic behind this. I really cannot when there are so many other options. Now that we have community groups actively and very vocally

speaking up against it, this is the last straw. They have already taken away the VCAT right of appeal. The member for Mordialloc mentioned before that there has been compulsory acquisition in his community and the integrity was there. Well, this has been piece by piece. The integrity measures in regional Victoria with these projects have been whittled away piece by piece, amendment by amendment, and here we are now.

The Labor government is just giving the finger to regional Victorians and generational farmers who have cared for that land for generations. They make a living off it. They have raised family after family after family. There are family homes that were the ones that the original settlers, oftentimes returned soldiers from World War I, built. One of those is in the pathway of VNI West. Guess what, they can now compulsorily acquire it before any assessment has been done. That is absolutely shameful. Those on the other side sit there and lecture us whilst displaying absolute contempt not only for regional Victorians but for food producers that work their butts off every single day – the amount of farmers you will find that have not had a holiday, not only because they cannot afford it but because they do not have time. Who has got time? The absolute contempt that this government shows for this state's food producers is disgusting. We are sick of it, which is why the member for Lowan called for mental health support in regional Victoria, because there are people taking their own lives because of the uncertainty. They know that the biggest threat to their farming enterprise is the Labor government. That has never happened to them before. The biggest threat to the Victorian farming and agriculture industry is the Labor government. They all know it, which is why no-one is saying a thing now. They know that that is true.

Nina Taylor interjected.

Jade BENHAM: I do not want to be lectured by the member for Albert Park on agriculture. Honestly. Like we said, if you are so insistent on renewable energy, go and put some towers in Port Phillip Bay and transmission lines over Albert Park and be happy with it and leave us alone.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (16:55): I am very happy to stand and speak to this amendment. I am also very happy to stand and support the Minister for Energy and Resources at the table. I think the minister at the table probably understands what it is like being at a *Married at First Sight* dinner, just sitting here and listening to the opposite side not say a lot but just scream in indignation and anger. It is such a shame that they have wasted their time with such a diatribe, which does not actually improve anything whatsoever.

I want to apologise to those on that side too, because what this bill is about is us working to get energy and renewable energy faster to the whole community around Victoria, and this is a very important point that you seem to have missed. Not a lot has been said on that side that makes sense. I am not going to comment on some of the comments that were made, because I think we do not have to go down that road. We can talk with integrity and we can lead by example. I am very happy that the Victorian Greens, Animal Justice Party and Legalise Cannabis have worked with this side of government. I guess it sucks to be on that side, doesn't it? Anyway, thank you and I support the amendment.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:57): The member for Hastings just does not get it. The people on this side are sticking up for their community. You guys are doing them over; they are sticking up for them. The member for Hastings just does not get the fact that we are passionate for our communities. Our communities are being done over by this Labor government. Can I say – and I said this in the chamber a while ago – to the people that have been opposing VNI West that we will all go and stand with them if we have the opportunity as people try to invade their farms. They are protecting their farms from people coming in from VicGrid, previously from the Australian Energy Market Operator, to invade their farms to do the environmental assessment. This is another piece of legislation to take away their rights.

Can I say to Ben Duxson and to his whole team: you are winning. Keep up the work. You are winning. You are actually doing a good job. This amendment has come about because you are winning. Keep doing it. Keep the Victorian government officials off your farms. They have no right to be on your farms. Keep up the good work, because this amendment that has been brought in at the last minute because of internal government issues is because Ben Duxson and his team are winning. Every time the people want to come on and do an environmental assessment, there is a phone tree. There is not one farmer standing on their own. It is 50, it is 80, it is 100 farmers turning up in their utes. It is standing room only inside that gate to keep the VicGrid officials out, and I say more power to you. Keep doing that. That is the best thing that you can do for country Victoria.

The member for Mildura said the greatest threat to agriculture in this state is the Labor Party. Yes, I endorse that. But the greatest threat to all of Victoria is the Labor Party. Look at the $15 billion in corruption. Look at all the things that are going wrong. The greatest threat to the economy in Victoria is the Labor Party. The greatest threat to the moral fabric of Victoria is the Labor Party, and I would urge everyone that gets the opportunity at the next election to put the Labor Party last.

Nathan Lambert: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 109, relevance to the amendments.

The SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The member will have the call when the house returns to the debate.

Electoral Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendments as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 1, page 2, lines 3 and 4, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
2. Clause 2, lines 7 to 15, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

   "(1) Subject to subsection (2), this Act comes into operation on a day or days to be proclaimed.

   (2) If a provision of this Act does not come into operation before 1 July 2026, it comes into operation on that day.".
3. Clause 4, lines 26 and 27, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

   "(b) appointed under section 18;".
4. Clause 8, omit this clause.
5. Clause 9, omit this clause.
6. Clause 12, line 20, omit "and" and insert "or".
7. Clause 12, line 21, omit "and" and insert "or".
8. Clause 45, page 36, line 19, after "after" insert "the close of the roll for".
9. Clause 45, page 36, line 21, omit "supplementary election day" and insert "day on which the writ for the supplementary election is issued".
10. Clause 73, line 6, omit "**New section 225 inserted**" and insert "**Part 13 substituted**".

11. Clause 73, line 7, omit all words and expressions on this line and insert –

    'For Part 13 of the Principal Act **substitute** –

    "**Part 13 – Transitional provisions – Electoral Amendment Act 2025**'
12. Clause 73, line 8, omit "'**225**' and insert "**224**".
13. Heading preceding clause 74, line 4, omit "**nominated entities**" and insert "**public funding**".
14. Clause 74, lines 8 to 29, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
15. Clause 74, page 53, line 1, omit "***independent***" and insert "'***independent***'.
16. Clause 74, page 53, line 11, omit "party;" and insert 'party;";'.
17. Clause 74, page 53, line 12, omit all words and expressions on this line.
18. Clause 74, page 53, lines 13 to 16, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
19. Clause 74, page 53, line 30, omit 'member;";' and insert 'member;".'.
20. Clause 74, page 54, lines 1 to 34, page 55, lines 1 to 34, page 56, lines 1 to 34 and page 57, lines 9 to 13, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
21. Clause 75, omit this clause.
22. Clause 76, omit this clause.
23. Clause 77, omit lines 6 to 30 and insert –

    "In section 207G of the Principal Act, the definition of ***independent elected member*** is **repealed**.".
24. Clause 78, lines 2 to 33 and page 61, lines 1 to 12, omit all words and expression on these lines and insert –

    'In section 208(2) of the Principal Act, for "a candidate in the election who was not endorsed by a registered political party" **substitute** "an independent candidate in the election".'.
25. Clause 83, omit this clause.
26. Clause 84, omit this clause.
27. Clause 85, omit this clause.
28. Clause 86, omit this clause.
29. Clause 87, omit this clause.
30. Clause 88, omit this clause.
31. Clause 89, omit this clause.
32. Clause 90, omit this clause.
33. Clause 91, omit this clause.
34. Clause 108, lines 3 and 4, omit "the first anniversary of the day on which it received the Royal Assent" and insert "1 July 2027".

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I move:

That the sitting be continued.

Motion agreed to.

Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Council's amendments

Debate resumed.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (17:01): I desire to move:

That the question be now put.

The SPEAKER: I believe there is an opportunity for members from parties that have not yet spoken to contribute to the motion. The Greens have indicated that they do not wish to speak to the motion. The member for Ringwood has indicated he does not wish to speak to the motion. The National Party has had a contribution. The member for Murray Plains can continue to finish his speech.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (17:02): Before we were interrupted for the guillotine, I was speaking about the fact that this amendment being brought forward at the last minute is effectively showing that those in country Victoria who are standing up for their rights are winning over the government. Full power to them for what they are doing and for this particular right for country Victorians to have people kept off their farms. VNI West, which is what this bill is all about, started out as a project a bit over $3 billion. It is now estimated to be $7 billion to $8 billion. It is going to be at least two years later than intended. Most people expect it will go to at least $11 billion. There are alternatives to this powerline. The government said, 'We cannot upgrade the two 220 kVA powerlines. They're impossible to upgrade, you can't upgrade those – we've got to build this great big new powerline right across people's farms.' But in the last renewable energy zone paper that the government put out, the 220 kVA line has magically changed from Kerang to Bendigo – or Bendigo to Kerang, whichever way you want to look at it – and can be upgraded. It is now listed as an upgraded

line. The government just cannot tell the truth to country Victorians. 'We have to build this great big new powerline across your properties, we have to compulsorily acquire your land, we have to build it, we can't upgrade the existing powerlines.' Then the last REZ paper that comes out has it in red – it can be upgraded. Surprise, surprise, the government has changed their opinion on that. Why would anyone believe this government when it has anything to do with these sorts of projects?

Last year we had VicGrid come in and brief the member for Mildura, the member for Lowan and me, as the three National Party electorates affected by VNI West. We explained to them that when the Australian Energy Market Operator went out and talked to the farmers, they did it appallingly. They got them offside immediately. They did an absolutely lousy job of it. So what does the government do? They take the powers off AEMO and set up the VicGrid bill. What do VicGrid do? They talk to the farmers even worse and upset more farmers. We actually had to point out to the VicGrid officials how lousy they were at talking to farmers, and they got offended. They were told the truth and they actually got offended. When they went to leave – normally when you have a meeting, you shake people's hands as they leave the room – they refused to shake our hands because we had actually told them the truth about how lousy they were at talking to farmers. Every time VicGrid goes out, they upset people even more.

What do we get? Another piece of legislation that comes into this place to take away people's rights, because VicGrid and the government cannot do their job. They cannot talk to rural people in plain English. They cannot tell them the truth. They keep smudging around the edges. They keep saying, 'We'll compensate you this,' but no-one is actually honouring what is being said. I would say to the minister at the table: if you actually want to get projects done, deal with country Victorian people with respect. Tell them the truth. Actually be factual with them. Do not try and snow them. Do not turn up to the gate with the police. If you have got to bring the police to do an environment effects statement (EES) and an inspection, you are doing something wrong. Like, spare me. Country people are tolerant. They actually trust people, until they do not trust them, and then they bloody hate them. They absolutely hate them, and they will fight to the death. That is where we are at the moment. They were trusting, and they have been screwed over, and now they hate the people from VicGrid. You will not need the police – you will need more than the police; you will need the army, because they are going to fight on this thing, and they are going to continue to fight.

I notice in the minister's contribution when these amendments were introduced to the house that she congratulated the Greens and the Animal Justice Party for these amendments going through the upper house. Can I say to the Greens party: I thought the Greens actually stood for the environment. To say that they are going to usurp the EES process to allow compulsory acquisition at the same time, the Greens have sold out what I thought they believe for. They have sold out what I thought they believed for in sticking up for the environment. Whatever has happened in the upper house to get this amendment through, something has been done. When it comes to the Animal Justice Party, who would be surprised that the Animal Justice Party would be supporting these particular amendments to take away farmers' rights? The Animal Justice Party has a defined aim to close down animal agriculture in this state. By supporting this bill they are going to try and close down all sorts of other agriculture in Victoria as well, because in having these giant powerlines forced across people's properties, people will not be able to carry out their normal farming operation.

You cannot use aerial agriculture anywhere close to these powerlines. For the potato growers close to Ballarat, you cannot use your travelling irrigators, because they will short out. You are not allowed to irrigate under these powerlines. You cannot use your big boom sprayers under these powerlines. You cannot burn stubble because of the smoke and the arcing. Farmers are the greatest innovators in the world. They take up new technology when it is available, if it is of benefit to agriculture. The whole system of GPS guidance will go out the window when you are under a powerline. You will not be able to use it under a powerline. There are so many things that farmers will not be able to do under these powerlines that people have not been honest about. The government has not been honest about those things. To say that you could not be truthful with people and put this in the original bill because

of internal processes – what are the internal processes that mean you cannot actually just tell the truth? The internal process is, 'We have to be sneaky. We have to be sly. We have to try and slip this through at the guillotine on a Thursday,' because they do not actually trust country people to tell them the truth.

As I started, to Ben Duxson, to all the people opposing this and to all the people that take the phone call and get in their ute and go to the properties to stop the people entering them, more power to you. Keep up the good work, because this government has got it wrong. There are better ways than VNI West. There are better ways than compulsory acquisition. There are better ways than not having an EES before you do compulsory acquisition. Full marks to all of you; more power to you. We will be there, and we will be supporting you. Get rid of this lousy government, because Victoria needs it.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (17:09): I move:

> That the question be now put.

Assembly divided on Mary-Anne Thomas's motion:

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, 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.

Assembly divided on Lily D'Ambrosio's motion:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, 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.

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

Crimes Amendment Bill 2026

Council's agreement

The SPEAKER (17:17): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Crimes Amendment Bill 2026 without amendment.

Business of the house

Postponement

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

> That the consideration of remaining business be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

> That the house now adjourns.

VicRoads, Kew, redevelopment

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:18): (1569) My adjournment is for the Premier. The action I am seeking is for the Premier to provide assurances to the Kew community that asbestos from the VicRoads redevelopment site at 60 Denmark Street is being handled, stored and removed according to safe asbestos management guidelines. Many local residents have reached out to me to express their concern about the work on the site and sent me photos of uncovered debris that they can only assume is asbestos given it has 'Caution: Asbestos' tape around it. They tell me it has been seen left uncovered for many days. I previously raised the community's frustration with the limited consultation process and the lack of meaningful engagements with those who would be most affected by this project. Residents have felt unheard and sidelined from the decision-making process around the future of the site, so it is entirely understandable that reports of asbestos being visible and left uncovered onsite for many days have caused alarm. These are families who are already living alongside a major construction zone, and they are dealing with demolition noise, dust, heavy vehicle movements and disruption to their daily lives. Parents are walking children past this site, elderly residents live in close proximity and small businesses operate nearby. The community should not be left wondering whether hazardous materials are being managed safely as well. Asbestos is not a minor compliance matter, it carries well-documented, long-term health risks. The community should not have to second-guess whether materials on a government-managed redevelopment site are properly secured. Even the perception that asbestos has been left exposed undermines that confidence, and confidence in this project and in this government is already very fragile.

Residents have asked me to put very reasonable questions to the Premier, including: was the material properly identified and contained? Were licensed removal protocols followed? Was WorkSafe notified? Is air monitoring being conducted, and are the results publicly available? They are practical questions from the community. When the state is overseeing a major redevelopment in the heart of an established residential area, the standard must be exemplary. Compliance must not only occur, but it must be visible and must be transparent. It is not unreasonable for residents to expect that hazardous materials are managed with the utmost diligence. We know that safe asbestos management requires licensed contractors, strict controls and clear notifications to regulators and the community whenever materials are disturbed. This is also required under occupational health and safety regulations and environmental protection law. It is not simply best practice but a legal obligation. So I ask the Premier to provide assurances to the Kew community that asbestos from the VicRoads redevelopment site at 60 Denmark Street is being handled, stored and removed according to safe asbestos management guidelines.

Queen Street bridge, Altona

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (17:21): (1570) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action that I seek is an update on the build of the new shared user path for the Queen Street bridge over Laverton Creek. When we asked the community as a government if they wanted the pedestrian and cycle bridge over Laverton Creek, they answered with a very enthusiastic yes. I supported it, and the government funded it. The new connection will provide a safe way for the community to get around, with pedestrians and cyclists separated from road users. That is important for our community. It also connects members of our community to the sporting facilities, to the clubs, to the religious centres and to the schools. It makes our community just that bit better. I am looking forward to the minister's response, and I thank her for her work.

Cobram Cemetery Trust

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:22): (1571) My adjournment is to the Minister for Health, and I am pleased that she is in the chamber tonight. The action that I seek is that the Cobram Cemetery Trust and mausoleum receive a review by the minister into their request to increase the amount of crypts that they have available. The Cobram Cemetery Trust completed an actuarial report, which cost $11,000, and the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust replied saying that extending the number of crypts was not viable. Then the Cobram Cemetery Trust explained three things: of the 22 crypts available, they have already pre-sold 15, so effectively they have only got seven available; with a large Italian and Muslim population in Cobram, many families who may have moved away still come home to be buried, so seven available crypts is not many, as they could get sold out in a very short space of time; and the final factor is that the Cobram Cemetery Trust is cashed up and can afford to build them out of cash flow. Once the Cobram Cemetery Trust explained the above reasons why seven was not enough, they were told, 'We didn't know about those cultural issues and your cash flow situation. You need to do another report.' They think it is quite unreasonable to spend another $11,000 on a report they have already done, and the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust wants another report, which will not vary from the one they have already submitted. I seek the minister's participation to get some common sense into this situation, instead of a fruitless report for another $11,000, and to allow Cobram Cemetery Trust to go ahead with the next stages: either stage 1 for 32 crypts, or stages 1 and 2, which is for a total of 74 crypts, considering that the trust has the cash in the bank to prepare for the longer term needs of the Cobram and surrounding community.

Planning policy

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:24): (1572) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to update me on our government's efforts to reform Victoria's planning system to make it easier for more homes to be built in the places where people want to live, work and raise their family, reducing growth pressure on outer suburban communities like ours in Melbourne's west. As the minister knows, suburban communities like Melbourne's west have for many years shouldered the brunt of housing development and population growth. Our government understands this, which is why many of our policies this term have been designed specifically to focus on growing our middle-ring suburbs. This is really important because we cannot solve the housing crisis by developing greenfield estate after greenfield estate on our suburban fringe in places like Wyndham. People want to live in these middle-ring suburbs in places which are close to public transport, close to trains and trams and closer to where they work – and even where many of their family and friends live too.

It is why we have created 50 activity centres in places that have this capacity: around train stations, around tram lines, particularly in Melbourne's east, which my community will tell you have the lion's share of infrastructure and services built up over many, many decades. But just last week the Leader of the Opposition and those opposite unveiled their housing policy. I cannot say I am all that surprised. They want to stop development in our middle-ring suburbs, and they want to scrap our activity centres. Most concerningly, they want to fast-track developments in the outer suburbs, in places like

Wyndham. For folks in Wyndham, we know what that means. It means tens of thousands of more homes in communities like ours in Melbourne's outer west, while their blue-ribbon suburbs block all new homes. It is the most NIMBY policy you could possibly think of. But let us not forget that it was their last planning minister, the member for Bulleen – the king of housing approvals, as he calls himself – who approved 11 greenfield developments in Wyndham at the eleventh hour of their term, and he did not even think about the infrastructure we needed to accommodate this.

We know what this housing policy is about. It is no new homes for Kew, for Brighton, for Caulfield, but it is tens of thousands of new homes for Truganina, for Tarneit, for Werribee, for Wyndham Vale, for Point Cook, and it goes on and on. Unlike those opposite, we know that the outer burbs cannot do all the heavy lifting. It is not fair. Our government recognises that our middle-ring and inner suburbs have an equal role to play in the future of our city's growth. So I welcome an update from the minister on how we are seeking to achieve exactly this.

Australian Education Union

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (17:26): (1573) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to write a letter to Joshua at Kambrya College, or if he would like to he could come out and visit and meet with Joshua. Joshua has written to me; he is currently a student doing a VCE 3/4 subject this year at Kambrya College. The action he has written to us is about the Australian Education Union industrial action that is coming up because this government will not negotiate with the teachers in relation to what is happening with their pay. In the words of Joshua:

> As you know, even short disruptions in senior studies can cause significant stress and risk to student outcomes.

Joshua is one of many students at Kambrya and other schools in the area who obviously, when they are going into VCE, understand the importance of teachers and how teachers can assist them to get the results they need. But they also know that disruption in this can create massive change and can cause lots of havoc for those students. They want to ensure that there is no disruption. Joshua has written to me and asked me to pass on to the minister that they would be more than happy to have the minister out to meet with them and to explain it all and guarantee that there will be no disruptions during their VCE years.

Glen Waverley electorate housing

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (17:28): (1574) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing and Building. The recent announcement regarding more homes near the future Suburban Rail Loop stations presents a significant opportunity for communities like Glen Waverley. Just as the Metro Tunnel and the West Gate Tunnel are reshaping how Victorians move around our state, the Suburban Rail Loop will transform not only how we travel but how and where we live. It is not simply a transport project; it is a city-shaping housing project as well. Last week the Allan Labor government announced that through the development facilitation program, planning approval has been secured for 795 new homes on Springvale Road in Glen Waverley, within walking distance of the future SRL station. This development will deliver a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments; basement parking; and new retail space, increasing housing choice in one of Melbourne's most sought after suburbs. Importantly, the project will deliver affordable housing, including 30 dwellings proposed to be gifted to an organisation that provides low-cost housing for women at risk of homelessness, often due to family violence. It will also provide approximately 4000 square metres of retail and commercial floor space to support local jobs and services, along with around 1000 square metres of public realm upgrades, ensuring the precinct grows in a way that strengthens the broader community.

People want to live in Glen Waverley because it offers exactly what modern communities are looking for: established amenities, transport connectivity, a thriving local economy and the best schools in Victoria. Delivering new homes within walking distance of these assets ensures that more Victorians can share in those opportunities. The action I seek from the minister is to visit Glen Waverley to see firsthand the housing opportunities presented by the Suburban Rail Loop precinct and to discuss how

we can continue delivering more homes that are affordable, livable and well designed. I look forward to welcoming the minister to Glen Waverley and working together to ensure our community continues to thrive as we deliver the next generation of housing to all Victorians.

Creative industries

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (17:30): (1575) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Creative Industries, and the action I seek is to produce a clear vision to reinstate Melbourne as the cultural capital of Australia. In just a few months eight major arts organisations have been suddenly defunded, facing decisions to cancel, scale back or even close up after decades of work. With Writers Victoria funding axed, we will be the only mainland state without a government-supported writing body. Next Wave, responsible for kickstarting countless careers, has been stripped of funding. La Mama's four-year funding was cut to two, and the Abbotsford Convent, fought for and secured by my community, has lost all support.

The pool that our arts organisations rely on was already so tiny – $81 million for the whole sector – and now Labor is cutting that to $59 million this year, a 30 per cent cut. With that come job losses, hundreds of them – the technicians and curators and producers and administrators that keep our arts organisations, festivals, galleries and public art spaces running. They are overworked and sacked and demoralised. The artists who create the joyful, unexpected, challenging work that makes our city wonderful are already among the lowest paid workers in our state, and they are being pushed further and further to the margins. Victoria has the most artists per capita, yet we are second last in terms of what we spend on the arts. We claim to be the cultural capital of Australia, a UNESCO City of Literature, yet the Premier did not even send a representative to the Premier's Literary Awards, let alone go herself. Budgets reflect priorities, and while Creative Victoria's funding is cut to $59 million, this government has spent comparable sums in a single day on other priorities – six times that upgrading the corporate stand at the grand prix, for example.

People do not flock to Victoria for our corporate hospitality; they come for our creativity, for our stories, for our cultural life. The amount needed to sustain the independent arts is a tiny fraction of the state budget, yet it determines whether artists and arts workers survive or not. Last week APAM, the Australian Performing Arts Market, was held in Perth. Victoria was the only state not to support artists to attend. For four decades our independent arts sector has shaped the national landscape, fostering experimentation and bold new voices. There is no point to building a new NGV if our arts community is unable to fill it. We do not know who the next Tracey Moffatt or Patricia Piccinini or Mike Parr or Abdul Abdullah will be, but we do know that without meaningful investment and a clear vision from this government the next generation of artists may never get the chance to share their art with the world.

Broadmeadows electorate road safety

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (17:32): (1576) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me for a road safety round table. Dangerous driving continues to be a big issue in the electorate. There was a serious accident at the Pascoe Vale Road pedestrian crossing in Glenroy on 24 February – a result of dangerous driving, I understand – and there continue to be near-misses when drivers run through the red light. Constituents have also raised concerns about drivers failing to stop at other pedestrian crossings in the electorate, including Barrie Road. Unfortunately a number of accidents have occurred on Glenroy Road near the intersection of Station Road, and parking and unsafe driving behaviour is an issue at many local schools. I continue to encourage constituents to report hooning incidents to Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000, which is now combined with the Hoon Hotline, as reporting data helps direct police resources. I was pleased with our Labor government's $20 million boost to road policing operations, and I thank police for the important work they do. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these matters with the minister along with representatives from the local community.

Hawksburn train station

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (17:34): (1577) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it concerns the significant reduction in train services at South Yarra station and the impact that this is having on residents in Prahran and surrounding suburbs. The action I seek is for the Allan Labor government to listen to the community and provide Metro Tunnel access from Hawksburn station.

Over recent weeks many constituents have contacted me, concerned and frustrated about the massive cut in services at South Yarra following Labor's so-called big switch. As part of the changes associated with the Metro Tunnel, the Cranbourne line and the Pakenham line have been removed from South Yarra, one of the busiest and most strategically located stations in the network. South Yarra is not an infrequently used stop; it is a critical interchange for commuters travelling to employment hubs, universities and even to Parliament. The removal of these lines has significantly reduced connectivity and flexibility for passengers who rely on city loop access. For many commuters who need to travel to Parliament railway station or Flagstaff railway station in particular, the changes mean that they must now board already crowded Frankston line services or travel via the Sandringham line to Flinders Street railway station and change there. Cranbourne and Pakenham line passengers requiring the city loop need to change all the way back at Caulfield or use the interchange at Town Hall, both options adding to the journey time. In peak hour this is not a minor inconvenience, it is a daily frustration that actually adds significant time and stress and uncertainty to people's commutes.

What is particularly disappointing is that the outcome was not inevitable. Labor could have connected South Yarra to the Metro Tunnel; they chose not to. They could have alternated services between the city loop and the Metro Tunnel to preserve connectivity and passenger choice, and they chose not to. Instead residents are now dealing with the consequences of what many see as poor planning and a lack of foresight about how people actually use the network. As a practical workaround, there is an opportunity to improve the services to the local area by ensuring Metro Tunnel services stop at Hawksburn station. Hawksburn railway station is well positioned to support local commuters and would help alleviate some of the pressures currently being felt at South Yarra station and across the network. This would not undo the broader structural decisions that have been made, but it would demonstrate a willingness of the Allan Labor government to listen to the community concerns and make more considered adjustments that are actually needed. The Allan Labor government should review the timetable and make changes so that the Metro Tunnel services stop at Hawksburn.

Working from home

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:37): (1578) My adjournment this evening is to the Premier, and the action I seek is an update for my community on legislation that will be introduced in this Parliament to enshrine the right to work from home for two days a week. It was in August 2025 when the Premier stood up and announced for Victorians that we would enshrine the right to work from home two days, recognising the importance of work–life balance in our lives, the importance of supporting people in the flexibility of their workplaces. In a community like Mordialloc, but indeed across Victoria in the other 87 electorates, people connect with the right to work from home, because at its heart, and as we consider International Women's Day, we know that work from home supports women to stay in and be part of the workforce. We know it is fundamentally a cost-of-living program and supports people not to have to put fuel in the car, especially with the uncertainty around the world at the moment, and to be in their communities. We know it is really important if you are travelling up and down the train line or on the V/Line from rural and regional communities; it saves that time and that effort.

There is nothing more fundamental – and this is what I hear from my community – than being in those life moments with the kids that you might have missed. There is that 6:30 run back, when you are on the last train, in congestion, or you are sitting on the Monash Freeway or Mordi bypass out my way, wondering if you will get to see those important events. Or there is three-year-old kinder, such a

fundamental moment – and we have got free kinder all through our state – and thinking about how important those formative moments are. Parents want to be there to see their kids grow up, and this provides that flexibility and opportunity. Or for the worker who has to trundle up and down each and every day for five days, sometimes six days, and shift work, trying to get home, that congestion-relieving work that is done with the right to work from home spreads that out. It is good for the entire economy. We know as well that it is one of the most productive things you can do. The blended work arrangement of some work from home with some work in your workplace is really critical. I am really interested, Premier, and I ask for an update on this legislation and when it will be introduced to the Parliament to enshrine the right to work from home for two days a week.

Responses

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:39): In responding to the member for Mordialloc can I say what an outstanding member for Mordialloc he is. As part of our Labor team he keenly wants to know more details about when working from home will become law, will become a right, for workers in this state. Of course we are doing this because it is only our Labor government that has the new solutions to the challenges that working people and families are facing right now, those challenges of cost-of-living pressures that are so real and placing pressures on household budgets. But also we know that cost-of-living pressure is robbing families of time as well as money, which is why working from home is so good for families. It saves families time. It is estimated, would you believe, that working from home can save workers up to 3 hours a week in travel time. That is time that they have back in their day. That is time that they have back with their family.

Do you know what the data also tells us? It tells us that when those workers have extra time they are putting it back into their work. Many workers are adding hours to their workday, putting hours back into their employer and their business, because CEDA data tells us that workers are up to 20 per cent more productive because they have the chance to work from home. Consider that, plus the fact that working from home means more workers get into the workforce, particularly women and particularly women with kids. I met one of those women this week, Danielle, who is a lawyer. She had a beautiful nine-week-old bub called Noah, and Charlie, his older brother, is two. She had been working three days a week from home, and she talked about what it meant for her, working from home. If she had to go into the office, she would leave at 7 o'clock in the morning, not get back till 7 o'clock at night and not even see her son, because of course anyone with little ones knows they get up at 7 and go to bed at 7. That meant she could see her child during the course of the day. That is precious time that is being given back to families.

Then of course there is the money that is saved as well. It is estimated up to $5000 a year is saved by families – again, precious money back in the household budget, money that can be spent on school uniforms, money that can be spent on groceries and household bills – but we also know it is money that is spent in the local community, in the local cafes, in the local shops, in the suburbs and regions across the state. This is why working from home works, and it is why our government is going to protect Victorians' right to work from home. We are doing this no matter the size of the workforce, because it is only fair. For businesses of all size, those workers deserve to have the right to work from home.

We also, in answer to the member for Mordialloc's adjournment matter, will be legislating and having the right to work from home protected from 1 September this year and will do so through the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 as the vehicle to deliver Victorians that right, to protect that right to work from home. Why do we need to do this? Because we have undertaken a survey, the biggest ever survey, and thousands of Victorians told us that they wanted the right to work from home but it had been refused by their employers. Unions every day get told by workers that their right to work from home, their reasonable request to work from home, has been refused. I spoke last year to a worker, and she told me about her experience. She was a single mum in the outer suburbs working from home two days a week. Those two days meant the world to her in keeping her life in balance. She had those two days a

week taken away from her by her employer. She was told this on a Teams call by a boss who was working from home themselves. That is why we need to protect workers right to work from home.

There is another very good reason why we need to protect the right to work from home. Liberals across the country are wanting to wind back working from home. They want to cut working from home. We know this is the agenda of the Victorian Liberal Party because they have had meetings with the business community about return to the office – not working from home, return to the office. We know the Liberal Party do not support Victorians' right to work from home. They do not support it being in law. Why do we know this? Because they have not said that they do, and at every turn they are looking at opportunities to get workers back into the workplace. That is why my Labor government, our Labor government, is going to protect Victorians' right to work from home – a reasonable request of at least two days a week. We are doing this because it is good for the economy, it is good for productivity, it is good for lifting workforce participation, particularly amongst women, and it is great for those families who need this support, because it gives them time and money back in the day. That is why we are legislating to protect the right to work from home. Only a Labor government is going to protect the right to work from home, and Victorians know the Liberals will cut it if they are given the chance. I thank the member for Mordialloc and our colleagues who are joining him here today to back Victorians' right to work from home. We look forward to the legislative debate over the coming months. It is going to be a cracking debate in this place as we protect Victorians' right to work from home, and only a Labor government will do so. I thank the member for Mordialloc for his adjournment matter.

I have another adjournment matter that has been raised, and it is from the member for Kew regarding the removal of asbestos in what was known as the former VicRoads building in Kew. I am very familiar with this project, because of course this is a former office building, a former VicRoads site, and do you know what it is being developed for? Housing. It is a great housing project – 500 homes. At least 10 per cent of those homes will be social and affordable homes. That is why there needs to be safe and appropriate removal of asbestos at this site, because our Labor government is making sure the former VicRoads site in Kew is being transformed into housing for Victorians. This, again, only happens under our Labor government, because there is an alternative policy that the member for Kew released last week –

Jess Wilson interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will talk about the policy. I know the member for Kew and the Liberal Party do not want to speak about a housing policy that is more on sandbagging eastern suburb Liberal-held seats. It is not a housing policy, it is a sandbagging policy. This policy is about cutting our program to build 300,000 homes in exactly the right locations – in those middle suburbs around train and tram stops, particularly those train stations where, for the benefit of the member for Prahran, we have added 1200 additional services to our train network because of the Metro Tunnel, a project the Leader of the Opposition called a waste. The day it opened the Leader of the Opposition called the investment in the Metro Tunnel a waste. We are going to build homes around those train stations, 300,000 homes, but that is what is on the cutting block from the Leader of the Opposition, cutting homes around those activity centres. Do you know what they want to do, though? They want to keep pushing homes into the outer suburbs without supporting the infrastructure, without supporting the schools and without supporting the road network. This is the policy of the Liberal Party – and it gets worse. They want to hand these powers back to local government. It sent a shudder down the spines of the development industry, a proposal to hand the powers back to local government.

I will say about building more homes: we are going to build them everywhere, including at the old VicRoads site in Kew. When it comes to the removal of asbestos on this site, I will remind the member for Kew it has been Labor governments supported by the union movement for decades who have stood up for the right of workers to be protected around asbestos removal. We all remember those awful, awful, awful experiences of so many families whose lives were destroyed because their loved ones either worked in the industry or worked in industries where they were exposed to asbestos material. I

am proud to be part of not only a labour movement that for decades has worked hard to protect workers when there is asbestos removal but a Labor government that has put in place strict guidelines around the removal of asbestos. My advice is that the asbestos removal at this site will be done within those guidelines.

But let us remember who is doing this work. The workers who are doing this work are likely to be good strong union members, and I thank them for this work. It is dangerous work. It is difficult work in the construction industry, and those workers deserve safe, strong workplaces. You get that by having strong representation, not cutting into that representation, not wanting to tear down that representation like Liberal Party always do. We will make sure that we remove the asbestos appropriately at the VicRoads site, but even more than that, we are going to get on and build 500 more homes for the people in the queue. We know the member for Kew does not support that. She does not support the building of more homes in the middle suburbs; only a Labor government does.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (17:50): I thank the member for Ovens Valley for raising with me the matter of the Cobram Cemetery Trust and their plans to expand crypts in order to meet the needs of their community. I will make inquiries to seek to resolve this issue as soon as I can. The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport, the member for Laverton raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, the member for Berwick raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, the member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing and Building and the member for Richmond raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Creative Industries. I will make sure that they are referred to those ministers.

The SPEAKER: Sorry, Minister, there are two more: the member for Broadmeadows and the member for Prahran.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I am so sorry. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the member for Prahran raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport. I will ensure that they are also referred to those ministers for an appropriate response.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. As always, I thank the clerks and the parliamentary staff for their assistance this week. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:52 pm.