



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 2 August 2023

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Christine Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Paul Edbrooke, Bronwyn Halfpenny,
Paul Hamer, Michaela Settle, Meng Heang Tak and Jackson Taylor

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Daniel Andrews

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Jacinta Allan

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Peter Walsh

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

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

¹ ALP until 5 August.

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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Wednesday 2 August 2023

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

*Announcements***Parliamentary integrity adviser**

The SPEAKER (09:33): I inform members that in accordance with the resolution of both houses on 22 June 2023, Professor Charles Sampford has been appointed as parliamentary integrity adviser as of 31 July 2023. Professor Sampford will be in the north library from 2 pm to 4 pm this afternoon. I encourage members to introduce themselves.

*Rulings from the Chair***Adjournment**

The SPEAKER (09:34): The Deputy Speaker referred last night's adjournment debate matters to me for review, following the Minister for Housing querying whether the matters raised by the members for Caulfield and Morwell were in order. I note, as the Deputy Speaker did, that the minister responded to the substance of the matter raised by the member for Morwell, so I will take that matter as dealt with, and I have not reviewed it.

The other matters are as follows. The member for Caulfield raised a matter for the Deputy Premier. The Minister for Housing expressed a view that the language used in the matter was unparliamentary and out of order. While the member was critical of the Deputy Premier, I do not find that he used unparliamentary language or impugned the minister. My greater concern with the matter is whether it is addressed to the correct portfolio, because as I understand it, the Deputy Premier has no specific administrative accountabilities to the house attached to the role of Deputy Premier. I think the matter would have been better addressed to the minister in her capacity as Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, but I will leave it to the Deputy Premier to respond as she sees fit. The matter is in order. All other adjournment matters raised were in order.

However, all of that said, I observe a pattern emerging in adjournment debate matters where members clearly set out the action they seek of a minister but without specifying the problem that needs solving. The purpose of the adjournment debate is to raise matters of public concern and request that a minister take some action to address the issue. I refer all members to Speaker Christie's and Speaker Andrianopoulos's rulings about the adjournment debate on page 1 of *Rulings from the Chair*. The adjournment debate is not an opportunity to give a set speech on a topic. Instead, members should bring an issue to a minister's attention and seek the minister's assistance in resolving it.

*Documents***Documents****Incorporated list as follows:**

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Border Groundwaters Agreement Review Committee – Report 2021–22.

*Bills***Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (09:36): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 without amendment.

*Motions***Western suburbs rail lines**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:36): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house:

- (a) notes the massive betrayal of western suburbs following reports that the Andrews government will axe two promised new rail lines into the west;
- (b) calls on the Deputy Premier to explain why the western suburbs have been neglected for almost a decade.

Leave refused.

Schools payroll tax

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:37): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house:

- (a) notes the unfair, regressive and farcical application of the Andrews government's schools tax;
- (b) notes the initial hit list of 60 schools will grow to include more schools from next year; and
- (c) calls on the government to immediately repeal the schools tax.

Leave refused.

*Members statements***Benwerren**

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:37): Benwerren in Yarra Junction provides a safe place for women and children in need where they have the chance to take time out and get back on top of things. Meals and education services are provided and women are given hope by staff and volunteers who have enormous hearts. For more than 30 years Dawn Develyn, the one with the largest heart, has been at the helm of Benwerren. Dawn grew up here and has turned the rambling old home and property into the most warm and welcoming retreat. Benwerren's services are invaluable. It has not always been easy, but women and children have remained the focus. Dawn stepped down from the day-to-day running of the organisation at the AGM and handed the baton over to Nichole Kelly, who has worked there for 10 years. She has got big shoes to fill, but I know she will do a tremendous job. In the last year alone 163 women and 150 children stayed at Benwerren, 28 families made the most of holiday time there and eight homeless women and children were provided refuge. What impresses me most is that the volunteers committee and board include women who have been beneficiaries of Benwerren and want to give back. This speaks loads for the organisation.

Commonwealth Games

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:38): The Andrews government's recent cancellation of the Commonwealth Games has been both embarrassing and humiliating for Victoria on the world stage. It confirms that Victoria is broke and that Labor simply cannot manage major projects without huge cost blowouts. There is now the possibility of Victorians being forced to pay a seven-figure cancellation fee, something we can ill afford. Victoria's debt is climbing.

Mike Bagnall

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (09:39): Across our state our SES volunteers consistently rise to the challenge of serving their communities. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of Mike Bagnall, who recently stepped aside from his role as unit controller at Gisborne SES. I have had the pleasure of working with Mike over the last six or so years. He is without doubt one of the most inspiring volunteer leaders I know: endlessly positive, good humoured and always brimming with new ideas in service of the community.

Mike has worked hard to build a friendly and inclusive unit focused on serving Gisborne and the Macedon Ranges during a time when we have faced many significant weather events, including unprecedented floods and windstorms, while continuing to respond to road crashes as well as a few cats inevitably stuck in trees. Testament to Mike's leadership is the fact that when Mike took on the role of unit controller Gisborne SES had a volunteer crew of 35 volunteers. Today, nearly six years on, the headcount for the unit sits at 70 with a further 20 waiting to join. Respected across the SES family, VICES chief officer operations Tim Wiebusch had this to say about Mike:

Thank you to Michael Bagnall for almost six years of dedicated commitment to leading your unit, and your support to other units, including during major emergencies across the state. Mike is a fine example of how well our volunteers embody the role, and lead by the values of our organisation.

Yarram Country Club

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:40): It was great to attend the Community Clubs Victoria awards night on Saturday night and support our clubs community. Congratulations to all the winners and particularly Yarram Country Club, from the great electorate of Gippsland South, which took home the award for the best community club bistro and restaurant. This is a fantastic achievement for a club in a small country town, up against others from all around the state. Yarram Country Club is indeed a focal point for the Yarram community, and I am sure that community will be very proud of the award.

Jan Gales

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:41): I want to pay tribute today following the loss of one of Parliament's and the Nationals' longest-serving stalwarts. Older members and parliamentary staff will remember Jan Gales, the former personal assistant to not only former Nats leader Peter Ryan but Pat McNamara before him and Peter Ross-Edwards before him. Jan's time here with the Nats dated back to 1975, I believe, and there were few people or events in state politics up to her retirement in 2014 that she could not tell you about. I worked here with Jan for four years and was very sad to hear of her passing recently. She was a second mother to many staff in the building and a trove of information and contacts. Indeed I recall Peter Ryan saying one day that if he called Jan up and asked her to get the Pope for him, she would probably say, 'Do you want to hold, or shall I call you back?'

Jan made many lifelong friendships across the Nats electorate office network and through the various parliamentary departments, and that was evidenced by the turnout at her memorial service in Malvern a few weeks ago. She was a magnificent servant of the Nationals team, the Parliament and the people of Victoria. Vale, Jan Gales.

Kalkallo Youth Advisory Council

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Suburban Development) (09:42): I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of my 2023 Kalkallo Youth Advisory Council. This year the group is focusing on the topic of career development and life skills, which are important issues for so many young people across my electorate. In response to this, members have decided to develop and distribute a flyer providing resources to young people for life after secondary school, with useful information and tips on issues such as résumé writing and managing finances. Thank you to Aarav, Ammar, Anagha, Ashly, Caitlyn, Divjot, Harkirat, Helena, Husain, Jayde, Kayla, Lorjel, Maria, Matthew, Mehar, Nathaniel, Nayush, Nirasha, Omar, Priyanshi, Sarah and Uthish for all their work so far this year. I look forward to seeing their work develop throughout the year.

Amanda Lee

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Suburban Development) (09:43): I would also like to take this opportunity to thank former assistant principal Amanda Lee, who has been working at Craigieburn Primary School for more than 20 years and is now moving into a new role. Amanda has worked at Craigieburn Primary School since 1998, when the school was still located on Hamilton Street, before moving to its current

location on Grand Boulevard. Since then Amanda has taught grades 3, 4 and 5 prior to becoming a leading teacher in mathematics and literacy, before being promoted to assistant principal three years ago. I wish Amanda all the very best in her new role and thank her for her outstanding contribution to the Craigieburn Primary School community.

Commonwealth Games

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:43): Today I rise to condemn the Andrews Labor government for cancelling the Commonwealth Games, leaving athletes, officials and regional centres high and dry. The cover-up in hiding the true cost is a disgrace, and every Labor backbencher is scratching their head in dismay. Having proudly grown up in Gippsland, like the members for Gippsland South, Gippsland East and Morwell, I understand the importance of valuing regional communities. It is clear from the recent actions of this Premier and the Premier-in-waiting that they have nothing but contempt for regional Victoria. These Commonwealth Games, according to Labor, were going to bring investment to regional communities and boost their local economies. Yet it appears the Commonwealth Games were just another classic shady Labor campaign tactic, and what is worse, they still have not released the failed costings that led to this decision. Labor only cares about those who live outside of Melbourne when it comes time to vote.

Simon Crean

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (09:44): I rise to pay tribute to the late Honourable Simon Crean. Simon was the reason I joined the Labor Party. I was 16 and helping out in my mum and dad's coffee shop, which was up the road from his electorate office. One day Simon popped in for a coffee and I was immediately starstruck. He told me I should join the Labor Party – I did, and the rest is history. A few years later he was pounding the pavement with me when I ran for council and again when I ran for Parliament. I also got to work in his office. He was just such an inspirational boss, who taught me so much, especially about the value of working as part of a collective. His passing really has made me wonder how different my life would have been had I not met Simon and had his encouragement. I certainly do not think I would be a member of Parliament.

Simon achieved so much in politics. He led the labour movement at both an industrial level as president of the ACTU and also as party leader. The only other person who has led both was Bob Hawke. This is therefore a very significant loss. I was just a school student when Simon as opposition leader prosecuted the case against the Howard government's decision to join the war in Iraq, and as we have heard over the past month, this was the right decision. He has received a lot of the praise over the past month for this decision, but it was not so at the time, and I think it is somewhat regrettable that we are only realising now what a great leader he was. Vale, Simon. You were the best prime minister this country never had.

Road maintenance

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:46): Nothing is more important than getting people home safe at the end of every trip. Whether it is a quick duck down to the shops, a regular school run or a longer run, every Victorian deserves to feel safe when travelling on our roads. The unfortunate truth is, however, my constituents often do not feel safe when using our roads. Daniel Andrews is not walking the walk when it comes to spending money on our roads and making sure Victorians get home sooner and safer. This has also made the transport of commodities to our ports for export less efficient. This means less income for our primary producers and local businesses at a time when they are getting hit with record taxes by the Andrews Labor government. I also speak to countless transport companies who are fed up with having to change tyres and windscreens on a regular basis amid a cost-of-living crisis. But what Daniel Andrews is an expert on is squandering billions on a false, made-up election promise like the Commonwealth Games. Now we know it could cost over \$1 billion to rip up that contract. Incompetence and waste are hallmarks of this government. No-one asked him to put his hand up for the games and no-one asked him to bid for it, but now every single Victorian has to pay for his

mistake. I am once again calling on Daniel Andrews to stop playing politics over road safety and restore the funding required to deliver these critical road safety upgrades.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast is to refer to members by their correct titles.

Northern Bay College

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (09:47): It was a great honour to host the Premier to visit Northern Bay College's Goldsworthy campus recently. Northern Bay began as part of the Corio–Norlane education regeneration project. This project amalgamated nine local schools into one prep to year 12 college across five campuses. The Goldsworthy campus was the last of the five campuses to be redeveloped, and it received funding for capital works in the 2020–21 state budget. The \$17 million project will deliver a performing arts centre, admin building and new classrooms. It will change the face of the Goldsworthy campus, uplifting the public entrance to the school.

The Andrews Labor government understands that every student deserves the very best facilities no matter where they live, and that is exactly what we are building in Corio. The Premier and I along with college principal Scott Diamond and Goldsworthy campus principal Erin Prendergast toured the site to see the progress that has been made on construction. A special thankyou to the school leaders for the wonderful tour and insightful conversation. Thank you to college captains Fiona Williamson and Jevic Mwanza and Peacock campus leaders Archer Boljkovac, Guneet Otal, Maddi Nunn and Tom De Francesco. I cannot wait to see this project completed and being used by students every single day. Thanks again to Northern Bay for having us.

Seymour FM

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:48): I want to highlight the fantastic community work in my electorate, starting with the reopening of Seymour FM radio station after being flooded last year. Committed community members worked tirelessly to reopen this vital asset, and it was a privilege to officially open the new station. The Seymour radio station is the heart of storytelling in our community, providing a beautiful platform for sharing our diverse voices. Well done Greg Sharp, Callum Watson, Nathan Foggie, Cynthia Lim, James Cisco and Bruce Hunt-Hughes.

Seymour community food share

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:49): Seymour has also witnessed an exciting initiative to combat and help people under extreme financial pressure in the community. A new monthly food bank program led by Barbara and her team at the centre distributed 50 hampers on its first day. The high demand sadly reflects the impact of the cost-of-living crisis in our region. Our offices have become a crisis meeting point, and the lack of government support for these individuals is devastating. I extend my gratitude to the selfless community-led programs making a real difference.

Dehan Coreejas

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:50): Lastly congratulations to sporting champion Dehan Coreejas, the recent recipient of a Benalla Young Sportsperson Trust grant. It is a privilege to be associated with this program – a program that supports young people to go on and achieve their dreams, bridging the divide between small-town sports and the major leagues. Dehan was awarded \$1000 to cover the cost of his trip to Queensland to compete with the Melbourne Rebels rugby side.

Lyn Holdsworth OAM

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:50): Two weeks ago Melton lost a community champion and trailblazer in Lyn Holdsworth OAM. Yesterday I attended her funeral, and given hundreds of people attended, it is undeniable how sorely she will be missed. Lyn's passion, dedication and commitment to the Melton township was at the heart of everything she did and worked towards. She supported many campaigns over the years, including spearheading the first campaign for a Melton hospital. Lyn was a strong advocate for those living with disability, the protection of our precious environment and, above

all else, the betterment of the community. Undoubtedly Lyn's legacy will endure for many years to come. If we were to reflect on all of her accomplishments, arguably her biggest contribution to the community was the planting of thousands of trees in the mission to revitalise the Toolern Creek. She cleared tonnes of plastic and rubbish invading the Toolern Creek and to her surprise discovered an abundance of platypus in the creek. The creek is now home to the platypus festivals which hundreds of people attend each year. It was an absolute honour to have worked alongside Lyn and to witness her passion and commitment to the Melton community. Lyn was selfless and kind. She would never hesitate to lend a helping hand to those in need. Lyn was a dedicated and loving mother to Simone and a proud grandmother to Rachelle and Aaron, and we send our deepest sympathies and condolences to them and Lyn's family. We thank Lyn for her unwavering support of the Melton community and her dedication and commitment to the betterment of the entire Melton township. Vale, Lyn Holdsworth OAM.

Benambra electorate roads

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (09:51): With apologies to Lucky Starr and others, I have spent the winter recess on roads dodging potholes so deep that I lost a staff member in one.

I've been everywhere, man
The roads are beyond repair, man
I've been to Towong, Sandy Creek, Leneva
Allans Flat, Norong, Baranduda, Kergunyah, Mitta Mitta, Bullioh
Stanley, Walwa, Corryong, Chiltern
Shelley, Pine Mountain and Burrowye
Tallandoon, Bruarong, Dartmouth, Browns Plains and even Koetong
These roads could bring down King Kong, man

I've been everywhere, man
The potholes are so deep you can drown, man
You cut 25 per cent of the budget share, man
But cars are breaking down, man
Seeing a road crew is rare, man
I've been everywhere, man

I've been to Wahgunyah, Beechworth, Kiewa,
West Wodonga, Talgarno, Barnawartha, Gooramadda, Doolans Bend and even Thologolong
Rutherglen, Cudgewa, Bonegilla, Granya and Killara
Eskdale and Berringama, Gundowring, Tallandoon, Bandiana and Tallangatta
Biggara, Tangambalanga
Bethanga, what's the matter, man?

I've been everywhere, man
I'd love the minister to visit, man
The roads up here are bare, man
She can breathe the mountain air, man
I'm happy to share, man
Please just show you care, man.

This is IT

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (09:53): What an act to follow. Recently I attended a very special event at Hallam Secondary College with my friend the member for Cranbourne, the City of Casey and the South East Local Learning and Employment Network to celebrate an incredible milestone in the organisation's This is IT program. This is IT provides more than 800 repurposed laptops to students living in the City of Casey, with the aim to tackle financial barriers leading to disengagement. This is IT has identified the south-east, including the City of Casey as a target area where a high percentage of students identify financial distress as a reason for disengagement. The program is working towards pathways to re-engagement and sees access to technology as a vital factor in this process.

The program also has a second objective of reducing e-waste levels in the community, putting an emphasis on re-using and repurposing technology that would otherwise go unused. It is an incredible initiative that addresses disadvantage by equalising education whilst reducing e-waste levels. It was great to speak to principal Simon Sherlock from Hallam Secondary College and principal Chad Ambrose from Gleneagles Secondary College about the difference this program has made to the students in their schools, providing greater accessibility to the tools that create better education outcomes. It was an honour to be part of this great event, and I really look forward to continuing to work on this program to tackle student disengagement in my community.

Sophie Trevitt

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:54): Late last week the world lost a young woman who was truly one of a kind. Sophie Trevitt lost her short battle with brain cancer at the age of 32, and I know this loss is felt deeply by all those who knew her, because if you worked with Soph, she left a big impression on you. I first met Sophie through the Australian Youth Climate Coalition when she was just 16 years old. She was wise and talented, with a strength and moral fortitude beyond her years. Over the next 10 years or so we worked together in various capacities – at the AYCC as young climate activists, at UN climate conferences and later side by side on election campaigns and in the Greens. In more recent years Sophie became a staunch advocate for young people in detention and prison and for First Nations justice. This year she was awarded the Voltaire Human Rights Award, but of course, in true Sophie style, she only wanted to use the award to further her platform for her social justice work. When governments finally get around to raising the age of criminal responsibility, it will be in no small part due to Sophie's tireless work alongside First Nations communities.

Soph packed a lot into her 32 years. Ultimately I will remember her as a passionate, sometimes wild, often accident-prone, incredibly loyal friend who spent literally her whole life giving back to others. Soph, I will remember all the times we spent dancing on sticky floors from Canberra to Cancun, the bad spoken word you dragged us to in the backstreets of Los Angeles and the nights you would stay late at the office, finishing the work the rest of us were too tired to do, fuelled only by carrots and hummus and a deep abiding sense of justice. Sophie set the standard for the rest of us. My love and condolences to the love of her life Tom, her friends and family and the many, many people who loved her.

Guardian Childcare & Education

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (09:56): I had the pleasure recently of visiting Guardian Childcare & Education in Point Cook. I would like to thank Mariam and the team for the welcome and their learning centre's excellent work in terms of education. Guardian Childcare & Education lead programs for children between six weeks and six years with play-based learning. I was very happy to learn about their programs, in particular around their engagement with the Bunurong people of the Kulin nation, the local Aboriginal community, and their engagement with further education for their team. This certainly meets some of our objectives around increasing the number of early childhood and kindergarten teachers ongoing.

Beach Patrol 3030

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (09:57): I recently had the opportunity to celebrate the local action group Beach Patrol 3030's eighth birthday. We had some vegan cake, and I have made a commitment to bring some cake next time for them. Beach Patrol is an effective activist group which has been keeping the beaches of Werribee South – the river of Werribee – nice and clean and suitable for our entire committee. Happy birthday.

Gobind Sarvar Gurmukhi Learning Center

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (09:57): Earlier this week I had the opportunity to join Gobind Sarvar Gurmukhi Learning Center to learn more about the Punjabi community's culture, music and faith. I would like to extend a thankyou to Ekta Mahal and the early learning team for their hospitality, their welcome and the opportunity to practise my Punjabi, which needs a little bit more practice.

Sorrento Primary School

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:58): I was lucky enough recently to have Dr Matt Bach from the other place come and visit me down in Sorrento and to visit Sorrento Primary School and their principal Elaine, who is trying something a little bit different with her foundation students. Every Monday, the students get a bus that is provided by the Rye RSL. They go down to Point Nepean National Park, and the kids just spend a day at Point Nepean learning out in the environment. Last week when I was there they were building rope ladders with sticks. They whittle timber away and they go and do numbers on the beach.

James Newbury: Did you have a go?

Sam GROTH: I did have a go, actually, member for Brighton. I had a little go there. They were digging holes. It is such a great, interactive way for kids to learn outside of a classroom. They are trying to actually move this through to students in grades 1, 2, 3 and 4 to get them out of that classroom and get them out into something a little bit different. On the back of COVID they are finding a lot of those students and younger people are struggling with the social element, so they are taking them into an environment that is completely different. It is early stages, but they want to be able to monitor next year, as the students go into year 1 and year 2, how those students interact socially for the future. I commend Elaine and the school on taking a risk and doing something a little bit different. It is fantastic what they are achieving, and I look forward to getting down to Point Nepean with the Sorrento Primary School kids once again soon.

Roxburgh Park United Soccer Club

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (09:59): It was a tremendous pleasure to join so many young players and their families on Monday evening at Roxburgh Park United Soccer Club to watch the magnificent Matildas navigate their way to the knockout stages of the World Cup with a superb win over Canada. Ayad, Dunia and the incredible team of coaches and volunteers at Roxburgh Park United provide such a welcoming home for families and young people with a passion for football in my electorate. Their focus is on participation, development, good coaching and fun – all of which were also evident when I saw the reserves take on Doreen last Saturday.

Mickleham Road duplication

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:00): Works are proceeding at pace on the stage 1 Mickleham Road upgrade. As Greenvale residents and all users of Mickleham Road know, this is a vital project that will deliver upgraded intersections, new lanes and safer, faster journeys. It is also a complex engineering project that is currently relocating 10 kilometres of trunk utilities, including a primary NBN connection that links Melbourne and Sydney and forms our nation's key information artery, as well as securing over half a kilometre of an incredibly sensitive aviation jet fuel pipeline, without which Melbourne Airport could not operate.

Aitken College

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:00): I was thrilled to be part of a great initiative at Aitken College last Friday, where year 9 students will nurture seeds collected from native trees along Mickleham Road into saplings, which will subsequently be planted along the upgraded road, providing shade to the users of shared paths and an enduring legacy for generations to come. Thanks to principal Josie Crisara and all the Aitken staff and students who are enabling this wonderful project.

Cyprus settlement

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:01): It has been 49 years since Türkiye invaded Cyprus, illegally seizing and violently occupying 36 per cent of the island, displacing hundreds of thousands of people. I am proudly Cypriot Australian, and this year, along with eight other Hellenic Australian parliamentarians, we passed a resolution at the World Hellenic Inter-Parliamentary Association's general assembly. Together we condemned the illegal occupation of Northern Cyprus by Türkiye, which contravenes international law and UN resolutions, and we called for the right of return for Cypriot refugees to their ancestral homelands. The resolution appeals to all parliaments, including this one, to fully support the UN-led efforts for a peaceful, just and viable Cyprus settlement.

The international community, bar Türkiye, recognises sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus over the entire island of Cyprus, yet for nearly half a century Cypriots have endured the consequences of invasion. Both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have suffered. To this day Nicosia remains the world's last divided capital. A UN-patrolled buffer zone fractures through it, like a wound that never healed. In the mountains north, a giant Turkish flag is scorched into the earth by the invaders, lit up at night as an ongoing reminder to Greek Cypriots of the injustice and horror wrought by Türkiye on this island. To the north-east is my mother's village of Asha – we do not go back there. It is occupied by Turkish military, who rounded up the Greek civilians, executed them and dumped their bodies into mass graves. The international community has repeatedly called for the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Cyprus and a peaceful resolution – a chillingly similar scenario to Ukraine now. I stand in solidarity with them.

Voice to Parliament

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (10:02): It has been nearly six weeks since we last met here in Parliament, and in that time the yes campaign has well and truly started up in Melbourne's west. It has been absolutely heartening to see so many westies from my electorate championing the Indigenous Voice to Parliament – it makes me really proud, actually – and like so many of my colleagues on this side of the chamber, I will be proudly voting yes. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make a real and profound impact for First Nations Australians – to give them more of a say in the things that affect them. We have seen in Victoria just a snippet of what the Voice can achieve through our First Nations Assembly, and we are making progress on our own treaty with First Nations people. We know from listening to Indigenous leaders that this is the preferred way to move forward. It is the result of over 10 years of conversation and consultation with hundreds, if not thousands, of Indigenous elders. What I would like to say to my community is that if you support reconciliation, if you support closing the gap, if you support better and fairer outcomes for First Nations Australians, then I would encourage you to vote yes at the referendum later this year.

Grant Nichol

Katie HALL (Footscray) (10:03): I am very pleased today to be paying tribute to a teacher who changed my life, and I am very pleased to have the member for Monbulk in here with me as I acknowledge the remarkable 49 years of service to Upwey High from Grant Nichol. Grant started his career as a civil engineer with the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. In mid-1978 he became a youth worker with the Uniting Church, focusing on camping, leadership training and social justice. In 1989 Grant started at Upwey High and never left. He was to stay for 49 years, and he will

probably make it to 50 years because he says he cannot quit cold turkey and will be back to help with camps and emergency teaching.

Grant was no ordinary teacher. He organised every school camp, taking busloads of year 9 kids to Central Australia, and he seemed to enjoy it, remarkably. He is one of those people who remembers everyone's name. He knows where all the students are working and travelling; he coordinates all the school reunions. Grant encouraged and believed in me. He encouraged my interest in politics over decades, from work experience in the Senate office of Jacinta Collins to the school strikes I went on, and now he comes out and hands out for me on election day. Grant Nichol is someone who has changed thousands of lives. Thank you, Grant.

Simon Crean

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (10:05): I too rise to say a few words about Simon Crean. Simon was a beloved son of the Australian Labor Party, but he was also a beloved son of the Australian union movement. My contribution on Simon's life is as a former leader of the National Union of Workers, the created and amalgamated union of the Federated Storemen and Packers, now called the United Workers Union. Crean was the assistant general secretary, then general secretary, of the Federated Storemen and Packers' Union from 1976 to 85. During this time he was junior vice-president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions as well as its senior vice-president at that time. He later went on to become the ACTU president from 1985 to 1990. While ACTU president, he played a key role in negotiating the prices and the income accord with the Hawke-Keating Labor government. He facilitated and introduced some incredible reforms in this country. He facilitated and introduced worker-led initiatives, including the establishment of universal superannuation, new welfare payments, improved skill and employment pathways and improved childcare and health and safety standards. Simon was still passionate about all of these things until the time he passed. Much has been said about his vision and his values. He was very generous with his time, and he was a true giant of the labour movement. Rest in peace, Simon.

Ubuntu community village, Springvale

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:06): I was very pleased recently to visit the Ubuntu community village in Springvale, a place that is very close to the member for Clarinda's heart, but I want to particularly acknowledge Selba-Gondoza Luka not just for inviting me but for the role she takes in leadership. The group is called the Mamas, and it is a group of women, many of whom are of the African-Australian communities and many other groups as well. They made sure that they let me know about what their needs are and recognised that there had been some trauma experienced in situations where they had come to the country as refugees and asylum seekers. I was really honoured to be brought into a really important circle of friendship. It was a kind place to be. I was extraordinarily grateful as well that there was a lunch that was served and you could taste the love, so I would like to thank Selba very much.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Integrity and Oversight Committee

The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:08): I rise to make a contribution to a report put forward by the Integrity and Oversight Committee, *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate*, and mostly I will be focusing on the minority report that was put forward at that time. We do know that there was quite a colourful history to that committee during the last Parliament, with multiple chair changes and plugs being pulled and the like, but the issues that were raised in this minority report are something that I think the whole Parliament needs to reflect on and continue to reflect on, because it very much relates to transparency and the way we do business, and it is so important that the way we do things is open and

transparent so we have a good system of government, not one that is interfered with by the government down into the public sector and into agencies. Some of the issues that are raised in the minority report absolutely focus on that.

The purpose of the committee is about keeping our agencies accountable through the monitoring and reviewing of their performance. Now, the ways that you do this are through submissions and public hearings, and you need to be open and hear that evidence with an open mind and look at it not from a political lens but from doing value for the taxpayer, because it is the taxpayer at the end of the day that misses out here, because we want IBAC and the Victorian Inspectorate, which are the subject of this report, to be operating with the highest degree of integrity. We want them to be able to do their job properly, and it needs to be transparent. As I said, these agencies – perhaps IBAC is underfunded; I am sure that they have a lot more work that they need to get on with and because of lack of funding cannot do – are taxpayer-funded agencies, so we need to make sure that the taxpayer gets value for money and the agencies can do the work that they need to do but then the committees can monitor and review that. I think value for money is something that is very, very lost on this government. We have had well over \$30 billion in cost overruns, and who pays for that? At the end of the day it is paid for by the taxpayer. At the moment, when the cost of living is going through the roof, we need to get bang for our buck, and absolutely we are not getting bang for our buck.

With the report and the minority report that I am referring to, one of the sentences, and I will read it out, is:

This Minority Report seeks to disclose some of the significant challenges throughout the performance audit process.

There were issues with the company that was appointed to do the auditing. Nevertheless, if there were issues, there are still ways for governments to behave, and what we saw was the most incredible interference, political interference, by the Labor Party into the outcome of the audit. I am referring to an email from Dustin Halse, the former chair and former member for Ringwood, on 6 October 2022. As I have said, there were a number of challenges, but towards the end of this email that he sent to particular people from the company in question is a direct quote:

For certainty, the Committee will not be in a position to approve the report if the above instructions (also noting the red flag items below) are not actioned in their entirety.

What is that saying? That is saying, ‘We want you to do what we want you to do.’ It is not allowing the auditor to be independent. It is to say to the auditor, ‘You must toe the line. This is what we want you to do, and if you do not do that, we are not going to approve the report.’ This is political interference and soft corruption at the highest level. It is staggering that this happened, and this is what caused the former chair of IBAC to write a letter to the Presiding Officers.

Privileges committees

Appointment of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser for the 60th Parliament

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:13): I rise to speak on the *Appointment of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser for the 60th Parliament*, a joint committee report which was published in June 2023. Of course this was to appoint Professor Charles Sampford as parliamentary integrity adviser, and the Speaker has recently advised that he will be in Parliament this week to meet members and discuss with members their important obligations.

Professor Sampford has been appointed for a period that ends four months after the next election. To give you a little bit of background of some of the credentials that Professor Sampford brings, he has bachelor of arts and bachelor of law degrees, each with first-class honours from no less than Melbourne University, and a doctorate of philosophy from Oxford University. He has been a board member of the Accountability Round Table since 2008, and he has held the position of president of the International Institute for Public Ethics. He is a person who comes with a great deal of background

and information and will be a very supportive person to those members of Parliament to assist them in their role.

The integrity adviser has a number of important roles to play: advising members of Parliament, educating members of Parliament, providing training and also a reporting function – accountability back to this Parliament. All of these are really important roles. Just to go a little bit into each of them, the integrity adviser provides advice to members of Parliament on ethical issues and integrity matters in their role in Parliament. Unfortunately for all of us here, he does not provide us free legal advice, but that might be something that is considered at a later point in time. Education and training are a fundamentally important part of this role to make sure that we are up to speed with those matters that we need to be aware of, including the provision of written resources, in-person training and training online. The reporting function – his accountability to the Parliament that employs him – is to report annually on the advice that he has given, the training that he has delivered, the time spent on the integrity adviser duties and any other matters that he considers appropriate.

Of course, there has been a recent review of the 59th Parliament. The review is called *Review of the Ongoing Resolution on the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser*, and it makes a number of recommendations, which have been included in this new role. Particularly it goes to the integrity adviser providing some advice around claiming of parliamentary allowances and conflicts of interest and general advice to members of Parliament on the code of conduct in part 3 of the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978. There is also strong emphasis on being available for members of Parliament, and that is making sure that he is available at least one sitting day across six separate sitting weeks. I guess the role of the integrity adviser is not to catch people doing the wrong thing but to inform them of how they can do the right thing, and that is an incredibly important role that the integrity adviser plays.

I would like to thank the committee for undertaking this work and recommending this appointment. That includes the chair, the Honourable Harriet Shing from Eastern Victoria and obviously in the other place; the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio, member for Mill Park; Dr Matthew Bach, a member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region; the Honourable Lizzie Blandthorn, a member for Western Metropolitan; Jeff Bourman, a member for Eastern Victoria Region – this is a very large committee doing an important job, so I will keep going with that – Georgie Crozier from Southern Metropolitan Region; the Honourable Melissa Horne, member for Williamstown; the Honourable Wendy Lovell, a member for Northern Victoria; James Newbury, you get a mention as well, member for Brighton; the Honourable Danny Pearson, member for Essendon; the Honourable Mary-Anne Thomas, member for Macedon; the Honourable Gayle Tierney, a member for Western Victoria; the Honourable Peter Walsh, member for Murray Plains; and the Honourable Kim Wells, member for Rowville.

I would also like to, and I know the member for Brighton would like to, shout out appreciation to the clerks who provided support in their roles: Richard Willis, the Assistant Clerk Committees for the Legislative Council; Vaughn Koops, the Deputy Clerk for the Legislative Assembly; and Vivienne Bannan, the bills and research officer of the Legislative Council. I thoroughly recommend that all members of this place take the time to read this important report and also engage the integrity adviser on how they can best perform their role in the best way possible.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Just before I call the member for Lowan, I remind members to use correct titles when referring to members of this house.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:18): I would like to speak to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) *Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audits of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office*, a report of May 2023, which I believe was the subject of the

previous member's contribution on committee reports today. As he recommended, it is a report worthy of everybody's consideration today and particularly around the great work that the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) does. It is so important that we have straight accounts and that the finances that are budgeted for the Victorian Auditor-General's Office are acquitted appropriately, because the Auditor-General's office does incredibly important work in ensuring the integrity and transparency of the actions and the work of all of our government bodies, of our public sector bodies, and how those finances are acquitted in their own right.

I have noted the work plan for the current year, the annual plan for VAGO, and I think there is an incredibly important amount of work to be done over the same period that this auditor has been appointed to ensure the financials all add up in the Victorian Auditor-General's Office. In particular I am very much looking forward to seeing the Auditor-General's report on protecting the biosecurity of agricultural plant species. There was a matter raised during PAEC this year which was around cutting of the rabbit monitoring program. This is a very important program for the monitoring of these pests across the state. It is around actually proactively understanding where rabbits are in our community and making sure that we have an early indication of where numbers are increasing, and of course that information is then used to target specific campaigns to eradicate or manage those pests. Now, unfortunately, this government has cut funding to the rabbit monitoring program in Victoria. This is not something that is acceptable. This is a program that has been going on for 32 years now, I believe. So I certainly am looking forward to seeing the audit reports on this, which is around plant diseases and pests in Victoria.

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have listened to what the member is saying. This is about committee reports, and the report relates to the financial audit of VAGO. I am not quite sure how a performance audit in relation to pest monitoring is relevant to the –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order is?

Members interjecting.

Danny Pearson: If you interrupt, I'll just take longer.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, Assistant Treasurer.

Danny Pearson: I am not sure how a performance audit in relation to pest monitoring relates to the financial audit of VAGO.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order is on relevance?

Danny Pearson: Relevance, Deputy Speaker. It is not relevant to the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, the member had strayed from the appointment for the financial audit. I would ask the member to come back to the committee report.

Emma KEALY: It is so important that the financial records and the expenditure are appropriately monitored and audited – and that is exactly the role of the individual who has been appointed by PAEC to ensure that this role is undertaken – because we need to ensure that VAGO, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, have the appropriate cash flow and their managers are expended appropriately to ensure they can do their fabulous work.

Some of the fabulous work that they are expecting this current year is also around reviewing employee health and wellbeing in Victorian public hospitals. Now, I note that in an inquiry earlier this week it was noted that the rate of bullying in IBAC was of great concern because it is up to 14 per cent. However, we know that in Grampians Health, for example, the rate of bullying is up to 23 per cent of staff. Now, the member for Narre Warren North had great concern about pursuing bullying rates of 14 per cent in IBAC, but why not the same concern around Grampians Health, which is at 23 per cent?

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is defying your ruling. This has got nothing to do with the financial audit of VAGO.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Again, if the member could come back to the report that was prefaced in the start of her speech, that would be much appreciated.

Emma KEALY: In summary, VAGO have got a comprehensive amount of work that they have planned for this coming year, whether it is around making sure our health services are operating appropriately, making sure there is no bullying anywhere across the sector, or making sure that also they are doing the right thing for Victorians. I support their work.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:23): I too rise to speak on the *Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office*, which is a report that was passed through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, of which I am a member. I note a number of other members in the house here who are also on that committee and thank them for their service, particularly the member for Yan Yean. I think the member for Point Cook has recently stepped out of the chamber. Can I also acknowledge the chair, the member for Laverton, and the member for Gippsland South, the other member of the Assembly who is on that committee.

The committee has been particularly busy in the last two months, not only looking at reviewing the budget in some detail but also fulfilling its many other functions, including the review of the Auditor-General's work plan, which, as has been described by the member for Lowan, is quite extensive and will explore a number of really important items in the coming year to ensure that the expenditure of government money is going in the right direction and is proving worthwhile. But it is important that the Auditor-General's work also has a role in that audit itself. It is not only important, but it is also a requirement of the Audit Act 1994. The recommendation of the report is that, in accordance with section 79 of the Audit Act, the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly appoint Mr Kenneth Weldin of PKF Melbourne Audit & Assurance for a period of 12 months to undertake this audit. This is a continuation of PKF's former role – they have been previously appointed for a number of years to undertake this important work – and that will no doubt continue to make sure that the work that the Auditor-General does and the continuation of their work has the appropriate financial oversight. It is important that we get all of that correct.

In terms of the Auditor-General's work in general, there are obviously many different reports and accounts that are currently going through Parliament. I do want to again thank the committee and the secretariat for our current inquiry, which is reviewing the Auditor-General's reports 99 and 213, which relate to gambling and alcohol, the subject of a current inquiry –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! If the member could please keep to the committee report that we are discussing, not current inquiries.

Paul HAMER: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, the focus of this report is the appointment of a financial auditor, Mr Kenneth Weldin. His specific role will be to conduct an audit of VAGO's financial statements for the 2023–24 financial year and review and provide an audit opinion on VAGO's performance standard, with that report to come to Parliament in the second half of 2024 – so obviously once the completion of the 2023–24 financial year has been done.

Integrity and Oversight Committee*The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate*

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (10:28): Today I rise again to speak on committee reports, and I would particularly like to home in again on *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate*. I would particularly like to focus on the minority report prepared by the deputy chair, the member for Sandringham, and the member for Rowville.

The minority report discusses significant challenges throughout the performance audit processes: the performance auditors' inability to do what both the law and the committee required and that the legislative framework underpinning the performance audit process is simply inadequate. A particularly salient topic of discussion in the minority report was the conduct of the Labor chair of the audit subcommittee in writing to the auditor expressing the committee's clear directions to Callida. The full email was attached to the report at appendix A. It essentially directed the independent performance auditor to remove any references to the Andrews government underfunding or under-resourcing IBAC. My colleagues the members for Sandringham and Rowville noted in the report:

This email from the Chair of the Subcommittee demonstrates the level of direct engagement and assistance – one may even assert 'interference' – in order to arrive at the final reports. It also further demonstrates Callida's inability to undertake the performance audit themselves.

The minority report concludes that:

... due principally to the misrepresentations of the auditor's capacity to undertake this audit, their final reports contained in the Majority Report are not independent ...

and also discusses concerns about the quality of work undertaken by the auditor. The auditors' plans were said to be well short of the committee's expectations. At the conclusion of the audits the auditors themselves acknowledged that they were ineffective and unable to undertake the audits to an acceptable standard. The report summarises that absolute independence cannot be ensured for the audit under the current system. The minority report by the member for Sandringham and the member for Rowville is not asking for wide-sweeping legislative changes but calls for further clarity and allowing for an audit to function as it normally would.

This comes after the 2023–24 budget allocated IBAC less money than the corruption watchdog spent in the last year. While IBAC received a \$300,000 year-on-year funding increase in the budget, it only received \$62.2 million in funding despite the anti-corruption agency actually spending \$62.9 million in the last financial year. IBAC is not the only target under this Andrews Labor government; it seems that it is integrity agencies across all of this Parliament, from the Parliamentary Budget Office to the Auditor-General, the Victorian Inspectorate and the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner. The Auditor-General's funding has fallen from \$33.7 million to \$29.8 million, OVIC from \$21.1 million to \$20.1 million and the PBO from \$3.9 million to \$3.4 million. This quite literally is a starvation of these independent agencies' integrity functions – a coordinated campaign by this government to hide the truth from Victorians.

I want to take some time also to reflect on some concerns raised by the former anti-corruption chief of Victoria Robert Redlich prior to the 2022 Victorian state election. Essentially he cited a disturbing trend of soft corruption at a national level but particularly in Victoria. He named his concerns as the centralisation of power, the growth in influence of ministerial advisers and the reduction in the level of responsibility of individual ministers.

Now, consider the fact that the Andrews government has been scrutinised in five IBAC reports in 12 months, each time with no adverse findings towards the Premier, where there is a rotten culture of corruption and secrecy involved in decisions made on behalf of Victorians day in and day out. The fabric of democracy is fragile because its survival is dependent on the will of the public. The moment

public trust begins to erode, when citizens become scared of their government's ability to tell the truth and their ability to govern, it can go rapidly. While it may seem like hyperbole, we must have the utmost respect for our democracy and its various wings. Time and time again overt and callous disregard for our democracy has come to categorise this Andrews Labor government.

Privileges committees

Appointment of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser for the 60th Parliament

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:32): I am very pleased to speak to the report of the joint Privileges Committee on the *Appointment of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser for the 60th Parliament*. Cutting to the chase, the essential recommendation from the committee, jointly is:

In accordance with (5)(a) of the 2019 resolution, the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly appoint Professor Charles Sampford –

and he has already been spoken to, quite rightly, today for good reason –

as parliamentary integrity adviser under the terms and conditions of appointment in Appendix A of this report –

and I will speak to that a little later –

which have been agreed in consultation with the Speaker and the President, for the period that terminates on the day that is four months after the next general election.

So obviously this is a very important appointment, and hence it is worthy of speaking to this matter in the chamber today – a very worthy report indeed.

Now, thinking about process, obviously when we are talking of matters of integrity, process is critical. I should say that the committees met jointly on 5 April 2023, and they actually – which happens from time to time – established a subcommittee to undertake the appointment process and make a recommendation to the committees. The chairs and deputy chairs of the Council and Assembly committees were appointed to the subcommittee. I want to commend the work of the chairs – or of the members of the subcommittee, I should say, to be more specific. We had a member for Eastern Victoria, a member for Southern Metropolitan Region, and in that case it was Georgie Crozier MLC, we had the member for Mill Park and also the member for Rowville as part of the subcommittee. In accordance with due process they advertised the position through the Careers.Vic website and sought candidates for the position through a range of networks.

The reason I am going into detail on this matter is of course it is an integrity adviser, hence we want to know that the process was thorough, and it certainly purports to have been so when we look at this report in detail. The subcommittee interviewed candidates and obtained reports from referees for the preferred candidate Professor Charles Sampford, as I have already stated today. Professor Sampford's background was summarised a little bit earlier. I may go into further detail on that if we have time, but I do know that the member for Point Cook did duly provide that detail, which I think is very helpful for the chamber as well.

When we are looking at what the parliamentary integrity adviser must do, I did refer earlier to appendix A. This is regarding the terms and conditions of the appointment:

- The Parliamentary Integrity Adviser (PIA) must:
 - exercise due care and skill and provide the Services to a high professional standard and to the best of their ability, knowledge and expertise;
 - comply with any reasonable direction given by Parliament –

and I say 'reasonable' –

in relation to the provision of the Services;

- comply with all the applicable standards and codes, laws and regulations in force from time to time;
- when using premises or facilities owned or controlled by Parliament, comply with any occupational health and safety requirements –

I would certainly hope so –

- and security guidelines notified to them from time to time;
- provide to Parliament on request periodic progress reports relating to the Services; and
- comply with any policies and procedures notified to them by Parliament from time to time.

I again am referring to the detail on that matter because of course we want to make sure that this role is conducted appropriately.

I should say, while we are discussing the report, a thankyou to Richard Willis, Assistant Clerk, Committees, Legislative Council; Vaughn Koops, Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly; and Vivienne Bannan, Bills and Research Officer, Legislative Council. I know that they will have conducted this report with rigour to ensure that it has been delivered to the Parliament in a satisfactory way that certainly meets the requirements and the understanding of all members. Can I collectively say – yes, I think I can – that we see all the due diligence that has been undertaken in terms of selecting an appropriate person for this role and that everyone is in broad agreement that this will be certainly positive for all members because, as was referred to earlier by the member for Point Cook, this is about helping all members to meet those ethical and integrity requirements.

Motions

Big Housing Build

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10:38): I move:

That this house notes:

- (a) since the start of the Big Housing Build in November 2020, 7600 homes are completed or underway, with Victoria on track to deliver over 12,000 much-needed social and affordable homes; and
- (b) the new \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund will deliver more than 1300 additional homes.

I want to thank the house for providing the opportunity to bring this motion to the floor of the Parliament for an important discussion on housing issues and in particular the government's Big Housing Build. Before I move into the program that is the Big Housing Build and the impact that it is having on providing homes for people who really need them, it is important to recognise the significant pressures that are on housing here in Victoria and right across the country. Every member of this place would know all too well that the pressures in term of increased interest rates, increased cost of living, cost of construction and blockages in the construction supply chains have meant that, and for a whole range of other reasons, there is pressure on people in all parts of the housing continuum.

We see that moving through the housing continuum through people paying mortgages, people in rentals and people looking for rentals or to purchase homes, and that therefore puts pressure onto people who are struggling and therefore on our housing waiting lists, both our general waitlist, which is called the Victorian Housing Register, and also the priority list, which prioritises against set criteria the neediest people in terms of social housing. It is important to recognise that we have a really large number of applications on both our Victorian Housing Register, our waitlist, and our priority list because of these factors that I have just mentioned. The figures that were published in March show that there were 67,985 applications on the Victorian Housing Register and 31,158 on the priority list. That is a lot of people in a lot of need, and I will come back to the measures that are being put in place and that should be put in place to address that extraordinary housing need.

In that priority cohort of people who really need housing there are groups within our community that it is worth highlighting face a range of significant issues. Youth housing and homelessness is a particular problem, because of course young people need stable housing to set themselves up for the rest of their lives, for their learning and for their early years in employment. Housing at that young age is so important – we know that is a challenge. People who have experienced family violence is another cohort. We want to make sure that people who are survivors of family violence have access to homes

and in particular, in talking to the family violence sector, that there are appropriate exits into accommodation from the emergency accommodation and crisis accommodation that are provided by that sector. Aboriginal Victorians are over-represented in both our housing need statistics and homelessness statistics. We know that we have to work with Aboriginal Victorians through an approach of self-determination and really invest in homes for Aboriginal Victorians to deliver that, and I will talk a bit about that in a moment as well. There are people who have mental health issues and disabilities that also face particular issues in terms of housing need. All these issues, as I will mention in a moment, have been picked up through the Big Housing Build, but of course a lot more needs to be done.

The impact of the housing emergency across the country right now means that there are more people than ever who are being forced into homelessness right across the country. Here in Victoria we invest \$300 million annually into homelessness services. That is providing support to about 130 organisations that provide direct support to people experiencing homelessness. The most recent budget, I was very pleased to see, included \$134 million, which was part of the \$67.6 million to continue the Housing First response for people experiencing homelessness. Now, the Housing First approach is probably the largest approach undertaken by any state, and it was undertaken by Victoria flowing out of COVID. In 2020, people will remember, the From Homelessness to a Home program was initiated. There is also the Homes for Families program, which is I suppose a family version of that From Homelessness to a Home program, and that program has now seen \$167 million invested to support around 1900 adults and 700 children into homes. That is effectively taking people who are rough sleeping and putting them into homes and wrapping supports around them – a Housing First approach. That is a great program and a credit to people who work in the sector who have been advocating for this for some time and to previous ministers and officials in the department who have helped to ensure that that program has been successful – a bumpy road, not perfect, but certainly overall a great success.

When we consider the challenges that I have just outlined, it does sound a bit simplistic, but the base proposition here is that we need more homes. We need more homes for people who need them, whether they be in any of those categories I have just talked about on our waiting list. Supply is the key here, and we are fortunate that a few years ago the government recognised that supply would be the issue and kicked off the Big Housing Build – \$5.3 billion to deliver over 12,000 new social and affordable homes right across the state. Its scale should be remembered – \$5.3 billion across the state is the biggest investment in social and affordable housing in the state's history, and when I go to ministerial council, it is made very clear that it is the biggest investment of any state or territory across the country in social and affordable housing. \$1.25 billion of that is being invested in regional Victoria to ensure that there is a fair distribution of the increase in social housing throughout regional Victoria as well. One of the great side effects of this program of course is job creation – about 10,000 jobs a year created through the construction and related activities that this program generates, creating jobs not just in Melbourne but right across regional Victoria. Because that investment is occurring across regional Victoria, we have also got those jobs occurring right across regional Victoria.

Just to give people a sense of the projects and the difference that they make to people's lives, I will run through some of the ones I have had the chance to visit recently. As I said in question time yesterday, yesterday I was out at Bills Street, Hawthorn: 103 social housing dwellings, 103 affordable dwellings – so a mixture of tenure, which is good thing – nearly a doubling of the amount of social housing that was previously on that site. This is of course improving vastly on what was there – run-down, old social housing – and building brand new, modern, energy-efficient apartments that are just fantastic. So that is a great development, that particular location. As the manager of the community housing organisation that will run those tenancies, Housing Choices, said to me yesterday, with the completion date late this year, they have already commenced tenancy work. So people will be in those homes before Christmas. It is fantastic to think that there will be 103 people off the social housing waitlist into those homes before Christmas.

The Markham estate, Deputy Speaker, is in your own electorate. I know you know that well. We visited that site together. 178 social and affordable homes – a great development well designed. It has had a difficult pathway because there was opposition from those opposite, both the Liberal-Nationals and the Greens, to this project. I am very proud to say this government has pushed on with that project and it is now tenanting people. People are moving in as we speak, and that is a great outcome as well.

I was recently with the member for Pascoe Vale at Harvest Square in Brunswick West, where we are delivering in partnership with Women's Housing Limited 119 social housing dwellings. Again it is a mixture of those social housing dwellings and market rentals and private apartments as well. It is a great development in that part of Melbourne, and 5 per cent of those dwellings will be Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) compliant. It is important to recognise at this point that these homes are all being built to 7-star nationwide house energy rating scheme (NatHERS) ratings, so they are highly energy efficient. The ones I am mentioning are all electric, so this is a great benefit for the tenants as they are able to reduce their power bills in these developments.

At Tarakan Street in West Heidelberg there are 130 dwellings. I was there with the member for Ivanhoe some time ago. Again, there are some DDA-compliant units there and it is a great change. I did not work too far away from that site some years ago, and I remember the old housing stock there. This has been an absolute step change in that housing for those people. Obviously with all these developments, the people who were living there have the first option to come back now that the construction has been completed. I was talking to one of the construction workers who controls the traffic out the front. He said he is regularly stopped by locals who used to live in the old housing asking when the job is going to be completed so they can come back. They are looking forward to coming back in. He said it is quite a common question, and you can understand that. You can understand, having lived in the old accommodation, being interested in coming back to that great development at Tarakan at West Heidelberg.

I was at the Townhall development in Preston with the member for Preston. That is a great development. It is 39 social housing dwellings just behind the town hall itself in Preston. It is again a great partnership with a community housing provider but also with the local council, who has put up land on a long-term lease so that we can build on that important site. It is a great project.

I was recently – some time ago – at Balaclava with the Minister for Housing at the federal level. The member for Caulfield was not there. He opposed that development through its process. But I am really pleased that we had the delivery of 46 new social housing dwellings at that really important site just beside the train station there. Again that was a cooperative approach where the City of Port Phillip provided long-term lease of the land and enabled that development to occur in partnership with HousingFirst.

Out at Halcyon in Brighton we have got a partnership with a community housing provider. There are 152 social housing dwellings being built there in that particular development. This particular development is focusing on people who need social housing who are over 55 – so a great development there – and we had the chance again to meet many of the residents of that particular building who are already moving back in.

I was out at Vermont not too long ago with the member for Glen Waverley having a look at a development out there that we are doing in partnership with Women's Housing Limited – 34 social housing dwellings. I know he is very supportive of that development occurring and more social housing in his electorate as well. This is just a sample of the developments that are occurring through the Big Housing Build.

As I say, in terms of delivering 12,000 new social and affordable housing dwellings, this is happening right across the state in projects big and small. When we go around the regions, the different parts of Melbourne and the different parts of Victoria, that investment is being spread out. If I can just go to the City of Greater Geelong, where the total investment in that area through the Big Housing Build is

\$192 million, 250 homes have been completed and 270 are on the way. These are all homes that are taking people off the social housing waitlist. The City of Greater Bendigo has a total investment of \$110 million – 40 homes have been completed and 272 are underway. In the City of Melton area, with an investment of \$26 million, 29 homes have been completed and 33 are underway. In the City of Monash, with \$113 million, 72 have been completed and 168 new homes are underway. Up in Ballarat, with an investment of \$119 million, 119 homes have been completed and 221 are underway. In the Moorabool area, with \$22 million, 30 homes are completed and 31 are underway. In Mildura, with an investment of \$39 million, 19 homes have been completed and 86 new homes are underway. In the Rural City of Swan Hill area, with \$34 million, 18 homes have been completed and 77 new homes are underway. In the Shire of Cardinia, with an investment of \$25 million, 14 homes have been completed with 47 currently underway. In the City of Whitehorse, with an investment of \$72 million, 38 new homes have been completed and 122 new homes are underway. In the City of Casey, with a \$58 million investment, 46 homes have been completed and 93 homes are currently underway. In the City of Latrobe, with an investment of \$66 million, 53 new homes have been completed and 108 are underway. This is about big projects; it is also about small projects, where we are doing one or two or three units in particular areas.

Since the floods I have spent some time in the Shepparton area. I have been asked to take a particular focus on Shepparton, as other ministers have picked up other areas, and I know that BeyondHousing and Rumbalara do lot of heavy lifting in terms of providing housing in those areas and ensuring people have the services they need. Funding through the Big Housing Build goes to BeyondHousing to deliver these housing projects. Good examples at the grassroots level are Regent Street, Shepparton, where we have funded five dwellings; Graham Street, Shepparton, 20 dwellings; McDonald Street, Shepparton, four dwellings; Rattray Avenue, Wangaratta, three dwellings; Raglan Street, Wallan, six dwellings; Melbourne Street, Kilmore, two; Mentor Street, Seymour, two dwellings; Hume Street, Wodonga, four; Macisaac Road, Mooroopna, 12; Appin Street, Wangaratta, two; Archer Street, Shepparton, four; High Street, Cobram, three; Lyndren Street, Wodonga, three; and Rotary Drive, Bright, four. I am just trying to illustrate the point that there are big apartment buildings being built in metropolitan Melbourne as part of this program and there are small-scale developments right across the suburbs and right across the state as part of the Big Housing Build. It is literally changing people's lives as we take people off the social housing waitlist. As I said at the start, there is lot more to do – we know the waiting list is too big – but the Big Housing Build is adding supply to take pressure off that waitlist.

As I mentioned at the start of the motion, we know that youth housing is important, so I was very pleased earlier this year to announce \$50 million for a youth housing package which will deliver in partnership with a range of providers – predominantly youth supported accommodation – 130 homes across Victoria. As we look to the future, with other funding streams coming in, which I will come to in a moment, we hope to be able to do more.

We know that Aboriginal housing is such a critical issue, and due to the work of previous ministers and people in the department, we have developed the Aboriginal housing and homelessness framework *Mana-na Woorn-tyeen Maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home* – that is the title of the document and the objective of the work we are doing in partnership with the Aboriginal community. I want to call out the good work of Aboriginal Housing Victoria in playing a stewardship role in the rolling out of that particular work. Our commitment as part of the Big Housing Build is that 10 per cent of that build goes to Aboriginal Victorians, an important allocation to ensure Aboriginal Victorians have access to housing. I was really pleased recently to be able to announce that we would be expanding the Aboriginal-specific private rental assistance program, which is an outreach service providing funding for Aboriginal people in private rentals. We are expanding the regions where that operates from five to nine locations. So we will keep working with the Aboriginal community to keep providing better services. A key piece of work that we are doing with the Aboriginal community at the moment – with Aboriginal Housing Victoria – is funding the design work for a single entry point into the homelessness system for Aboriginal people. That is a really important piece of work as well.

I also want to come to the need for mental health housing, and again I was pleased recently, this time when I was up in Ballarat at La Trobe Street in Redan, to announce \$85 million for the mental health supported funding round. This is an allocation which will deliver around 214 homes for people living with mental illness, and it was great to be at that site that day because I was able to meet a gentleman who lives in one of these homes in Melbourne. He was there for the opening in Ballarat. It was great to have the member for Wendouree with me that day. I think the member for Ripon too was there at Redan that day – with a keen interest in housing and in particular this mental health housing project. They run a great program, the Haven Foundation. In partnership with the housing funding they have received from us they utilise NDIS funding for participants who are residents of those homes, to provide the services, the wraparound support, for those people in the homes that we have helped to build.

There are a range of other providers working with us, but I wanted to give them a shout-out and note the important role that housing plays in the recovery of people who have mental health illnesses and also for people with disabilities. We all know the problems that have occurred over the journey of the NDIS, in particular the lack of take-up from the market of specialist disability accommodation housing and supported independent living housing, so I am very proud that Victoria is the largest SDA provider in the country and that we did not jump out of SDA provision. Many other states jumped straight out of SDA provision, but well before my time this government made a decision to stay in the provision of SDA. I think it is important that we do not leave our most vulnerable without appropriate housing. It is great that we will do more in terms of disability housing as well.

I hope I have given a bit of the flavour of the breadth of the Big Housing Build, because sometimes people see the headline, but they do not understand the scale of this program. It is fair to say that members of Parliament will get complaints about housing – I think I have heard from everybody in the chamber at the moment – and there are definitely challenges there, but it is also important that members have an understanding of the amount of housing that is being built to meet this challenge. It is at an incredible scale, and I am very, very proud of that. As I indicated in the house yesterday, there are 7600 homes completed or underway, and we see the dwelling stock numbers that are reported every year, so total social housing dwellings, now increasing by thousands. Of course with the Big Housing Build having been announced in 2020 – the planning, funding and construction – we are going to see a lot of these homes coming online over the next 12 months and making a real difference to people who need those homes.

It is not just government saying this. When you talk to organisations that work in housing and homelessness out in the community, they are all big supporters of the Big Housing Build. Salvation Army Housing (Victoria) says:

The disparity between the median housing cost and the more affordable rental options underscores the need for concerted efforts to address this housing challenge. To address this challenge the Salvation Army Housing supports the Big Housing Build, which is invested in social housing. This collaborative approach aims to make a positive impact on the housing situation and provide support to those in need.

Unison, a big social housing and community housing provider, says:

Thanks to the Big Housing Build funding, social housing provider Unison Housing last month completed its 42-unit Heidelberg West development to help address Melbourne's growing housing crisis for women. Mostly the two-bedroom apartments will prioritise women, providing a safe and secure home for people with a history of homelessness and complex needs, including those who have experienced family violence.

That Unison property was part funded by the Victorian state government as part of the Big Housing Build social housing growth fund rapid grants round, which has delivered 2352 new dwellings with a value of \$1 billion. This is the largest ever commitment to community housing in Australian history. Unison maintains 100 per cent ownership of the land and building. It is responsible for managing and maintaining the building and will work collaboratively with local services to ensure that families are linked with support agencies where needed.

Community Housing Limited says:

As a delivery partner with the Victorian government Community Housing Limited takes immense pride in being part of the Big Housing Build initiative. By working together we have been able to pool our expertise, share best practices and create a united front in the fight against homelessness and housing insecurity. This sense of collaboration and collective purpose has strengthened the overall capacity of the community housing sector, leading to improved housing outcomes for Victorians across the board. Since 2020 more than 1700 households have either moved or are getting ready to move into brand new homes provided under the Big Housing Build initiative. Community Housing Limited remains dedicated to driving lasting change and working together with the government and other partners to fully realise a future where every Victorian has access to a place they can call home.

Housing Choices Australia says:

Housing Choices Australia is working productively with the state government's Big Housing Build to deliver social housing projects across Melbourne that will house hundreds of Victorians. Also in partnership with the Big Build, we will deliver future projects in regional Victoria and tenancy management of government-owned social and affordable housing. We commend the Victorian state government for their significant investment in social housing. We also commend the government for streamlining planning processes and improving design quality requirements across the Big Build program, improving the livability and speed of delivery.

The community housing sector – people who work in housing – know the importance of the Big Housing Build. It is broad, it is across the whole state, it is delivering more homes as we speak, it will deliver thousands more homes for people who need them. Of course that has an impact in terms of people's lives.

It was pleasing to see recently the data that is working its way through the system. The June quarter data that will be published very shortly will show that there has been a drop in the housing waitlist, both the general waitlist and the priority waitlist. I want to be clear and say I do not claim this is a change in the general trend, because I think we will see pressures at the national level still meaning there are people coming onto the waitlist. I am not suggesting this will be the turning point, nor am I claiming this is any sort of victory. It is just important to point out, though, that the combination of the hard work of people in our department, the people who work in the housing sector and the people who are building these new homes, backed in by our investment, is starting to show flickers of hope in terms of the waitlist. We should see the priority waitlist reduce from 31,158 to 30,725. That is better than where we were before. Sorry, that is excluding transfers.

Thousands of new homes – this is a good opportunity for me to come to the investment we have made in the Big Housing Build – as I have mentioned, \$5.3 billion. Recently we saw the Premier announce \$1 billion for a Regional Housing Fund. That is more money flowing into social housing, more money flowing into housing for Victorians in regional Victoria.

Members interjecting.

Colin BROOKS: It sounds like those opposite do not support that housing going into regional Victoria.

Richard Riordan: Absolutely. Regional Victorians want housing.

Colin BROOKS: 'Absolutely'.

Richard Riordan: Yes, but we want more than a house for a billion dollars.

Colin BROOKS: The Shadow Minister for Housing, the honourable member for Polwarth, has just said he does not support the billion-dollar regional housing investment. I cannot believe –

Members interjecting.

Colin BROOKS: 'Absolutely', he said. I cannot believe it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Order! I want to continue to hear the minister, in silence. The member for Polwarth!

Colin BROOKS: I cannot believe that I indicated that those opposite did not support the Regional Housing Fund and the shadow minister – let the record show – said ‘Absolutely’. ‘Absolutely’ do not support a billion dollars being invested in housing in regional Victoria – unbelievable. We will let people know you do not support that. We will let people know. On top of the \$1 billion that I have just mentioned, which the opposition do not support, there is an allocation from the federal government for the first time in a long time – we had a federal Liberal–Nationals government that was not interested in housing – of nearly half a billion dollars for housing in Victoria. There is \$2 billion funded across the country and nearly half a billion dollars for investment in Victoria – the accelerator fund – and we will invest that in social housing across the state as well.

Of course we know that those opposite do not support the regional fund by the sounds of it. We know in Canberra they do not support funding for social housing as well, because we have got the Senate with a housing package sitting in it right now in the middle of a housing crisis across the country, and we have got the Liberals and the Nationals and the Greens teaming up to block that housing support coming through to people in Victoria who need it. I will just say this: in the middle of a housing crisis, if you are in the Senate, if you are a Liberal or a National or a Green and you are not supporting more funding for housing, for social housing, then you should hang your head in shame and resign, because everybody in this chamber from every political party knows the need for social housing. They know the need for social housing in their electorates. I know that they know, because I get letters and phone calls from everybody in the chamber – a social housing emergency, a national housing emergency. In Canberra –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Order! The shouting across the chamber is too –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): The member for Polwarth! The member for Nepean!

Colin BROOKS: It seems that the Nationals and the Liberals and the Greens in Canberra, who are blocking this funding, are being joined by those opposite here in Victoria who want to block the \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund. One billion dollars for regional housing – I cannot believe that you are saying that you do not support that funding. That is incredible. We will let people in regional Victoria know that you do not support that funding.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Wendouree, you are not in your allocated place. Member for Polwarth, I would ask you to cease interjecting. I would like to hear the minister in silence. Other members will have their turn to speak on the motion.

Colin BROOKS: Thanks for the protection, Speaker. One of the things that I did not expect coming into this discussion on housing today, given the general agreement I sense around the issues affecting housing, is that the Liberals and Nationals would be indicating their opposition to the \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund. I am gobsmacked because that is housing that will go to putting people who most need housing into secure homes.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member’s time has expired. I remind members to direct their comments through the Chair and that the use of the term ‘you’ is not acceptable.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (11:08): I rise to take on the government’s motion this morning about their achievements in the housing portfolio. A government that has been in for nine years now can blame no-one else; no-one else can be blamed for just the appalling situation that vulnerable Victorians find themselves in at the moment, unable to access a home. Whether you are in inner Melbourne, outer Melbourne, regional Victoria or even our smallest country towns, housing and a home are no longer accessible for so many people, and not only are they not accessible but those that

have been processed and are on waiting lists are now waiting unacceptable lengths of time to receive respite and somewhere to call home.

A home of course is the foundation for all households and families. A home gives dignity, a home gives a sense of purpose, a home gives security. A home is a healthy place for people to raise families. It is a healthy place for people's mental health and wellbeing. They can go there at the end of each day and have somewhere safe to sleep, somewhere safe to be, somewhere that they can look after their families and their friends and somewhere where they can have a sense of place in the community.

There are just far too many Victorians, after nine years of this Labor government, who find themselves couch surfing, sleeping in their cars or sleeping in tents. As shadow minister I know only too well how unprepared this government has been to get in and get value for money and start getting a return for Victorians, who are quite happy for the government to allocate big resources. This government has allocated a large amount of money. Mind you, they had not allocated any money prior to that so many will argue it is just some catch-up funding. But it is a significant amount of money. It is on the national agenda, and it is a cause that there is great bipartisan support for across the state: that we spend more on housing and get better outcomes. But that is not what we are seeing here in the state of Victoria.

The minister in his motion today talks about 12,000 new homes. The simple fact is that there have not been anywhere near that amount of homes commenced and underway. There is not going to be that many new homes. On the list which the minister read out earlier, as of today there are 37,079 families on a waiting list that do not have homes. That is a 300 per cent increase since this government came to power. When they came to power in 2014 it was 9900. It is now 37,079. Then there are another 30,000-odd families who live inappropriately. These are families that might only have one bedroom when they need three. It might be a person with a disability or a chronic disease that is on the third floor and has to go up steps and cannot access their apartment or, more importantly, cannot leave with ease and safety. There are a lot of people who are in inappropriate housing. All up, it is a figure of some 67,985 families who are not living in anything near what the average Victorian would expect someone would have – safe, accessible, affordable housing access. This figure has increased by just under 4000 in the last year.

The government talks about its Big Housing Build, and we will read out what that progress looks like from the government. In 2015, when they came to power, there were some 86,266 homes. That peaked in around 2017, so just before the last election, when there were some 86,813 homes. Since that time, since the big build has been called, this government has gone on an unprecedented public housing sell-off and demolition fest and they have wiped clear the landscape of public housing in Victoria. On the one hand the minister wants to stand here before the Parliament today and talk about his 12,000-home agenda, which mind you is nowhere near that, but he is actually demolishing and selling off more homes than he is putting onto the market.

On 3AW only yesterday there were real estate agents ringing in and talking about how their books are full of public houses that are on the market today. In an unprecedented housing crisis this government is choosing to sell homes. In April–May this year I attended one of those auctions – three perfectly fine homes in a nice suburban street in Balwyn that were next door to a kindergarten. They were ready to be lived in, they had had recent renovations to kitchens and yet this government was choosing to sell them off. At the same time as I am dealing through my office, as I am sure the minister's office is, with literally thousands of desperate people wanting somewhere to sleep, this government is selling off homes in order to fund new joint venture deals that they are doing – secret deals because they are not public, they are not on the record, they will not fess up about them – and these deals are being done at the expense of the most vulnerable in Victoria.

We can guess where some of those funds might be going, because they are definitely not going into a net gain in public housing. They are possibly going into paying for tunnels, they are possibly going into paying for debt, they are possibly going into, as we know in the last month, \$1 billion or \$2 billion worth of compensation payments on failed commitments around the Commonwealth Games. They

could have even gone into help fund the billion dollars we wasted on east–west link. The waste and mismanagement of the government is really chronic, and unfortunately in this area of housing it is the most vulnerable that are hurting the most.

In his contribution this morning, the minister made reference to all the projects that he has been visiting and opening. Quite frankly, if you have just spent \$4 billion and you do not have something to show for it, it is beyond comprehension. What the minister fails to tell the community and what he fails to tell this Parliament is that since 2017, at the high point of public housing ownership by the state of 86,813, in his most recent published data, as the largest landlord in the state and the person who has the best capacity to help the most vulnerable and the needy and the homeless in the state, he has not reconciled his property ownership for two years. Now I ask: is there a landlord, a real estate agent, a property developer or a commercial owner of property or real estate that would have gone two years without reconciling how much property they had or what assets they had? This government is reckless – absolutely reckless – in its management of what is now one of the state’s largest assets. Some \$80-odd billion worth of taxpayer assets sit in the housing portfolio, and this government has not reconciled the asset ownership of this vital community service for more than two years.

In fact when asked under questioning at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) only six weeks ago, the response from the department was that it was an oversight. We are in allegedly the biggest housing build – the biggest single investment in the biggest asset the state has – and it was an oversight that no-one has reconciled what they actually own or what they actually control. I have been waiting quite some time to get from the department a reconciliation of what has been sold, what has been demolished and what has been hived off to other investments – to the private sector and others. What is the net value for the state of this big build?

The minister made much of the fact that this side of the house does not support investment in rural Victoria. Well, never has there been such a twisted mistruth spoken in this chamber – never before. Of course we absolutely welcome spending. In fact I look at my own electorate in the Surf Coast shire, one of the most underdone local government areas in the whole state for public housing, which has again been overlooked, with numerous projects from housing providers and the local community waiting for support. We still await that support, so absolutely we want that funding.

What distresses this side of the house and what distresses people in regional Victoria is that in all the bluff and bluster of this government they have come out and said, ‘Oh, as compensation for the Commonwealth Games we’re going to invest an extra \$1 billion in social housing.’ That is great; we love the \$1 billion. But guess what – it is 1300 houses. It is \$770,000 per house, plus land. That will work out at \$1 million per dwelling in regional Victoria. Now, what level of incompetence would the minister be in charge of to think that you are going to go and spend \$1 million per house in regional Victoria? I can tell the minister now he could go and give that \$1 million to 1300 families in regional Victoria and they would get two houses for every one house this government could procure. It is an absolute disgrace. But then again, if we look at the performance of this government, when was the West Gate Tunnel going to be built? In 2022. Well, they have long burnt those signs. We do not even know when it is going to go.

What was the Commonwealth Games going to cost? Six weeks ago, \$2.5 billion, and now it is suddenly \$7 billion. Victorians do not actually have to imagine why this government thinks it is going to cost \$1 million to build one- and two-bedroom units in regional Victoria. Regional Victorians are shaking their heads at the waste and mismanagement that could be involved. Certainly as a proud regional Victorian I am looking at it and going, ‘For heaven’s sake, stop the spread of waste and mismanagement from the metro.’ It is bad enough when we turn our tellies on at night and see the complete cost overruns and blowouts in the city, but to bring that disease of mismanagement to regional Victoria is a woeful effort from this government. They have been way too late in sharing the largesse of government spending in regional Victoria. Now they are coming out to regional Victoria and they are going to literally waste it.

The average median house price – you can buy whole houses and land for half the price of what this government is going to embark on with for its social housing build in regional Victoria. We see the fact that we are literally adding thousands of families a year to the homeless list, and yet this government is choosing to so blatantly waste scarce and precious taxpayer resources on just a complete overspend and poor outcomes. One of the examples is the much-touted development in the Ascot Vale region, where there were originally 80 public housing units. The government said, ‘We’re going to increase the public housing stock by 10 per cent.’ Well, that is a good thing. Most people would agree that if you can do a redevelopment and get 10 per cent more public housing, that is a good thing. What the government left out of that equation of course was that the 80 units were all two- and three-bedroom. There were some 160-odd bedrooms available to the most needy and desperate in that community. They replaced it with 88 – so there are eight new units, but they are all single-bedroom. So we have gone from a community having access to 165 bedrooms down to only 88 bedrooms. They have literally halved the amount of places where people can find safe refuge. Safe, reliable, affordable accommodation has been lost for that community. The worst part is that as taxpayers, as the Parliament, we have no fundamental understanding of the deal, because the private sector got some 250 two- and three- bedroom apartments out of that same deal. What I want is: show us the money. Where did the money go? What was the deal? It is not commercial in confidence, which this government hides behind. These are valuable state-owned assets that have been frittered away for very little net gain for the community. That is what this government refuses to look at: the net gain. When the 37,079 families who are sleeping on couches, in tents and in cheap motels wondering when they are going to have somewhere safe to go and call home see such a blatant waste of money, it can only just add to the stress and worry that they have to endure.

We also learned recently from the current budget and through the PAEC hearings that for another incredibly vulnerable cohort, families escaping domestic violence, this government has budgeted that they should be expected to wait some 10 months before they can expect a safe place to live. If you said to the average person on the street, ‘If you’re escaping domestic violence, if you and your children are at risk, you want to get away and you need somewhere safe to call home and get the kids back to school, to stay somewhere in your local community, to feel that you can start to bring your life back together again – if you’re in that position’, most average Victorians would probably say, ‘I think 10 months is still too long.’ This government has seen a year-on-year increase. It is now in excess of 20 months. So essentially anyone at the most dire and critical point of their life, escaping domestic violence, with children needing to just get somewhere to call home, is waiting nearly two years. Where are they in those two years? Where are they staying in those two years? The choices just do not exist. So many people in that vulnerable situation find themselves having to go back to their abusive partner, which is just a recipe for ongoing disaster and torment for that family, and unfortunately this government is forcing that to happen. The second option that people have, the only other option, is caravans, cheap motels or staying with relatives and friends who do not necessarily have the space or the ability to house one, two, three, four extra people in their homes. This is a chronic situation in a state and a country that should be priding itself on world’s best practice in this area, yet we are performing so badly on it.

The government’s claim that it is getting so much done, it is a nation-leading big build and it is a commitment for the future has misled and continues to mislead Victorians on what the actual outcome is. There is no other way to measure success in this space. It is not the amount of photos that the minister has with his hard hat and fluoro jacket on. It is not that. That does not matter. The people sleeping in caravans and on couches and in the backs of cars and out the front of police stations and under the lights near the town square – all these places where I have met with and spoken to people since my time as shadow minister – are not caring how many photo opportunities the minister has had and how many times he wants to turn up to conferences and talk about his \$5.6 billion build. They want to know when they are getting a home.

What do we know from the facts? We know from the facts that this government is simply not delivering extra homes. They are demolishing, they are selling off, they are doing bad deals and getting

poor outcomes. The hypocrisy and the lack of self-awareness by this government on what a poor deal they are getting could not have been highlighted more than it was in recent weeks when they made that announcement in rural and regional Victoria of 1300 homes for \$1 billion. The best part of \$1 million per home in country Victoria is just so out of touch. One can only assume that the ministry is now so full of inner-urban elites that have forgotten about outer suburbs and regional Victoria that they have forgotten that it does not cost \$1 million per one-bedroom unit in regional Victoria. It does not, and in fact there is no shortage of groups and people that I would rather see the government give the money to who would actually get a real increase in homes.

The other disaster that awaits the homeless and the vulnerable in Victoria is the management of the housing stock that we have. In questioning at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee – the member for Mordialloc I think still represents on PAEC; he knows how the scripted answers go at PAEC and he will be aware of this – we asked how long it takes to turn a property around when the tenant leaves: what is the ideal time? The department does not really have KPIs in that space.

Unfortunately, without any effort at all, as shadow minister I do not actually have to go to the department to find the empty houses, because people are showing me and taking me to them all the time. I can quote two, for example. One is in a fantastic location but is in an absolutely appallingly managed public housing row of eight homes, which if they were managed by anyone other than the Victorian government would be multimillion dollar apartments, in Clifton Hill. It is well located, very close walking distance to public transport and schools – an ideal, fantastic location for people or families wanting to set themselves up and have good, long-term, affordable housing in an otherwise incredibly expensive part of town. At that property the spouts have not been done, the lawns have not been mowed and the fences are rusted and falling down. The properties have not been painted. In fact two of the units out of eight – a quarter – have been sitting there empty for well over 12 months. Now, how in a housing crisis can we not prioritise three-bedroom units that are well located in the heart of the city, close to all the services that the most vulnerable people would need? We have got them sitting there empty.

In fact it is even worse than that. One of the constituents I was working with, who was escaping domestic violence and enduring the two-year wait for somewhere to live, was living in a caravan, because that is the only accommodation the department could provide for her and her children down on the Mornington Peninsula – indeed in my good friend the member for Nepean's electorate. Working with her we located this three-bedroom property. It was not ideal because it was taking her out of the community, but it was a home. It was a place that she could call home and her children could call home. She got a notice in January this year from the department which said that the home was now available for her and she could move there. The mum and the two kids, who do not have a lot of money, had to fill the car up. It is a good hour's drive to get from down Dromana way up to Clifton Hill, and what did she find when she got there? We know that this government has made much of its changes to tenancy laws and about the respect that landlords must have for tenants, but this poor woman, who had been living in quite a comfortable caravan as far as caravans go, gets to the apartment this government wanted her and her two teenage children to live in and there were no curtains on the windows, no hot water, no working stove. It had not been painted or maintained inside for God knows how long, and when going there you literally dry-retched at the stench and the smell in the unit. The front courtyard was covered in broken glass and detritus – just rubbish and junk everywhere.

She went there and the depressing, sinking in her heart – to think she had been waiting two years for somewhere to call home, had been told this government was going to provide her with a three-bedroom unit, and that was what awaited her. That was in January. Working with her and the department, they finally put a lick of paint in one of the rooms, said she had to go there and essentially evicted her from her caravan on Good Friday – the day before Good Friday. I went with her on her first day there – still no stove, still no blinds, still no hot water. Granted, there are not a lot of tradesmen around on Good Friday. I accept that; however, it should never have been that situation. She was then told on the Thursday before Good Friday that the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing would get her

some hot water within the next two weeks. Now, how can we be spending billions of dollars on new builds when that is the way we are treating not only our tenants but the properties that we manage?

I can go on. I will give one more example. It was almost the same design public housing in a lovely street in Caulfield. There were two empty – once again another two – there must be something about leaving a quarter of the available accommodation empty. The government of course will not tell us how many houses they have empty, but from my anecdotal surveys of these things we seem to be running at about a 25 per cent vacancy rate, which is beyond comprehension in a housing crisis. Nonetheless we arrive at this property in Caulfield. It was the same: three-bedroom, two-storey, close to public transport in a lovely Caulfield street with a fantastic array of adjoining neighbours in the public housing, with some older people and younger people. It was a nice mix of tenants.

This apartment block had been fixed up. They had actually invested in this. They had painted it, recarpeted it, retiled, fixed the spouts and all – it actually looked pretty schmicko. I have got to say, as a member of the Parliament and as someone in state government, I could say I would be pretty happy to offer this property up as public housing. It was quite well done. The only problem was the two units had been sitting empty for two years – well, 18 months actually, not two years, I will not exaggerate – 18 months. The person I took there had been living in his car for over two years. As a single man he was at the bottom of the waiting list, and through mental health and the fact that he had been bashed three times while living in his car, he was just beyond desperate. I went with him to that house on his first day there, and it was a breath of fresh air to think he has got a place to call home. Then we looked over the fence to the other adjoining property, and I spoke to the other neighbours and said, ‘How long have these been empty?’ ‘Oh, 18 months, they’ve been sitting empty.’ ‘What’s happening in the house next door?’ ‘Nothing.’

After illegal tenants had snuck in for a period of about five weeks and set up an illegal meth lab, and once they got rid of them, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing then decided to use this perfectly newly renovated apartment as a storage facility. Can you believe it? A storage facility. But then that does not shock me anymore, to think that in a housing crisis a perfectly nicely renovated, three-bedroom apartment in Caulfield would be used as storage unit. I then had the misfortune of hearing about the experiences of the people in one of the South Melbourne towers who were living down there. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has decided to fence off over three-quarters of their available parking to also use as storage units.

So, Minister, one of the suggestions I have on your \$5.6 billion Big Housing Build is to stop using existing assets that should be accessible to the needy and the vulnerable and those seeking good affordable, accessible accommodation and actually start letting them use those assets. If you need extra storage space, if you need somewhere to store some bricks, if you need somewhere to store some extra mattresses or if you need somewhere to store some old carpet and blinds, stop making the homeless and the vulnerable in Victoria pick up that bill. Go and talk to some of the people in some of your electorates who own storage facilities and rent a shed, because renting a shed would be a far better use of taxpayers money than wasting homes and car parking spaces for the most needy and the vulnerable on the homeless waiting list.

The other thing I wish to draw attention to, once again getting back to the homelessness rate – not only the regional rate but the state’s homelessness rate – is some of the appalling statistics that Victoria now finds itself with despite the rhetoric of the big build. I quote from the *Australian Property Journal*, which did an assessment of Victoria’s social housing commitment and build and actually put some facts down, as opposed to the government’s spin. I will just highlight a couple of their points made on 17 July, so just in the last month. They said:

Back in 2014 –

so back when the Liberals were in government –

social housing supply in Victoria, which includes both public and community housing, was at 3.5% of all households and has been on the decline ever since.

We are down now to well under 2 per cent in Victoria today. Deborah Di Natale, who is the CEO of the Council to Homeless Persons, says:

We simply can't have a situation where more people and families are being pushed into homelessness while the rate of public and community housing –

continues to remain so low as a percentage of our housing. Finally, while Victoria has the lowest share of social housing – below 2 per cent – other areas, such as the Northern Territory, for example, are offering rates of up to 14.6 per cent. Victoria does not lead the nation; it does not lead the debate in this space. This government's rhetoric – its essential ability to pump up its own tyres – is becoming tiresome in the state of Victoria.

Just in the last six months across the region that I represent, some of the mismatch of expectations that Victorians have had to put up with – we have seen the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games, we have seen the cancellation of the Geelong fast train and we read in the papers today that we have now cancelled the electrification of extra public transport out to the west. It is one thing after another. The government says one thing in the lead-up to the election and not only runs away from those commitments but sprints. In fact the member for Nepean would not be able to hit them with a tennis ball. As the fastest server, he could not catch the minister with the way he retreats from the promises that were made only six months ago. Victorians will remember the fact that this government said that it can promise all these things and still deliver healthy budgets and do everything.

Sam Groth: 'Can do it all.'

Richard RIORDAN: In the words of the Premier, 'We can do it all.' Not only can they not do it, they cannot do it well. What they are choosing to do they cannot do well.

Finally, to wrap it up, the big build has been the big con. It has been the big con. Victorians and those most vulnerable are being told week after week that the government is making investments to help them, and the investment that Victorians are getting is poor value with poor outcomes. It is not helping the people that need it, and so many of our most vulnerable communities are left waiting and getting very poor value for the government spend. Nothing highlights that more than the most recent announcement of a billion dollars for 1300 homes – a million dollars a pop is just outrageous. Victorians expect better. This Parliament should expect better. While this level of incompetence manages it, we will never see the required reduction in the priority and homelessness waiting lists here in Victoria.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (11:38): It is great to rise and speak on a really important motion around the Big Housing Build and follow that word salad. That was a work of art – to talk a lot about what seemed like nothing in lots of words – but I am not sure there was a rational contention. How can you come forward today with any serious credibility as the Shadow Minister for Housing and call the Big Housing Build a big con but then talk about all the different communities where you want to see more building of housing when we are delivering 12,000 more houses under the Big Housing Build. I have served on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) with the member for Polwarth, and I thought it was a chance for him to come in here and do the honourable thing and apologise – apologise to the house for the substantial cuts that were made by the former Liberal government in housing services. It was \$470 million. I thought, 'He's a straight shooter. He calls it out. He likes to be known as talking the talk.' I thought he would come in here – this is his moment – and lean across to Brooksy, the Minister for Housing, and say, 'Look, I know that we did the wrong thing. Let's work together. This motion's a chance for us to show some bipartisanship.' Instead he has gone on a rant about expensive housing and building housing.

When we hear the Liberals talk about waste in housing, we know what that means. That is cuts to services, and that is savings that they make on the backs of people. He talks about these dwellings and talks down the Big Housing Build. These houses are supporting people now. They are putting roofs over their heads now and supporting people and their families. Thousands and thousands of people are

being supported and cared for. In mid-2022, last year, there was an announcement around more housing for people with mental ill health, and we know how critical the intersection is of housing and mental health and wellbeing.

There are tangible examples, in the thousands, that are going. Yes, there is more to do. That is why it is called the Big Housing Build. We are not doing hundreds of millions. We are spending billions on better housing. It is really curious to be lectured by those who say things like, 'We shouldn't have certain people in rich suburbs in housing.' Remember that Wendy Lovell, a member for Northern Victoria, got really tangled up in 'those people' and who should actually be in communities. They would not be able to afford an iPhone or sneakers. Those people are people that Labor MPs represent each and every day and build aspiration and build hope for. There are people in this place who have lived experience of public housing. We had powerful stories from the former member for Lara John Eren and a former member for Northern Victoria Mark Gepp who had grown up in public housing. We went through the example of no less than our Prime Minister himself. He does not say, 'Oh, you shouldn't be in any sort of suburbs as those people', and what that means.

You hear similar language from the shadow education minister when he talks about choice of schools. Rather than every school being absolutely elite and having excellence and equity across our state, you should choose to go to certain schools and lead communities. That is the narrative that we have heard from the coalition. They have no credibility with housing when they slash \$470 million when they get the chance, when they do not talk about opportunities and supporting and protecting people and putting roofs over people's heads and changing the generational outcomes of the disadvantaged and giving kids that hope and aspiration of the safety and security of a home, which should be a right of every Victorian. They do not talk about it in that language. They talk about it as waste, they talk about it as a con, when the shadow minister fronts up to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and sees stat after stat. Clearly Minister Brooks is living rent free in the member for Polwarth's head because he is tracking his socials and all the photo ops. He has got so many because there are so many builds going on.

It is curious that the part-timers in this Parliament have not rocked up for this debate. We thought with the motion coming forward this was going to be a day of housing. We have got four members of the Greens political party who are so busy doing pieces to camera and trying to get their political members into the chamber today to hear a debate that they do not rock up before lunch to speak on this housing motion. To their credit, the opposition's lead speaker, the member for Polwarth – I think we are still trying to unpack the complexities of his points of view – had a crack. Even though he said that they were representing regional areas when we on this side have more regional members in the Labor government representing communities in regional Victoria, he gave it a crack. The Greens political party have a 30-minute or 20-minute speech to go and we do not see them. We do not see them rock up here, yet the grandstanding that they will rock up at 4 pm is absolutely extraordinary.

I want to take them to task on this, because right now their political grandstanding has absolutely the same journey and approach as their opposition to the carbon pollution reduction scheme when they blocked meaningful climate action under the Rudd government. It is the same thing. It is a narrative that comes up in their focus groups and polling. It is a sinister approach to how you politic in this state, because it is not about benefit; it is about what comes up in their polling that says they have to oppose Labor. They have to be a differential. They cannot find the middle ground with the government on anything because it affects their primary vote. It affects their support. There is a despicable approach from the Greens political party around housing and community support in this state. It is sinister, and it is polled and it is researched. They cannot find the middle ground. They cannot join us in a \$10 billion housing fund, because it affects their seats and it affects their upper house representation.

The challenge for them today is to call out what we all know: they opposed this and pushed back housing reform in the Senate until October. We could be on the ground now in states and territories with that money supporting people. This is not theoretical or ideological politics here. These are people screaming out for support today, who are desperate in the cost-of-living environment that we see and with the exponential pressure that has been put on people. But no, in their ivory towers the Greens

political party put out there that they are happy to wait. Well, they are happy to wait until October. Their constituency and their supporter base are not sitting on the street waiting for housing now. They are people that Labor MPs represent and front up to each and every day.

They are people that sit in our offices waiting for services like the power saving bonus, going ‘Mate, this is changing my week’ or ‘This is changing my day, because I didn’t know where my next feed was coming from’. They are the kinds of people that Labor MPs represent and support in their communities – not grandstanding and saying ‘Oh, well, \$10 billion on a housing fund can wait till October’ when people are in such desperate states, when they think hour to hour about what will happen. I mean, if you bothered to care, you would go down to where the member for Footscray took a few MPs the other day, down to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, with people literally fronting up for a feed. When you hear the lived experience of people who are facing such turmoil and you hear about these constituencies and the pressure that they are under you wonder why any political party that says anything about progressive politics would not support these reforms.

But it goes deeper. We have examples across the board of Greens political party supporters and representatives who oppose housing in communities. It is an extraordinary thing where they weaponise heritage over homes – where they weaponise neighbourhood character over new builds. We see that time and time again, where they are fronting up one day, saying ‘You don’t do enough for housing; you don’t do enough in rent’, and then they are on the side of the likes of David Davis, opposing housing builds across our state and dressing up neighbourhood character and weaponising that against new builds. That is what we see each and every day.

Now, thankfully there is a bit of a cultural revolution going on. You have got the chief nimby David Davis and then you have got the yimby Evan Mulholland. That is an interesting seismic shift in the upper house – and sometimes we mourn not seeing what goes on up there. There is a bit of a race for the front bench that you see as well – the amount of opinion pieces that no-one is reading that these people are pumping out at the moment, goodness me. Maybe electorate officers are a bit underdone in those upper house offices because of the amount of opinion pieces going out, but I am glad that Evan is taking on David, because it is a really important thing and it should be multipartisan – not bipartisan – because for too long those on the conservative side have been using and weaponising heritage and neighbourhood character. So he is spot on. I think it is a more mature discussion, and it is great to see some new voices talking about this.

But let us turn our focus then to a multipartisan approach. The Greens, if they want to be a serious third force – and potentially, the way the Libs are going with their primary, they could be the opposition in an election to come, when you see their vote and their surge, when they are eating into the Liberals in the east, when they are absolutely slaying them and the teal vote is surging and when you see that they could be a credible opposition down the track – cannot front up opposing housing. You cannot front up letting the perfect be the enemy of the good because your focus groups and your polling says that if you give an inch to Labor, it will affect your primary and it will affect your vote.

Tim McCurdy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, we have given him plenty of run at this. This is a housing motion, and we have not heard anything about housing for some time. He could come back to talking about the motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): The member has been talking about the housing motion. The member to continue and refer to the housing motion.

Tim RICHARDSON: I have served with the member for Ovens Valley on committees. It does not surprise me that he was not listening. But it is so very critical for the housing bill to go through the Senate. Ten billion dollars is so critical for our communities, and they have to stop opposing some of the state initiatives that are increasing development and planning. That is the challenge. That is what the government is fronting up to. We are having the hard chats now. The Deputy Premier and the

Minister for Planning are doing extraordinary work. We look forward to that. Let us get on board and support people who critically need housing. It is their lives at stake.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (11:48): The Minister for Housing very proudly spruiked Labor's Big Housing Build and noted the government was on track to deliver more social and affordable housing with his motion saying that:

- (a) since the start of the Big Housing Build in November 2020, 7600 homes are completed or underway, with Victoria on track to deliver ... 12,000 much-needed social and affordable homes; and
- (b) the new \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund will deliver more than 1300 additional homes.

What is the breakdown of the 7600 homes that are currently being built or underway? How many of them have been completed? How many of them are in planning mode, sitting on local council tables to be voted on? We need to know these figures. It is great to throw them out, but we need to know what they are. What is the net gain of the 12,000 new houses that are going to be built? We need to know what that net gain is going to be.

In my seat of Morwell down in the Latrobe Valley we have public housing being sold off. We talk to our real estate agents, and they can tell us that these houses are going to auction or being bought privately and being taken away from people that need housing. So that is what we need to know: what is the actual number? Not the 12,000, not the 7,600 – what is the actual tangible number that we can hang our hats on so that I can go back to my constituents and say: there are X amount of houses available here in the Latrobe Valley for you to move into?

The other issue, which the member for Polwarth actually articulated before, is we are selling off three-bedroom houses and replacing them with one-bedroom houses. So how are we fitting families in? How are they expected, when they are in times of need and times of crisis, to not have a two- or three-bedroom house to put their children, to actually all move into a one-bedroom house, or are we expecting them to rely on friends, rely on other ways and means – living in caravans, hiring motel rooms? It is really not working. I think we need to get that point across to the minister. Before, he said that we are against \$1 billion being spent in regional Victoria on the big build. Well, I am here to tell him we are for it because we desperately need it. What they are putting on the table in facts and figures is great, but what is landing on the ground, especially in the seat of Morwell and I am sure right around regional Victoria, is falling far, far short of what we need.

It is my job to represent the people of the seat of Morwell and the greater Latrobe Valley, and one of the biggest issues down in my electorate at the moment is that public housing crisis. So we need to make sure that that is happening. The Deputy Premier also told us yesterday several times as she was standing there that the Minister for Housing was very, very busy. Was it a badge of honour so we think that he is busy? We know it is a big portfolio; he needs to be busy. He is probably doing all the work, but I need to highlight to him that we need more. The people and constituents of regional Victoria are crying out, screaming out, to the government to let them know what is happening and that the money they are throwing needs to be spent in a different way. We need to have these houses on the ground that we can actually put people into.

Clearly the minister is too busy to cast an eye past Pakenham and come down and look at what is happening, what is the crisis in my electorate of Morwell, because if he did, there is no way he could stand up in this place with any conviction or integrity and claim to be addressing the crisis that the government has created. Housing is by far the most frequently raised issue with my office – the most frequently raised issue – and every day we deal with people who are at their wits' end, at their most vulnerable, pleading for help because they have nowhere to live and have been failed by the department and failed by the Andrews government. There is no way of understanding how pervasive and wicked the problem is unless you are on the ground. I implore the minister and also the Premier to visit my electorate to see the confronting reality of the housing crisis facing the Latrobe Valley, the people I represent. I would also like to encourage the minister to make a simple call to their own department, the department that my constituents and my office are calling for crisis help, to get

firsthand awareness of how this department is not working, how it is failing these people, how it is failing me and how it is failing the government.

Data from the Council to Homeless Persons shows homelessness in the valley has increased 85 per cent in the five years to 2021. Given the data is two years old now and given the cost of living is spiralling out of control and the people coming through my door, we can safely assume the figure has increased substantially. People are slipping through the cracks, and this data does not even account for the huge number of people and families who are sleeping in their cars or couch surfing or relying on other family members to put them up. 2783 people in the Latrobe Valley local government area accessed specialised homelessness services last financial year, more than any other region in Victoria – 2783 of them.

Even more frustrating is the fact that constituents have visited my office to report vacant properties across the valley, some of which have been built by Homes Victoria for the purpose of social housing and crisis housing, which we are screaming out for, yet they incomprehensibly sit idle with no-one in them – no people are allowed to stay in them. People are sleeping in tents that line the creek in Traralgon. It is just ridiculous that these people, with these homes available, cannot get into them. High-density housing, which has been pushed forward in a couple of areas in the Latrobe Valley, does not work. We need to have a look at how the housing – the social housing, the affordable housing that we want – is going to work. We do not think that high-density housing is going to work.

I have written to the Andrews government several times to report these vacant properties and requested urgent action, but I have not received a response. In speaking with the minister, he said he will follow up for me, and I thank him for that. I do note that when the minister got up and spoke he said that in the City of Latrobe \$66 million has been spent on housing, 53 new homes have been built and 108 homes are underway. I want to know where they are. I want addresses so I can drive past and see them, because I do not see them and constituents do not see them and are coming to me. If I cannot find them, I need to let the minister know so he can continue and see what is happening. That is the thing: I think they listen to what they want to listen to. They do not listen to the people who are on the ground, and that is an absolute thing that they need to get through.

For three years we have been promised more social housing, but all we have received is platitudes and excuses while the supply of homes is dwindling and homelessness is skyrocketing. To see a mother come in with her young children through your door or you catch up with them and they have nowhere to go – they have no friends, they have no family and the only respite they have is to sleep in their car in a car park under a light so they feel safe. If it is behind my office, if it is behind a police station, they are out there. Do not fool yourselves that they are not. They are doing it hard, and it is the duty of everybody in this chamber, especially the minister, to make sure that these people are looked after and are safe. We can talk about all the stats that we want to talk about, but we need to make sure that it is working. I think it is incumbent on both sides of politics, on both sides of the house, to make sure that in response to our public housing crisis, the crisis in everyone's electorate – I am not singling out mine – across the state, we are doing the right thing. It is our job. We who stand here inside this chamber, it is our job to make sure that our constituents are safe and that we are looking after them.

I implore the minister to come on down. I will show him personally what is going on. Tell me where these houses are on the build so I can go and check for him that it is actually happening, so he can follow up with the departments that he needs to follow up with to make sure that we are building purpose-built public housing for our people who are in crisis and we can move forward and make sure they are safe.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarnait) (11:58): It gives me great pleasure this morning to rise and speak on this motion from the Minister for Housing. Those on this side of the house, those in the Labor government, absolutely know that the key to having a safe and secure life is to have a place to call home. That is why I am so incredibly proud to be part of a Labor government that is making the largest investment in social and affordable housing not just that this state has ever seen, but the largest investment that any jurisdiction in Australia has ever made: over \$5 billion as part of the Victorian government's Big

Housing Build program to deliver more than 12,000 social and affordable homes right across metro and regional Victoria.

We have not wasted a minute in doing that. In fact we have already passed the halfway mark whilst also creating 10,000 jobs per year. More than 7600 homes have been completed thus far or are underway, with more than 2800 homes completed and welcoming renters. Every new social and affordable home built through government investment is a home that is taking pressure off what is an incredibly tight housing market. Similar to what the member for Morwell said, it gives me even more pride to be part of a government undertaking this program because housing affordability and housing and planning more generally are by far the largest volume of constituency inquiries that I get through my office on a daily basis – in fact almost every day of the week, including Friday, because unlike some in this chamber, I open my office on a Friday. I think it is probably the least that I can do.

Our affordable housing rental scheme will also deliver 2400 affordable homes across metro and regional Victoria. The first development in Kensington has already welcomed renters, and renters are also moving into Markham Avenue, Ashburton, and Dunlop Avenue in Ascot Vale. Additionally, as the minister said in his opening remarks, the \$1 billion regional fund will deliver more than 1300 social and affordable homes to Victoria's regions, because housing supply is not just an issue that affects metropolitan Melbourne and is not just an issue that affects the outer suburbs, it is also an issue that affects regional Victoria, which makes that \$1 billion regional fund incredibly important.

Now, I think later this afternoon, or it might be tomorrow even, we are going to see the Greens political party perhaps enter the chamber for the first time this week and speak on a matter of public importance, being social and affordable housing. It would be remiss of me to not point out the walking hypocrisy that is the Greens political party. We are standing here right now debating social and affordable housing on a motion on housing affordability, and they have not even bothered to come into the chamber to either contribute or to at least listen to the contributions of the government and the opposition on this incredibly important matter. They claim to be the champions of social and affordable housing. They claim to be holier-than-thou on the subject, but it is incredibly important, given what we are speaking about, to go through the history of the Greens on this very subject, because it is not just hyperbole. There are examples littered all the way through metropolitan Melbourne of Greens councillors voting against housing development. I will go through just a few.

In 2017 Greens councillors in the City of Darebin led the vote against the development of new social housing dwellings at the vacant Huttonham estate site in Preston.

Paul Edbrooke: Who was the mayor then?

Dylan WIGHT: Who was the mayor then? Greens councillors, once again in the City of Darebin, opposed and delayed the Preston renewable project by 12 months in 2020. In 2020 Greens councillors in Merri-bek also voted against the redevelopment of the former Gronn Place. That same year in the other place the Greens teamed up with the Liberal Party to vote against much-needed social housing as part of the Markham estate revitalisation project. In 2020 the Greens-dominated Yarra City Council voted against the Collingwood social and affordable housing development that would have seen hundreds of additional homes added to local housing stocks, helping local renters and homebuyers. I do not typically make it my business to know who the mayors of different metropolitan councils are, but if I am correct, I am fairly sure that the member for Richmond may have been the mayor of Yarra City Council at that particular time.

A member: Did she work on Fridays?

Dylan WIGHT: She does not work on Fridays.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member not to respond to interjections.

Dylan WIGHT: So for the Greens political party to come in here and lecture us on housing is just one of the more hypocritical things that I have seen in my short time in politics – perhaps that I have ever seen in my life. There are some local examples of what the Greens really think about increasing housing supply, but as others have done, I think it is entirely appropriate as part of this debate to speak briefly on what is happening in Canberra and in the Senate. At the moment in the federal Parliament there is a bill in front of the Senate for \$10 billion – \$10 billion – to increase the supply of social and affordable housing across Australia. I spoke about Victoria's Big Housing Build – \$5.3 billion – being the largest investment of any state government around Australia ever. Ten billion dollars is the largest proposed investment into social and affordable housing ever.

Instead of supporting that, instead of increasing supply, the Greens have teamed up with their mates, the coalition – they have teamed up with their mate Peter Dutton – to block the bill. So instead of having \$10 billion over the next 10 years to increase housing supply in this country, we have nothing. Let us be frank: the reason is because the Greens are not there to achieve anything, they are just there to argue, they are just there to obstruct, they are just there to block. They do not care. They do not want to achieve anything. They do not want to increase housing supply. They just want to increase their voter base and that is it. If the Greens really cared about social and affordable housing in this country, they would get out of the way and they would pass the bill in the Senate.

Just with the small amount of time that I have remaining, I thought I would touch briefly on the planning future for Victoria. Planning law, planning legislation, plays an enormous part in being able to increase housing supply and where we increase housing supply and the infrastructure that goes around it, and there is no community that understands that more than my community of Tarneit. There is no more important issue in the state right now than housing. That is why we are working hard on a housing package, and we will obviously have more to say in due course. More generally, planning has a powerful role in delivering a more livable Victoria, including more affordable housing and more affordable choices for all Victorians. I see that the member for Brunswick has graced us with his presence – but what I will say is that the Greens need to get out of the way and allow more affordable housing.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (12:08): Thank you for the earlier introduction. This is wonderful. I really commend the government for bringing this motion. It is great to have this. Obviously we know there is a lot of excitement about our motion for the matter of public importance debate this afternoon, but to be granted a support act is really good. It is just a shame the posters did not go up in Brunswick so my electorate could hear more about the government's plans for public housing. Look, let us face it, the government is celebrating their Big Housing Build, and why not? Because building public housing is government business. This is something that governments should be doing. It is perfectly appropriate for the government to announce a modest build of 12,000 homes and call it a big build. Why not?

It would all be great if it was public housing. The problem is it is 'social and affordable', and 'social' is an umbrella term – it could be public or community housing. There is a role for public housing which is publicly owned and publicly managed, and as far as we know that is not what this is. As far as we know either this is all going to be run by community housing organisations or it will be called 'affordable housing', which is privately rented to people at a capped rent of 30 per cent of the median income, which is actually a lot of money when you consider who will be eligible for this. It will turn out that you are spending about 46 per cent of your income on housing if you are paying that rent. This affordable housing, so-called, will be very expensive for the people who are eligible to live in it.

Getting back to public housing, public housing is really important. It is critical. It is not in its own little silo of housing. Public housing is important for health. The best predictor of readmission to a mental health institution, a psychiatric ward, is lack of secure housing. Public housing is critical to keeping people well, people with severe mental illness in particular. We heard just a week or two ago from mental health workers saying they shudder when they see 'Big Housing Build' signs going up and see public housing being demolished and know that the residents of that public housing will be sent far

and wide across Melbourne or Victoria, away from the people they know, while over a period of time that land is then covered in a mix of community and privately owned housing.

Public housing is also critical in crime prevention. The single biggest predictor of readmission to prison is lack of secure housing. That is why it is government business to be building public housing. It is why the Greens welcome this motion today, and it is why we are waiting for government MPs to use the phrase 'public housing', because so far all we are hearing is government comms. 'Social housing' we are hearing – this woolly umbrella term that could be public, but is largely, if not entirely, community housing. Hearing people gloss over the need for public housing with this imprecise term 'social housing' is a sign of not just this government, but previous governments backing away from government responsibility for providing public housing.

The percentage of households in public housing in Victoria has declined from 2.8 per cent in 2014 to 2.3 per cent in 2022, while the public housing waiting list has only grown. In December there were 57,600 families or so on the public housing waiting list, so the medium-size build of 12,000 homes is just over one-fifth of the waiting list – it will only accommodate just over 20 per cent of the waiting list. Building 12,000 homes is a good thing, but it is just over 20 per cent of enough. As far as we can tell, none of it will be public housing. We need public housing so we can put roofs over the heads of those people who are difficult to house, people who may be kicked out of community housing, people who if we house them, we will not have to accommodate in prisons or in psych wards. A genuinely big build in genuinely public housing would be a good thing. I also welcome the term 'big build' in public housing. I first heard it in the Green New Deal that came out of the pandemic in mid 2020, and it was great to hear it repeated by the then Minister for Housing Richard Wynne in the November, because it was delayed that year, state budget, the initial announcement of the \$5 billion big – although perhaps better called medium-sized – build for social and affordable housing. I am delighted to see, though, that the term has been picked up.

I am concerned that a lot of this is actually rebuilding demolished public housing when in fact a lot of this public housing that is being demolished at places like Port Melbourne is structurally sound. The Port Melbourne estate is, I think, 80 or 90 units, but they were built in the 1970s. They look really good. I was in one of those units a few weeks ago visiting Margaret Kelly, who is being evicted by the government so that her sound, secure home can be demolished. We know that a lot of this housing could be much more cost-effectively refurbished. The architecture firm Office has even produced costings for refurbishing this housing, which would mean that the \$5 billion would go a lot further if that housing was refurbished rather than demolished and rebuilt by private developers, with every other bit of space above and around it going to private housing.

I think we should talk now a bit about the funding for this. The member for Mordialloc conveniently mentioned the federal gamble of \$10 billion on the stock market, the yield of which was meant to fund public housing around the country. A couple of points need to be made, and I thank the member for Mordialloc for raising the Housing Australia Future Fund. This \$10 billion is not being spent on housing, it is just the yield from the \$10 billion, and when it was first announced it was only going to be whatever the yield was in that year. But by opposing the fund the Greens were able to extract from the federal government an increase to a guaranteed \$500 million a year, so by opposing it the Greens were able to increase the amount of money to be spent on public housing. Then by continuing their opposition they were able to extract more from the federal government because Prime Minister Albanese was able to find \$2 billion just like that, so opposing the HAFF has generated more funding for public housing around the country than if we had voted for it. If the Greens had listened to all those people pleading with us to vote for the HAFF, we would still be getting less than \$500 million a year nationally, a hundred and something million for Victoria – a pittance. By opposing it we have got \$2 billion straightaway that the Prime Minister found down the back of the couch and \$500 million per year guaranteed minimum, so the question is how much longer we should keep opposing it, because we might get more.

The Greens are holding out for some support for renters. It would not have escaped the notice of the members of this place that renters in Victoria right now are living in fear of receiving a notice from the estate agent, from the landlord, saying that their rent is going to increase. While this is being portrayed as purely a supply problem, it is not something that can be fixed with any single thing. No matter how much money Max Chandler-Mather can squeeze out of the Prime Minister, it takes time to turn money into housing, whether it is public or community or whatever. When you get money, it takes years, but there is –

Members interjecting.

Tim READ: I will wait, Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member should be able to continue in silence.

Tim READ: That is fine, Deputy Speaker. I am getting useful suggestions for my speech. I will continue by saying that no matter how much money Max Chandler-Mather can extort out of Prime Minister Albanese, it does not turn into housing in a week or a month. But there is something that can be done to provide housing immediately. Prosper has calculated that there are around 70,000 empty homes in Melbourne. Now, these figures are about four years old, so it could be more or less. On census night there were about a million homes empty across Australia – probably an overestimate because some people were just away for the day. But we know that there are tens of thousands of empty homes in Melbourne, and if something could be done to bring a few thousand of those onto the long-term rental market immediately, those are houses that do not have to be designed and built. Those are houses that do not require planning and permits. Those homes could be brought onto the rental market rapidly, and one way to do that is by properly regulating short-stay accommodation.

The Victorian Greens are very pleased to have had an assurance from the state government that they will be considering short-stay regulation to this end. But we need more than consideration, and we need more than token measures. We need serious measures like a strict limit on the number of days per year that a property can be put on the short-stay market – like a decent-sized tax, not just a slap over the wrist. We need proper regulation of the short-stay accommodation market to push tens of thousands of currently empty homes onto the rental market in a way that could be done within weeks. Bringing this into the debate will mean that we can do something to bring rents down. It is a way of increasing supply that is much faster than just building homes. Remember, the medium-size build is producing 12,000 homes plus some additional money going into the regions. But there are around 70,000 empty homes in the city and 57,000 families on the public housing waiting list, so this medium-size build is not of a scale that is necessary to address the problem.

No matter how much money we can squeeze out of the federal government, we need to do more. And the other thing that we need to do is limit these currently out-of-control rent rises. With rents going up faster than they have in my memory, with more people renting than ever, with a third of Australians now renting, we need to listen to these people, just as the Labor political party in the ACT has started listening to the Greens and just as the Labour Party in New Zealand has started listening to the Greens. And it goes both ways. I might just remind the more numerous Labor members that some sort of coalition or agreement does actually impose some discipline on the smaller party, so it works both ways. By collaborating, these parties are able to make real achievements for renters, and so if we think less about the politics and more about the needs of the renters, then we will get better policy.

Pressure on short-stay accommodation, increasing the tax on vacant housing and limiting rents will do a lot more to help renters. Properly funding this medium-size public housing build – sorry, social housing build, to use the government's term – and including some actual public housing will increase the supply where we need it most. We need more public housing, and to get that money it would be great to increase the contribution from the HAFI above half a billion dollars a year nationally to something like half a billion a year for every state. On that note, I will conclude by thanking the

government for getting in early and extending the matter of public importance, and I look forward to hearing this afternoon's contributions as well.

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (12:26): I rise today to speak on the motion moved by the Minister for Housing, and what a great motion it is – 7600 homes completed or underway since just November 2020, with Victoria on track to deliver over 12,000 much-needed social and affordable homes. And we have also, just in the last few weeks, announced a \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund, which will deliver more than 1300 additional homes.

Now, this is an issue extremely dear to my heart. Housing is the reason I am here today. My passion for housing runs deep; it runs through my veins. As soon as you get a passion for housing, you cannot shake it. I know how far we have come as a movement in just the last five years because I have been there the whole journey. As the head of policy at the peak body for public housing tenants back in 2018 I remember meeting with members of Parliament, including the member for Brunswick when he was the Greens candidate for Brunswick. I met with ministers, union officials, public housing tenants and over 20 not-for-profit organisations, building the case for more public housing to address our housing crisis. I sat in the homes of public housing tenants who told me the roof over their head was the only reason that they were alive – tenants like Cherie, who said moving into public housing was the key to her recovery after years of torture and abuse at the hands of her ex-husband, and tenants like Chris, who worked part time as a truckie and could not believe it when he got the call that he was moving into public housing after sleeping rough in a tent for seven years. He said he could barely even understand how to be in four walls after being in the forest in the Dandenongs for seven years. There are tenants like Natalia, who had been in nine different foster homes and lived on the streets before getting into public housing and who told me, 'Having a home gives you a chance to start living again. Now I am like a butterfly.' It is these stories that kept me fighting for change.

I met with the Greens, with the Liberals – not many of them would meet, surprise, surprise – and independents. I remember presenting to the Labor faithful at a conference about the dire need for more social and affordable housing the day my nephew Eamon was born, so a little bit over four years ago now. I remember the pride I felt when the former Minister for Housing Richard Wynne committed to building 1000 new public housing units before the 2018 election and when I helped establish a movement of over 1000 Victorian Labor Party members who are fighting internally for more housing action as we speak, and they have done massive amounts of work to date. It made me think of the advice that my mother gave me that you should never throw stones from the outside – you should be in it to change it. That is exactly what we are doing on this side of the house. That is why I am so proud to be a part of a government that listens, that cares and that is delivering tens of thousands of new social and affordable housing properties across the state.

Our \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is changing lives, and it has already delivered so many homes. Now, we need to reflect on the number. The member for Brunswick says, 'Oh, it's a small amount. It's just over 12,000 – that's insignificant.' This is not just bricks and mortar. It is 7600 families that now have a permanent, safe, affordable place to call home. It will not just be for them, it will be for the generations that benefit from that roof over their head. It cannot be understated and cannot be considered just an insignificant amount by those opposite. There is \$1 billion – I was so, so proud to see this a few weeks ago – to deliver an extra 1300 new social and affordable homes in rural and regional areas.

This is a game changer for our rural and regional communities across the Ripon electorate and will benefit so many more across the state. It will mean that we can build the much-needed key worker housing our industries have been calling out for. It will mean that we can address the chronic housing supply issues and rental stress so many are experiencing. I cannot go anywhere in Ripon – and many members in this chamber are in the same position – without the issue of housing coming up. In Carisbrook the principal of the primary school told me that there are several students who have been sleeping in tents around Maryborough for several years now. Around Lake Burrumbeet just outside of Ballarat and Green Hill Lake outside Ararat, dozens of people are sleeping rough. In Wedderburn

kids are living in shipping containers. In St Arnaud the late, great former mayor Tony Driscoll told me that there are no affordable homes to house prospective workers and shearers during peak season. In Beaufort the Country Women's Association are calling for affordable housing to be built for older women at risk of homelessness, and in Maryborough developers are ready to build more social and affordable housing in partnership with community housing associations.

Having this extra \$1 billion will be able to address so many of these issues, and it will go such a long way – a billion dollars is a huge amount in regional and rural areas. It is often said that 10 homes in Ararat are like 100 in Werribee. It is a really significant amount to have that \$1 billion up our sleeve. It will also create jobs and economic opportunities for our region. It will help victim-survivors of family violence. It will help people living with disability, those with mental illness and locals who can no longer afford rising rents. Homelessness organisations, unions, peak bodies and even the master builders are praising us for our action on housing. They all know that we are not just providing a home to families but are also putting downward pressure on overall rental prices in the private market and improving housing affordability.

We have partnered with the Albanese federal Labor government to get this work done, and all the while the Greens political party are blocking and stalling and opposing and wrecking progress. In Canberra they are abstaining from the vote on the federal government's Housing Australia Future Fund and effectively stopping vulnerable people from getting a roof over their heads. They are making housing affordability worse, and they are grandstanding and talking a big game but never delivering a single thing. While they protest and lecture us, we are getting on with actually delivering tangible outcomes for Victorians in need. We are building more refuges, we are building more transitional housing, we are creating more affordable rental schemes, we are boosting funds for homelessness support, we are strengthening tenants' rights and we are building permanent secure housing where it is needed most. I would much rather be on this side of the chamber actually getting on with it rather than throwing stones from the outside like those opposite. They had the opportunity, and they never did anything with it to deliver on housing for those in need.

I want to thank the Minister for Housing for all his hard work in delivering more affordable homes, and I also want to thank the incredible staff at Homes Victoria and in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, who are deeply committed to ending homelessness and building more affordable homes across our state. I had the pleasure of working with many of these people before entering this place, and I know how tirelessly they are working every single day to get this job done. Now, our work is not done. We will be the first to admit that, and that is why our government is working hard on a housing package to be announced in coming months. In Ripon there is a long way to go in addressing our housing shortage and levels of housing stress. We have delivered 150 brand new homes in Ballarat, including nine in Mitchell Park. We are building nine more, as we speak, in Ararat, and we are building 30 more in Mitchell Park next year. I know the member for Wendouree is just as excited as I am about the amount of housing that we are building in Ballarat. This has already changed lives, with more great things to come.

I will continue to advocate for more social and affordable housing for my community, and I know that our government will work hard to address this pressing issue, unlike those opposite, who will just continue to whinge and complain. There is no more important issue anywhere in the state than housing, and that is why we are not wasting a minute in changing and saving lives so that more people can have the dignity, the respect and the comfort that comes with a secure place to call home.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:35): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

We have had 2 hours now of talking about this important topic of housing. We have a matter of importance a little bit later on in terms of housing. There are a number of notices of motion that we have on the notice paper at the moment which I would suggest are very important, particularly now that we have just had a vote in the upper house on the Commonwealth Games. A number of notices

on the notice paper at the moment deal with the Commonwealth Games. We have been talking about housing and the fact that we do not have money to build housing. We have seen the government waste money and go from a \$2.6 billion Commonwealth Games to a \$7 billion Commonwealth Games in literally weeks.

In the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee we heard the minister say the games were going to cost \$2.6 billion, then it was \$4.4 billion. The money keeps on adding up. We do not know what this Commonwealth Games was going to cost. We did not know at the beginning what the \$2.6 billion was for. We do not know what the additional \$4.4 billion was for. The Deputy Premier in question time yesterday said it was \$6 billion and then we had \$7 billion. We are going up by the billions by the minute and there is no detail. The waste and mismanagement by this government is absolutely appalling, and Victorians are paying the price.

If you look at a number of these notices, particularly notice of motion 31, they deal particularly with the details of cost and how a government would sign a contract. We are talking about housing. You would never sign a contract to build a house without knowing what the house was going to cost. Imagine just saying to your builder, 'Thank you very much. Here's the contract', and then halfway through the build you understood the cost was nowhere near the money that you had in your bank and you had to walk away. Well, Victorians unfortunately have been left with nothing, not even the frame, when it comes to the Commonwealth Games. The Andrews government have walked away and left Victorians with nothing but broken promises. That is what they have done, and that is really important. A parliamentary inquiry has been voted on in the upper house, resoundingly. Victorians were humiliated by this Andrews government. Victoria was humiliated on the world stage. The Andrews Labor government were humiliated today in the upper house because everybody got behind what is very, very important – that is, to get to the bottom of this decision. Why was it made? How was it made? When was it made? Who made it, and how much is it going to cost? Because we are all going to be paying the price.

We are in a cost-of-living crisis. We cannot build housing because the government has more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. That is why we cannot build houses. That is why we cannot pay our energy bills. That is why we cannot build hospitals, we cannot build schools, because this government has sent Victoria broke. They have sent the state broke, and that is why we have a situation where the Commonwealth Games, which was promised before the election to win votes, has been cancelled after the election, a cancellation for which we are all going to pay the price. We are all going to be on a bill for billions of dollars to cancel the contract.

Now, we remember that, don't we? It is *deja vu*, and what a horrible horror movie this is. The east-west link, a billion dollars to get out of a contract when Daniel Andrews came into power, and on his way out, because the Premier has not been here for the last two days – where is he? – we see the potential for another cancellation of a contract. The opportunity to be able to talk about this motion today is really important because we have a number of members in the lower house that are affected by the cancellation and they will have the opportunity to talk about this, about how much it is going to cost their constituents in their electorates and how disappointed they are, because before the election and only six weeks ago the Premier, the Deputy Premier and everyone was talking up how great the Commonwealth Games are. How wonderful it is –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The members for Narracan and Wendouree can remain seated.

David SOUTHWICK: Now what we have is a big doughnut, a big zero for Victorians, except for a bill. That is all we have, a bill, which every Victorian will be paying –

Juliana Addison interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member, without assistance from the member for Wendouree.

Juliana Addison interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Wendouree can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.

David SOUTHWICK: The government can scream and moan as much as they like, but Victorians have been damaged. Our international reputation has been damaged by this, irreparably. Victorians are left wondering by this government that has humiliated us on the world stage. The government really should be held to account, and as we have been saying, the Deputy Premier should resign from this horrible mess that she has put Victorians in.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment, Minister for Public Transport) (12:40): I rise to oppose the motion put by the opposition. It is very clear to anyone that we have a housing crisis in the state at the moment. I just recently, with the member for Frankston and the Minister for Housing, was at a facility in Yarraville which is a community partnership between the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, the Health and Community Services Union and Hope Street Youth and Family Services, and which spoke –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is a tight procedural debate and not the chance for the minister to go waffling on about his exploits around housing.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is correct that the debate is on the reasons for the adjournment put forward by the member for Caulfield. The member for Caulfield was given some latitude to explain his reasons, and I am listening to the minister, who has recently started and will continue.

Ben CARROLL: Thank you. I think the member for Caulfield had a very long leniency and talked a fair bit on the Commonwealth Games. So let us be very clear that this motion is about housing, in particular what will occur in regional Victoria, as the member for Ripon so eloquently outlined in her contribution. There can be no more important issue than delivering a home, a roof over people's heads. Where I was going to is that this issue is beyond just housing. It is about family support and giving young people in need – those that I and the member for Frankston saw last week – a roof over their head so they have the dignity to get to where they need to in life as well.

This motion in particular deals with housing in regional Victoria. As the minister responsible for introducing the regional fare cap and bringing equity to regional fares on the V/Line network, that goes hand in hand with what we will be doing with our Regional Housing Fund, which the member for Bundoora and the Minister for Housing will oversee. We are very proud on this side of the house, whether it is at the Commonwealth level or at the state level, of making sure that that central issue of housing is front and centre going forward. As the Minister for Industry and Innovation I sat down with superannuation funds, just last week, that also want to roll up their sleeves and see what they can do to partner with the government. That is what we are after, a real partnership approach to deliver on the work that we are doing, to get on with it and to make sure that more Victorians have roofs over their heads, because there can be nothing more important.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (12:43): I rise to support the motion from the member for Caulfield. I think it is important to note that there are many members in this house who actually are from the regions, as the member for Wendouree, who is no longer with us in the chamber, pointed out, but they have not been given the opportunity to tell Victorians, to tell their communities, in this place why the government has made the decision to go and cancel these Commonwealth Games without notice, or why they have not been able to have the chance to explain to their communities why the cost has blown out by \$4.4 billion.

Members interjecting.

Sam GROTH: It is very interesting to hear the interjections, because I think that when you go through some of the contributions that have been made in this place, some of the record may need to be corrected or adjusted or clarified. When you look at 16 May, the Deputy Premier said they ‘committed to delivering the Commonwealth Games with that \$2.6 billion of investment’. That is now out the window. That probably needs clarification. I am sure the minister across the table, the Minister for Industry and Innovation, actually would love to debate this because it props up his ability in terms of that leadership race. You know, it lifts him up the ladder a few rungs.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member got up and made a point of order on the minister at the table, when in fact he is being entirely irrelevant.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order, Minister?

Mary-Anne Thomas: It is a narrow procedural debate. He is being entirely irrelevant to the narrow procedural debate. I ask you to bring him back.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind all members once again to stick to the reasons for the adjournment motion put forward by the member for Caulfield. You may have been straying a little bit at the end there. Come back, please.

Sam GROTH: I was just making the point that members in this house I am sure, while the housing motion is important, would love the opportunity to be able to speak on a Commonwealth Games motion. There are plenty of them on the notice paper. But I will go back. Maybe the Deputy Premier would like to clarify:

Bendigo will be on the international stage, alongside Ballarat and Geelong and the Latrobe Valley and Shepparton, as we host the 2026 Commonwealth Games.

I am not sure how that is going to happen. She said in a press release on 17 March:

We’re delivering the first-ever regional Games, creating thousands of opportunities for local workers and businesses and cementing Victoria’s status as the major events capital of Australia.

If you want to talk about cementing, the only thing the government has done is put concrete boots on this state’s reputation and thrown it in the Yarra. That is all they have done with cement. If you go to the member for South Barwon, who was taking a thousand dollars a week, he might like to clarify:

Victorians love their sport, and that is why this government is getting on with delivering the first ever regional Commonwealth Games.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I advise the member to come back to the topic.

Sam GROTH: The member for Melton:

There are certainly some future Olympic stars down at Bacchus Marsh ... with many of the athletes setting their sights on the 2026 Commonwealth Games, a great aspiration to work towards.

What are they working towards now? Does he want to clarify his statements? The Minister for Industry and Innovation, across the table:

... the Commonwealth Games, which is going to be a massive boon for regional Victoria.

And we still have not heard if the minister is going to deliver on those electric buses that he was going to deliver to the regions for the Commonwealth Games. The member for Geelong, who I note is in the chamber:

Geelong loves its sport, there is no doubt of that, and excitement is building around the 2026 Commonwealth Games ...

Is there still excitement in Geelong around the Commonwealth Games?

Darren Cheeseman interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for South Barwon is warned.

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, we are all quite competent enough to read *Hansard* by ourselves. We do not need the member to do that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order is?

Paul Edbrooke: The point of order is on relevance. It is a very tight procedural debate, and the member should be drawn back to that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the reasons for the adjournment, please.

Sam GROTH: On the reasons for the adjournment, I am sure the members would love to come out and, as I noted, have the chance to speak about their previous contributions and clarify some of those. The member for Eureka:

The Commonwealth Games will be the first of their kind ...

It will not be the first of its kind. Actually it will be the first of its kind – the first of its kind to be cancelled. That is the first of its kind – not in its delivery, in its cancellation. Of course the member for Wendouree, who is no longer here:

... hosting the Commonwealth Games in regional Victoria will be an excellent opportunity to showcase our state ...

There is absolutely no opportunity, and you are a disgrace.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member's time has expired. Further early lunches can be organised.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (12:48): It is great when the member for Nepean comes in. He found Nepean when Box Hill was not a viable option. He went down to the holiday home and found a better seat, and he became a regional MP. After serving it up near Kooyong, he found his way down to the holiday roost.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Brighton on a point of order, which I think I can anticipate.

James Newbury: Deputy Speaker, this is not an opportunity to sledge, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the question.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, the member for Mordialloc is literally just on his feet. We just heard the member for Nepean –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have not called the minister. I am going to presume that was on relevance.

James Newbury: Yes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Go figure. I would encourage the member for Mordialloc, who has relatively just begun, to come to the reasons for adjournment or not.

Tim RICHARDSON: It was a drop volley at the net, Deputy Speaker; I had to return serve.

There is no bigger crisis in our state at the moment than housing and the cost of living. It is what everyone is focused on; it is what is leading debate across not just Victoria but our nation. We have had a number of members and the Greens have had one person rock up today to this debate on the housing motion, but we need to be talking about this each and every day, because each and every day Victorians are suffering in the cost-of-living crisis that we see. That is why this motion is so important. Bring forward your values, bring forward your views and make that contribution. I understand that you have to front up and put a few names on the list for the matter of public importance. There are probably about three or four coalition members of Parliament that have been put forward, but there are more members

that can contribute on that motion. We see a lack of contribution from the Liberals in particular in this Parliament, and we see their lack of contribution in a range of different areas, meaning that they have more time to do whatever they do but are not contributing to the important business.

I would argue there is nothing more important than this housing motion. Just because you do not have enough speakers, just because you may not care or you suggest that people should not live in Brighton for housing, they should live somewhere else – they are their values and their ideology. It is not then to bring in a motion on the Commonwealth Games, which literally is just a farce. There will be an inquiry, there will be hearings – that is part of the respect for the upper house in the Parliament. That motion will get underway; there will be submissions and opportunities to have that. That is not to bring it now and adjourn the debate to grandstand before lunch. Let us ask those coalition members of Parliament to come forward and contribute, importantly, on the motion. That is the key thing, and that is what we want to be seeing as well. There we go. We are going to wrap up now – Nina is wrapping me up. We will get to lunch soon. I will hand it over probably to Emma Kealy. There we go.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members to use correct titles.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (12:51): I rise in support of the motion by the member for Caulfield to adjourn debate today. We understand that housing is an issue; however, we have already debated this motion for some time. There are a considerable number of motions which are equally important on the notice paper today. We have got a matter of public importance today – everybody has an opportunity to have their say. It may be something they speak on, or it may something they interject on, which is often part of the MPI process.

What I think is very, very important is that we talk about what regional Victorians are talking about and what people and businesses and everyone across the state really are talking about: why did the government cancel the regional games? Why did they inflate the figure to \$7 billion when it is a complete and utter made-up number? It is clear that this is another broken promise to Victorians, another broken promise to regional Victorians and just another example of Labor saying one thing before an election and then another thing after an election. We have seen more and more broken promises from this government, whether it is about the Commonwealth Games – and wasn't it sold as a fantastic opportunity to put the spotlight on regional Victoria? It was not just about the sporting event, it was about showcasing all the fabulous things about regional Victoria. We were going to put ourselves on the world stage. On the world stage regional Victoria was going to be.

It would support our economy. It would support people in local communities to understand that regional kids were important too. They could see their favourite athletes, they might be on that stage one day, or they might actually be able to open up a business that they see thriving in that community. They were promised so much. But what did the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery deliver? Nothing. They actually delivered a string of broken promises right across the state of Victoria, and it is Victorian people who are suffering from that and wondering, 'When did this actually become a decision? Was this a decision before the election? Was it never, ever going to come to fruition? Was this just something that was a good idea before the election that would win a couple of votes but something they had no intention of ever delivering?' I think the member for South Barwon would absolutely understand this completely, with his little parliamentary secretary role, his little sweet deal – 50K a year just to sweeten the deal and get a couple of votes. It probably bought him his seat – for a swimming pool that was just going to be demolished and shipped out anyway.

If this is not the ultimate example of something that should be debated in this place, I do not know what is. But I can understand why Labor do not want it debated. They do not want to debate why an investment in regional Victoria is something that 'We'll build, and then we'll take it away from you again, because we do not believe in investing in regional Victoria.' That is exactly what Labor thinks. Labor do not believe in investing properly in regional Victoria.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for South Barwon!

Emma KEALY: We have seen that for the last 10 years. We have seen this for such a long period of time. I note the many interjections today, because if the government members are so keen to interject now –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members on my right will be removed without warning.

Emma KEALY: they should also be keen to bring on this motion and actually debate it.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: And on my left.

Emma KEALY: Stand in your place, and stand up for regional Victoria. All of you should be standing up – and actually standing up for it.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for South Barwon can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.

A member interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! If I knew which one of you that was. The member for Lowan to continue in relative silence, please.

Emma KEALY: I am not very good at silence, but I will speak up for my regional communities, which is what the National Party do each and every day. We will always be a strong voice for regional Victoria, which is why we want to bring on these motions. We want to see exactly why you lied to Victorians before the last election, why you will not invest in our infrastructure, why you will not deliver on the promises –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member is fully aware that that word is unparliamentary.

Emma KEALY: We know that Labor say one thing before the election to every Victorian – but particularly regional Victorians. We want to debate this motion, and we want to make sure we get on the record how many broken promises Labor has delivered to Victorians, because that is all they have delivered.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:56): It is amazing, the fervour that is coming from over there so they do not have to talk about housing. They really do not want to talk about it – ‘Really, really, really, please, please, please, we don’t want to talk about it’ – because they have got nothing to say. They have opposed all our big builds the whole way along. Bills Street, Markham estate, you name it – they have a great fervour for opposing things but do not want to deliver. Then they say we do not deliver. Let me correct the record: 2800 homes completed, 7600 built or underway. Look at all the level crossings we have removed. And how about the Metro Tunnel? That is a year ahead of schedule. If only they had the passion to actually deliver – but no, it is oppose, oppose, oppose, every step of the way. Well, that is not where we come from on this side of the chamber, because we support social and affordable housing. That is why we have invested \$5.3 billion in the Big Housing Build. That is why we are delivering.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, as you have already ruled, it is a tight procedural debate, not an opportunity to debate the motion that we are moving to adjourn.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It would be nice if it was. The member to focus on the reasons for adjournment or not raised by the member for Caulfield.

Nina TAYLOR: To close out, I say that we would like to continue speaking on the very important topic of housing, and it would be nice to see that shared by the other side of the chamber as well.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (22): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Jess Wilson

Noes (52): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

The SPEAKER: The house will return to debate on the motion after question time.

Sitting suspended 1:04 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Members

Premier

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:02): I rise to inform the house that today I will answer questions on behalf of the Premier.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Commonwealth Games

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Deputy Premier. In the interests of transparency and accountability to the Victorian people, will the Deputy Premier commit to giving evidence to the newly established select committee on the 2026 Commonwealth Games?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:03): The answer to the Leader of the Opposition's question in part is in the question itself. The motion to establish this committee has only been passed an hour or so ago in the Legislative Council, so it is inappropriate to pre-empt the actions of a committee that is yet to be established. The make-up is yet to be formed. Members are yet to be appointed to that committee, and it would be inappropriate to cut across the work of that committee. What I would say though is to again remind the house that the Andrews Labor government has already previously announced that more than \$6 billion to hold a 12-day event was just too much, and the key reason why we agreed to hold the games in the first place of course was to support the legacy benefits for regional Victoria. That is what we agreed to in the first place, that had bipartisan support in the first place and that is

exactly what we are going to deliver through that investment in housing, investment in community sporting infrastructure, investment in great community sport programs like the all-abilities sporting program and investment in tourism and infrastructure.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 58 the Deputy Premier knows not to debate the question. The Deputy Premier is now debating the question. If the Deputy Premier intends not to give evidence to the committee, the Deputy Premier can make that point.

The SPEAKER: Order! You have made your point of order, Manager of Opposition Business. There is no need to elaborate. The Acting Premier was answering the question that was put to her.

Jacinta ALLAN: Again, as I indicated before, it is inappropriate to cut across the workings of a committee that has not even had its members appointed. What I will say is it has been drawn to my attention that there has been a lot of commentary about this decision, for understandable reasons. But I would like to share with the house this comment: ‘I think it is reasonable to say if I were Premier today and took office today and confronted with that, I would have no choice but to do what has been done’.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I ask you to bring the minister back to the question: will she give evidence at the select committee or not?

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

Jacinta ALLAN: As I indicated before, let us let the committee, out of respect to that committee, be established and set its work program. Meanwhile, the Andrews Labor government is going to get on and deliver those important legacy benefits for regional communities.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): Will government departments be instructed to fully cooperate with the newly established select committee on the 2026 Commonwealth Games?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:06): Again, how government departments engage with the committee processes is absolutely a matter for them. There is a well-established practice for departments to do that. The committee is yet to even be established with members, to set its work program, so it is pre-empting any deliberations of that committee. In the meantime the Andrews Labor government is going to get on in continuing to deliver that infrastructure in housing, in community sport, in supporting our tourism industry. The reason why there was bipartisan support for these games in the first place was to invest in those legacy benefits for regional communities.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland South is warned.

Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:07): For workers across the Andrews Labor government’s Big Build program it has been a very, very busy winter period where progress has been going rapidly. 72 dangerous and congested level crossings have been removed. Work on the West Gate Tunnel, work on the North East Link, and just last week –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I know the Leader of the Opposition will want to talk over this milestone. Just last week the Metro Tunnel had its very first test train running through the Metro Tunnel. This is the biggest milestone yet on this project, and it is going to transform, for decades to come, the way people

move around our city and state. I would like to acknowledge the work of Sheena Begbie, the first person – the first young woman – who drove the very first train through the Metro Tunnel, and a shout-out to those thousands and thousands of workers who have been working around the clock to support this major milestone. Now, there was a major milestone on the Metro Tunnel between 2010 and 2014. It was scrapped. There was a major milestone, there was a major decision by those opposite to scrap the Metro Tunnel, to not proceed with the Metro Tunnel – the Metro Tunnel that is going to transform the city and state.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Assistant Treasurer, you are warned. Leader of the Opposition, I have asked you to stop interjecting across the table. It is very difficult to hear the Deputy Premier. Leader of the House, I ask you to also cease interjecting across the table.

Jacinta ALLAN: We have pushed on with the Metro Tunnel because it is going to provide for the connection of the Sunbury–Pakenham line, a 97-kilometre level-crossing-free corridor that will provide for more trains on the corridor, more trains across the rest of the network – a project we are pushing on with, as opposed to those opposite who walked away from this vital project.

Commonwealth Games

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): My question is to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier commit to give evidence to the Victorian Auditor-General’s investigation into the Commonwealth Games debacle?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:10): There are well-established requirements laid out under legislation for the way the Auditor-General engages with the public service and the department and government on the way they conduct their inquiries, and of course we will comply with those requirements. I think it is important, though, to be clear here that the Andrews Labor government’s decision remains that for a 12-day sporting event, the cost of more than \$6 billion – \$6 billion – was just not worth it. It just did not stack up. The Leader of the Opposition has asked a question about the Auditor-General’s actions. Frankly, that is a matter for the Auditor-General, how they carry out their actions. We are not a government, unlike those in the past, that has tried to sack the Auditor-General, as we remember well, but also when it comes to –

John Pesutto interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: I know the Leader of the Opposition likes the sound of his own voice. But let me quote back to the Leader of the Opposition what he has said, which is that he has got no doubt –

John Pesutto interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, I have asked you to cease interjecting across the table. I think you are being disrespectful to my rulings.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance. This was an important question, not an opportunity to be nasty, and I would ask you to ask the Acting Premier to return to the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the Acting Premier was being entirely relevant to the question, and I ask that you rule the point of order out of order. Question time is not an opportunity for the opposition to continually interrupt the Acting Premier when she is answering the questions that they have asked, so I ask them to provide the Acting Premier with the respect that she deserves and that they be quiet and listen to her answers.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House has raised an important point, and that is about respect. I think that the house needs to show some respect to those who are on their feet, to those who

are asking the questions and also to the Chair. The Acting Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I said at the outset, the government will work with the Auditor-General in the usual way under any inquiry that the Auditor-General may choose to pursue. We should not of course cut across the work that the Auditor-General will do. How they choose to engage on this matter is really up to the Auditor-General. In the meantime our work is focused on supporting regional communities with that \$2 billion package of support for housing, for community sporting infrastructure and to support the strong tourism and major events industry in regional Victoria that continues to grow really strongly. Look at last week's unemployment figures for regional Victoria – 2.8 per cent, just about the lowest figures on record. We have a strong and thriving regional community and economy, and that is strongly supported by the Andrews Labor government and will continue to be as we invest in these key areas that are important to regional Victoria, particularly in the area of housing.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:14): Will government departments be instructed to fully cooperate with the investigation undertaken by the Victorian Auditor-General into the Commonwealth Games debacle?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:14): The departments and particularly department secretaries have obligations as part of their engagement in that role to work with the Auditor-General, as is outlined in legislation. For the Leader of the Opposition to suggest we cut across and interfere with that relationship is deeply inappropriate.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this was a very important, straightforward question. There was no inference in the question, and I would ask you to bring the Deputy Premier back to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Acting Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked and was answering the question that was asked. I ask the Acting Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Speaker, I have concluded.

Ministers statements: public IVF services

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:15): I rise today to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is doing what matters – helping more Victorians realise their dream of becoming parents through our nation-leading public IVF service. Fertility care services like IVF can be truly life changing. They provide couples with fertility challenges, single parents, LGBTIQ+ families and those with illness that impact fertility with the opportunities to start and/or grow their family. But too often and for too many, these services have not been within financial reach. There are many reasons why someone may choose not to start a family, but your bank balance should not be one of those reasons.

That is why we are investing over \$120 million to deliver public IVF services right across our state. More than 550 Victorians have already started their IVF journey since these services first opened at the Royal Women's and at Monash. I am delighted that our first public IVF baby is due to be born in just a few months with twins to follow shortly thereafter. We are ensuring that even more Victorians can access care closer to home with satellite public fertility already opening in the member for Broadmeadows' electorate at Epping and in the member for Mildura's electorate at Mildura, and I am sure that she joins me in celebrating this great achievement and the speed with which we have been able to deliver this service to Mildura. By the end of the year further services will be open at Bendigo, Sunshine, Ballarat, Heidelberg, Geelong, Warrnambool and Shepparton. Once fully implemented this program will help up to 5000 Victorians a year, saving families on average up to \$10,000. The Andrews Labor government will stay focused on the real needs of real Victorians by delivering public IVF.

Western suburbs rail lines

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:17): My question is to the Deputy Premier. In 2018 and 2022 the Deputy Premier promised two new electrified Metro rail lines to Melton and Wyndham Vale. The Deputy Premier has now broken this promise along with Geelong fast rail and Melbourne airport rail. Following her role in the Commonwealth Games debacle, will the Deputy Premier now apologise to commuters in Melbourne's western suburbs for breaking a promise of the much-needed public transport projects in the west?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:18): Firstly at the outset let me say to the member for Caulfield if he is using the reference in the media today and the reports in the media today, those reports are wrong. They do not reflect the decisions of government. The member for Caulfield referenced what I might say to the communities of the western suburbs. Let me tell you what we would say to the community of the western suburbs: we would say that we have been working hard for eight years now on a range of projects that are all about providing more room for more passengers across the western suburbs, and there are a series of projects. There are so many projects –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lowan will come to order.

Jacinta ALLAN: that some have been completed, some are under construction and some are in planning stage.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lowan will come to order.

Jacinta ALLAN: And we are working very, very hard. Let me give you some examples.

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

Member for Lowan withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: Let me give you some examples. When I say 'you', Speaker, I am hoping the member for Caulfield is tuning in as well. The Metro Tunnel – I have mentioned this already today, but specifically when we talk about what it means for the western suburbs, it means more trains more often, particularly on the Sunbury and Werribee lines. Lines that will be level crossing free. What it will mean, for example, in the member for Footscray's area is it will mean a train every few minutes during the peak period. There will be more trains too in the area of Laverton. In the Sunshine station area there will also be more trains. And of course the Metro Tunnel is a full year ahead of schedule, which means those benefits come to those communities a full year earlier. When it comes to the Melton corridor in particular there is no better and bigger advocate for the Melton community than the member for Melton himself. We have committed to the Melton community to make the Melton area level crossing free. We are also, as part of that, with the Melton line upgrade, going to provide more seats for more passengers on the Melton line. We are also –

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, just on relevance, this was particularly around the Western Rail Plan in dealing with Melton and Wyndham Vale – the electrification – and I ask you to bring the member back to the specifics of those two areas that have been cancelled.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The Acting Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course, being asked about planning, you can only go and make Melton level crossing free, you can only go and deliver the Metro Tunnel if you do that important planning and have each project build on the other. The work that has gone on in Melton comes off the back of the Ballarat line work, which saw the track duplicated around Deer Park and Melton, which means that

we now run an additional 220 services every single week for the Melton community. There is a lot more, and that is exactly what we are getting on and delivering for those communities.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Frankston is warned.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:22): Melbourne's western suburbs experienced commuter chaos, with the government telling people to stay at home last month while the Deputy Premier was off on holiday. Why is it that people in Melbourne's west are being punished by the Deputy Premier's broken promises?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Ringwood withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:22): I am pleased to have the supplementary question, because it enables me to continue to refer to the list of projects in the west that we are either delivering, planning or have completed. There are of course the new stations that we are building in Albion and Tarneit West; it is not just about you, member for Melton, there is other work going on as well. There are works going on on the Wyndham Vale line. Not only are we building these trains in Victoria, where we have had to reverse the previous decision, which was making trains in South Korea – we prefer them to be made in South Dandenong and Ballarat – those trains are being made bigger to be able to run on the Wyndham Vale and Melton corridors and to take more passengers, because unlike the member for Caulfield, who needs to take a packed lunch to the western suburbs, we are engaged every single day with western suburbs communities. What they tell us they want is more seats and more services, and that is exactly what we are delivering under a sequence of planned and delivered investments.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen is warned.

Ministers statements: major events

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:23): Victoria's major events are world class. Our tourism sector is booming, and our government is committed to doing what matters. This industry supports 21,000 workers, and I was proud to announce continuing support for major events in this year's budget. Major events drive interstate and international visitations and put Melbourne and Victoria on the map, filling hotel rooms and creating Victorian jobs. We know that people will travel interstate; in fact attendance from interstate at many of these events is 40 per cent and above.

Last weekend we saw the biggest crowd for the Wallabies game in 25 years right here in Melbourne, with 83,000 fans at the Bledisloe Cup. Almost 28,000 fans packed AAMI Park for the extraordinary win by the Matildas over Canada, 4–nil. But ours is not just a Melbourne story. We have made huge investments in regional Victoria over the years, supporting over 300 events since 2016, from stadium events such as the Kings of Leon in Mildura to White Nights in Shepparton, Ballarat and yours and the Deputy Premier's beautiful town of Bendigo, Speaker. This wonderful event captivates the entire community. There is the great city of Ballarat, much loved by the members for Wendouree and Buninyong, which this month will see the Foto Biennale. I know the incredible member for Geelong is happy to welcome Big Bash League and Women's Big Bash League matches to Kardinia Park this year.

I am proud to say Victoria's visitor economy hit a record \$35 billion in annual spend this year. This is a testament to the hard work of tourism operators, accommodation providers and event organisers right through Victoria, with strong and sustained support by our government. There is fierce

competition globally, however, for major events, but Victoria will continue to be ahead of the pack for three reasons: our world-class facilities, our expert workforce that delivers the best experiences and a community that comes out in droves to support these major events. This government is investing another \$150 million in regional tourism as of the last few weeks.

John Pesutto interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Jobs, economic growth and quality of life – this is doing what matters in tourism and major events.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Leader of the Opposition to not interject when members are on their feet.

Schools payroll tax

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:25): My question is to the Minister for Education. Andale School in Kew is a specialist primary school of just 22 students that provides a specialised education for children that are not reaching their full potential in the mainstream system. Andale School is registered as a public benevolent institution. The minister is meeting with Andale School tomorrow. Will the minister advise that it is government policy that schools that are public benevolent institutions are exempt from the schools tax?

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:26): I thank the member for her question. As she knows, this government has now applied payroll tax to the wealthiest schools in this state, and we have drawn a line in the sand of \$15,000 to be subject to those schools that pay that in fees. Also the government has done extensive consultation with the sector, and that threshold has been broadly aligned with the ACARA standards and measuring by the federal government. I am really pleased to say that the vast majority of non-government schools have been exempt from that, with only 60 schools being captured, or 8 per cent. Let us make sure that we all recognise that these are the wealthiest private schools in this state and that government schools across the state continue to pay this payroll tax –

Jess Wilson: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very specific about whether the schools tax will apply to public benevolent institutions like Andale School.

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

Natalie HUTCHINS: We are yet to be advised as to whether the status of this school is as a benevolent institution or not, but I am happy to meet with the school, and that is why I have made time in my diary to sit down and talk to them about this. At this stage they are on the list because they do charge the fees to the students and the families that go there in line with the other schools that are on the list.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:28): Under the government's schools tax legislation, the minister has full power to add and remove schools from the hit list by the stroke of a pen. Regardless of the SRO's advice, will you commit to doing the right thing and exempting Andale School from the schools tax?

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:28): It astounds me that the opposition continue to ask about the wealthiest schools in this state and continue to –

Members interjecting.

Natalie HUTCHINS: Well, there has not been a single question that those opposite have asked me about our public school system, about our outcomes when it comes to education, about our investment in capital in the about 100 schools we are building. I have already said that I will meet with this school tomorrow. I will discuss this with them, but the reality is that our government is delivering for the non-government sector. We have put up \$450 million worth of capital investments to be shared across the Catholic and non-government sector when it comes to this year's budget, and we will continue to fund specific programs that extend into the non-government sector in those schools that truly need it.

Ministers statements: schools funding

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:30): The Andrews government is doing what matters, delivering new schools in our growth areas – growth areas like Melton that actually extend out more than the township of Melton, but those opposite would not know, because they need a road map to find Melton. This investment has been made possible by the \$14.9 billion investment in building, upgrading and maintaining our schools. On Monday I was really pleased to announce the names of the 14 new schools due to open their doors in 2024, 10 of which will be in Melbourne’s growing western suburbs. For the first time, these schools will have First Nations names. These names have been generously provided by traditional owner groups, and I thank them for this. It was really great to join the member for Kororoit to announce the naming of Yarrabing Secondary College and Dharra School in Aintree –

Sam Groth interjected.

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

Member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.

Natalie HUTCHINS: two schools that will be co-located alongside a brand new kinder and a community centre, making sure that we ditch the double drop-off for parents. Yarrabing means ‘white gum’ and dharra means ‘white hawk’. These are absolutely fitting tributes to the land of the First Nations people in this region before these schools were established, and they will be adding to the unique identity of our outer-suburb schools. I know that the members for Melton, Laverton, Tarneit, Werribee, Pakenham and Kalkallo and even the member for Berwick must be excited about the incredible names that are attached to these schools and the rate at which these schools are going up in their electorates. We are committed to ensuring every family has access to a great local school, unlike those opposite.

Annabelle Cleeland interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Euroa is warned.

Infrastructure projects

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:32): My question is to the Deputy Premier. Does the minister agree with the Premier’s statement in relation to the government’s costings of major infrastructure projects that ‘things cost what they cost’?

Danny Pearson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Assistant Treasurer will come to order.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:32): As a statement of fact, things do cost what they cost. I am not sure why we are quibbling over facts. It is a bit odd for the Leader of the Opposition to want to have an argument about facts. To put the question in the context that the Premier was making that quote, I was standing with the Premier that day, last Tuesday morning, when we were marking the arrival of the very first train running through the Metro Tunnel, a project that is a full year ahead of schedule and a project that is going to provide decades and decades of benefits for the Victorian community as it unlocks the entire train network and as it creates that 97-kilometre level-crossing-free corridor from Sunbury in the north to Pakenham in the south – and a shout-out to Cranbourne as well.

Just while I am on level crossings, if you want to talk about projects and costs, the level crossing program is not only ahead of schedule, it is also well under budget. I refer the opposition to last year’s budget, the 2022 budget, one of the many outstanding budgets delivered by our Treasurer, where the Level Crossing Removal Project returned \$400 million to consolidated revenue. While we are talking about level crossings, we have removed a number of level crossings on the Cranbourne corridor as

part of the Cranbourne line upgrade. That Cranbourne line upgrade is also under budget, and it is ahead of time. That project has delivered 10-minute frequencies to the growing Cranbourne community. And of course you can only do these extra frequencies on the outer parts of the network because we are untangling the heart of the network, which is why the Metro Tunnel is so important. I remember a time when rail projects were committed to and walked away from because they were too hard. We take a different approach: we deliver these projects, and we are so proud too to support the tens of thousands of workers who deliver these projects on behalf of Victorians.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:35): Is the up to \$2 billion in compensation that Victorians will have to pay for the Commonwealth Games debacle another example of this government’s attitude to taxpayer funds that ‘things cost what they cost’?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I suspect I am going to anticipate the point of order from the Leader of the House.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I am struggling to find the connection between the first question and the supplementary question. The first question was about the cost of a range of infrastructure projects. The second question was about the Commonwealth Games. I am really struggling to, as I said, find the connection there. I would ask that you ask the Leader of the Opposition to rephrase his question and perhaps –

The SPEAKER: Order! I have heard enough on the point of order, Leader of the House. It astounds me the disrespect that is being shown in this house today – absolutely astounds me.

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Speaker, there was a clear link between the first and the supplementary questions. The supplementary question drilled down further into the substantive question and used a specific example, which the Deputy Premier confirmed in her initial answer.

The SPEAKER: I will allow the question on the basis that the words ‘things cost what they cost’ were used in both questions.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:38): The key word clearly is ‘cost’ there in the Leader of the Opposition’s supplementary question. I want to draw your attention to this reference: ‘I have got no doubt that it could cost as much as \$7 billion.’ Who said that? It was the Leader of the Opposition in the context of his support for the government’s decision regarding the Commonwealth Games. I acknowledge his bipartisan support when it comes to this question of cost. I also acknowledge the bipartisan support for the work that we are doing on the legacy benefits from this decision. The question went to \$2 billion – \$2 billion is being invested right now in regional communities, in 1300 social and affordable housing homes and in community sporting infrastructure and tourism and major events work. The key reason we agreed in the first place to these games was that enduring legacy benefit, and that is absolutely being delivered for those regional communities.

Ministers statements: energy policy

Lily D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:39): I am absolutely delighted to say that we are getting on and doing the things that matter to Victorians – delivering the nation’s most ambitious renewable energy agenda and cutting the cost of living for Victorians. I am absolutely pleased to give a midyear update on where Victoria is up to with our renewable energy generation. Victoria has now achieved 36.5 per cent renewable electricity generation in this state, and there are nine more large-scale renewable energy projects that are currently under construction and that will provide even more capacity – 1300 megawatts of capacity is coming online to service Victorians into the future. As we do that, we are creating more jobs and we are consistently delivering the lowest wholesale electricity

prices in the country. We are keeping the jobs coming with our 95 per cent renewal electricity target by 2035 – 59,000 of them – and new affordable electricity.

The projects keep coming. We have got a new big battery at Hazelwood – 200 megawatts – which opened just a few weeks ago. Plus of course I was delighted to turn the sod just last week on a new battery that is coming to Cranbourne – a 200-megawatt battery over in Cranbourne. Just in April I turned the sod on the new big renewable energy wind farm at Golden Plains – 750 megawatts of new energy that is going to be built for our state, and there is a lot more to come. We have also got to count the six projects that have been delivered thanks to our Victorian government's Victorian renewable energy target second auction: 623 megawatts of new power from solar plus 365 megawatts of new storage. There is a lot more there. We know we are also delivering solar to people's homes, battery storage technology in people's homes, solar hot water and of course the power saving bonus. And we are bringing back the SEC, which will accelerate all these projects – *(Time expired)*

Constituency questions

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:42): (240) My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier please explain why his Labor government are content, if not eager, to continue work on the Suburban Rail Loop even though it will add \$125 billion to an already inconceivable \$171 billion debt, yet when the Commonwealth Games, the games they asked for, suddenly goes over budget as a direct result of their own incompetence – nearly three times over the projected cost – the Premier makes the distinction to cut this project? The Premier might claim that it is a project that we cannot afford, but what about the countless other blowouts on large-scale projects in Victoria? It seems whenever Labor handles a large-scale project it becomes a cost blowout shrouded in secrecy, with the Premier still not having released the details of his latest financial blowout.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:43): (241) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources about moving towards a less gas-reliant future. Would the minister please explain to me the benefits for households in my electorate of going all electric. Rising gas prices are having a significant impact on household budgets as we experience another chilly Ballarat winter. Often temperatures do not make it into double digits, and we are heavily reliant on heaters to keep us warm. This comes at a significant cost for households across my community, especially for our most vulnerable residents. With the rising cost of gas and uncertainty about supply into the future my office has received many inquiries about support for moving from gas heating, cooking and hot water to electric. As a family we are making the transition to electric. We have installed solar panels, moved to electric split systems, which replaced our gas central heating, and even invested in an electric lawnmower. I welcome the announcement that all new homes and residential subdivisions requiring planning permits will be all electric.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:44): (242) My question today is for the Minister for Education, and I ask: will the minister come to Kilmore to listen to concerns of the community about local education and see the grounds of the former Colmont School? This former school campus is ready-made, conveniently on the market and has the opportunity to provide a cost-effective solution to a very real issue for this town. A petition launched by me and Kilmore resident Jesse Coombe has called on the government to purchase this site, and it has already reached nearly 3000 signatures. Jesse's dedication to this cause comes from his 13-year-old daughter Armani, who travels over 2 hours each day to get to and from her school. Kilmore is the largest town in Victoria without a government secondary school, and it is completely unacceptable that our families are having to fight tooth and nail just to have access to an essential right like an education. Kilmore is continuing to grow, and by not

taking immediate action the government will leave it too late. Minister, just moments ago you said, and I quote, you are ‘committed to ensuring’ students have access to schools in their area.

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:45): (243) My question is for the Minister for Education, who I see is at the table. Minister, what is the latest information on this government’s commitment to upgrading Gladstone Park Secondary College in my electorate? Minister, as you will recall, prior to the last election we committed to upgrading this outstanding local school within my community to the tune of over \$11 million. As it happens, we were of course successful at the last election, and this commitment can now be delivered. Better facilities, new and upgraded schools, the best in teaching and learning – that is what this government is committed to, and that is what the Education State will deliver. This upgrade within my local community is very well and widely supported. Today, tomorrow and every day this government is committed to investing in high-quality teaching and learning, making sure that we are providing for all students right across the state. Again, Minister, I ask for the latest information on this project.

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:46): (244) My constituency question is to the Premier. Will the Premier release all documents that estimated the cost of the Commonwealth Games at \$2.5 billion in 2022 and the subsequent documents which detail the cost at between \$6 billion and \$7 billion in 2023? Constituents in my community want to know how the Andrews Labor government got this estimate so completely wrong that in just 14 months the price to hold the event nearly tripled. If Victorian businesses ran their cost estimates like the Andrews Labor government, no-one would do business with them. Yet the Andrews Labor government think they can just keep having blowout after blowout and charge it to the Victorian taxpayer like it is nothing.

Point Cook electorate

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (14:47): (245) The matter that I raise is for the Minister for Environment in the other place, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the Point Cook Coastal Park. The Point Cook Coastal Park, for those who have not been there yet, is a much-loved park in the local community. It is situated on Port Phillip Bay, the coastal park, and it is a place where the community that I represent and beyond come to enjoy the beautiful natural settings of the environment. Having visited the park recently with my own family on a sunny winter’s day in Melbourne, I could see that the project is well underway, with the barbecues, the seating and the playgrounds under construction. The upgrade will be well utilised by the community. In fact it is already supported by the government in another way, which is through a \$10,000 grant to the terrific volunteers at Coastcare, as part of that park. They are going to be planting over 1000 tube stocks there very soon. I look forward to hearing from the minister on this exciting project.

Brunswick electorate

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:48): (246) My question is for the Minister for Housing. I was recently contacted by Asena, a single parent with a disabled son, who lives in a one-bedroom public housing unit in Brunswick. But she and her son have been left stranded by the department and are staying in a motel at Asena’s expense. What was initially meant to be a few days work to fix a longstanding mould problem has become a major renovation with less than a week’s notice, requiring her to move everything out and put her furniture into storage, also at her expense. She will be out of the motel this Sunday with nowhere else to go. She and I have both repeatedly tried to contact the housing office and the minister’s office, to no avail. So my question for the minister is: will you swiftly provide suitable alternative accommodation and arrange compensation for this constituent during the renovation period?

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:49): (247) My question is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. This will come as no surprise to people in this house, but the western suburbs, particularly in my electorate of Kororoit, are among the fastest growing areas in Victoria. As the member for Melton knows, as we share parts of the boundary of the Melton LGA, it is the fastest growing municipality in the country – not just Victoria, but the country. Close to 60 babies per week are being born in the Melton LGA. With the employment precinct being developed in Kororoit, I am pleased to say that 19,000 jobs are projected to be created and more than 25,000 new residents are expected to move into this area by 2051. Can the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure please tell me what investments are being made on the Melton line to cater for this fast-growing community?

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:49): (248) My question is to the Minister for Education. Why has the minister included Andale School in Kew on the government's school tax hit list? Andale School provides specialised primary education for children with language and learning challenges. With only 22 students, Andale is truly a unique learning environment that supports students to reach their full potential. The school relies on parent-organised fundraising to help provide the diverse range of educational programs that students need. I have had the great pleasure of working closely with the Andale community. I have never seen a more committed group of parents, teachers and staff, who so wholeheartedly dedicate themselves to ensuring Andale students have the best possible education. It defies belief that Andale School has been hit hard by Labor's school tax, which will cost Andale around \$12,000 next year. While this may be a modest amount for the government and will have no impact on the state's budget, it will have an impact on Andale's budget. Andale's inclusion in the school tax hit list has come as a shock to the school and the Kew community. It is simply shameful that the government has targeted Andale School with this regressive tax on education.

Greenvale electorate

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:50): (249) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport. I am delighted the Andrews Labor government is delivering stage 1 of the Mickleham Road upgrade thanks to the advocacy of great local members like the member for Kalkallo over many years. It is a complex engineering project and an absolutely essential one to ensure safer and faster journeys for all road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and bus passengers. While the stage 1 Mickleham Road upgrade will be transformational for journeys across Greenvale, I know that it is just part of this government's broad commitment to invest in infrastructure and improve transport across the north and across transport modes. I love buses, and I think they have a vital role to play in connecting Victorians. They are a flexible transport solution that can improve the provision of public transport services in growing areas of Melbourne like Greenvale, so could the Minister for Public Transport please inform me how the work he is leading to reform Victoria's bus network through the Victorian bus plan will help improve services for residents in my electorate of Greenvale and support the current and future public transport needs of my community?

Nick Staikos: On a point of order, Speaker, on the constituency question raised by the member for Rowville. It was about the Commonwealth Games, and as it did not relate to the electorate of Rowville, I believe it is out of order, so I would ask that you review *Hansard*.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Bentleigh. There are a number of constituency questions that were raised today that I will be reviewing. Thank you for drawing that to my attention.

*Motions***Big Housing Build****Debate resumed.**

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:52): I am rising to speak on this housing motion because I am really quite frustrated to hear the spruiking from the Labor government saying that they are getting on with building more houses when, frankly, the reality is starkly different in South-West Coast than what I am hearing in this chamber. The reality is that over 900 families are on a waiting list for housing in South-West Coast – 900 – and this government spruiks about how much money, millions of dollars, they are putting into the area for housing.

I see women coming into my electorate office who have been assured through public campaigns of the support they will receive, if they are victims of domestic abuse, from the Andrews Labor government, and they come in and they tell me that they are on the street or living in the car with their children. I have even had a woman with four children sleeping in their car. The organisations like St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army – I might add someone from our good Salvation Army community was on the steps today, Lindsay Stow; I met with him earlier on the steps of Parliament – do a fantastic job. They are so desperate to help people in this housing crisis and to get the government to listen to the fact that we need more social housing, not just the talk but actually delivering on the promises, that they have come all the way down here to protest on the steps and point out to the government that they are failing. Thank you to the organisations that do so much work, so much frustrating and very challenging, hard work. When you see the devastation and despair on people's faces that we see that come into our office, saying 'Can you please help? We have got nowhere to go. We are getting kicked out of the hotel that we have been in' or the caravan or 'We have been offered a tent'. These are the stories that are just not able to be coped with from the point of view of even the staff at the Salvos, who must struggle, like we do in our office, because it is just too heart-wrenching.

The government had an article in the *Standard* recently saying they had built 75 homes. But the truth is in 2017 this state had a collection of 86,813 homes on their books, because the government owns the most homes for rental properties and manages these properties. By 2021, because we do not have any figures past then of the actual net situation, the figure was 86,887. After all the billions of dollars they have spent on this big build that we keep getting told so much about, that is an improvement of 74 homes – just 74 homes. Now, there are 900 families. Families in our electorate are often four people, so that is a lot of people – a mum, a dad and two kids is probably more normal than the 1.2 of the state average in South-West Coast would be my guess. Places like Terang I do not think even have any social houses, but we do have people trying to help.

I met with the Women's Housing association, and they are building houses in Portland and Heywood. Midfield Meat, a local family-owned enterprise who do a lot for our community by way of social good and philanthropy, are actually trying to solve the problem themselves by building a housing complex for their workers, which will take the pressure off the housing market. Whether it is rental, whether it is social housing or whether it is people trying to buy, there is a real supply issue. My colleague at the table, the member for Kew, continually shares with the government that it is a supply issue and we need to actually do more to improve the supply. You get businesses like Midfield Meat, who are going ahead and trying to do that, and they are held up by government regulation instead of being supported and assisted in the process of making sure permits are given where they need to be in a timely manner.

Or take on board our suggestion, which we had as a policy before the last election, of a flying squad to go around and help the councils. We do have a challenge with accessing staff, and it makes sense at times to use centralised people like planning people in the council who can use the department's expertise, because it is often very hard to attract people to the regions. And when you do not have housing to attract them, the problem just continues to compound. So having that flying squad concept is something I think the government should still be taking up as an idea. It does not hurt to take up good ideas and swallow your pride sometimes and say 'That's a good one. We should adopt it'. Then

we can get a bit more land available, because in places like Warrnambool there just is not the land available to be able to increase the supply, and the more roofs we have over people's heads is where we start to really solve the problem.

It is time to stop just spinning the wheels on this spin that comes out of the government's mouth and actually start to deliver. Things like false promises like the Commonwealth Games. We were not going to get anything in the South-West Coast region from a Commonwealth Games perspective, because it was Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong that were going to benefit mainly from our part of Victoria. But the reality is that the legacy is something we do need that was promised. These houses – we need them and we need them now. With the Commonwealth Games, those promises were meant to be delivered by 2026. The government needs to stick to that promise with the legacy and deliver by 2026. There is no reason and no excuse not to, with the disappointment that the communities are struggling with as a result of the government being told they could have run the games for \$1.4 billion but insisted on \$2.6 billion, which they now claim to be \$7 billion but will not evidence, and when we have to pay \$1 billion to now get out of contracts. For \$1.4 billion we could have had the games and now we are getting nothing. It just economically does not add up, and that is what the problem is with this government: they do not understand economics. Having all the spin in the world cannot take away from the fact that people are homeless and people are struggling. When we were in government last, in 2014, we had 9900 people on the priority waiting list – that was way too many, no question about that. Now, in March this year, there were 37,079 people on that priority waiting list for houses. Now, this is a government that has been in government for 20 of the last 24 years, and in that time the priority waiting list for families to go into housing has tripled.

This is a government who says it has been getting on with it and delivering for the community of Victoria and that it cares about our most vulnerable. Well, I do not know how you can triple the homelessness figure and say you have been delivering. Just yesterday in the Parliament the Deputy Premier was talking about all the work they have done – all the changes they have made to legislation – to improve the situation for renters. The evidence is clear: there are less people able to rent properties. They have failed. All those changes have clearly not worked, because we are in a rental crisis. I struggle to see when this government is going to realise that the smoke is clearing and the mirrors are not really showing what it hopes it will see, because it is becoming too clear for everyone, and the evidence is just landing at our feet. The evidence is just too clear: there is a rental crisis, when a government says it has done wonderful things to change legislation and improve that; homelessness figures are increasing; and priority housing lists have tripled from when we were in government to now. And this government uses the language 'We've been getting on and delivering'. In South-West Coast alone we are in the top 50 areas of homelessness, with an increase in homelessness of 44 per cent. That is not something to be proud of. I really struggle with this motion that says the Andrews Labor government are doing a wonderful job delivering on social housing. I think it is a complete and utter failure. It does not matter what I think – the evidence is in figures, and the figures have tripled. That is quite clear.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: It does matter what I think – thank you, member for South Gippsland, you are right. Everybody is valuable; you are quite correct. But the reality is the figures speak much more loudly than my words, and the figures are damning, especially the figure of 37,079 families that are on a priority housing list. The government have failed. They have failed our most vulnerable. The government, who say they care, clearly do not care, and those women who have been promised that they will be looked after if they are in a vulnerable situation of domestic violence and need to leave have been absolutely failed. They need to stay in their communities, they need to stay in towns like Terang, but there just simply is not the social housing to assist them. They have been let down. This is not a government that cares. This is not a government that cares about our vulnerable, it is not a government that cares about our homeless people, and it is not a government that cares about women.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (15:02): Acting Speaker, I hope you appreciate my being a gentleman before in getting the smooth running of the house going after lunch. I did have the call. It is great to stand here today and speak on a motion given to us by the Minister for Housing –

Danny O'Brien: We always appreciate you, Paul. Always.

Paul EDBROOKE: You always appreciate me – thank you. I have had a little bit to do with the Minister for Housing in the past couple of weeks. The Minister for Housing has announced a project with Kids Under Cover in Frankston, which will provide housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth at risk, and Kids Under Cover of course is a fantastic stakeholder to work with and a good stakeholder to partner with. We have also been to visit 3PE Engineering in Yarraville. You have heard me talk about 3PE and Charlie in this house before, but they make modular housing systems which would provide governments and other stakeholders many, many opportunities to make an impact on the housing crisis across the nation.

As we have heard people across the aisle say today, the numbers speak for themselves. Labor and only Labor knows what a strength and a support it is for people to have a safe and secure place to call home. It is obviously a solid foundation from which to thrive, especially for people at risk. Our \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is delivering more than 12,000 social and affordable homes across metropolitan and regional Victoria, and we have already passed the halfway mark. Twelve thousand social and affordable homes – and that is creating more than 10,000 jobs a year, which is incredible. More than 7600 homes have been completed or are underway, with 2800 homes already completed and welcoming renters. Our affordable housing rental scheme will deliver 2400 affordable homes across metro and regional Victoria. The first development in Kensington has welcomed renters, and renters are moving into Markham Avenue, Ashburton and Dunlop Avenue, Ascot Vale. Additionally, we have heard of the \$1 billion regional fund that will deliver more than 1300 social and affordable homes to Victoria's regions.

So it will not be a surprise to anyone that someone on this side of the house, someone who is very passionate about housing, can take umbrage at some of the scenes we saw yesterday, especially with the Greens. I notice that we are talking about something very important – most of us would say the most important issue in our state at the moment – housing, and yet, where are the Greens? They have not really been in here at all today. It seems they are not interested. They are interested in being influencers and getting votes but not in actually putting roofs over people's heads.

We heard the member for Richmond yesterday talk about a lady who had no place to go, could not get a roof over her head and went to her office. The member for Richmond was in tears about it, and I do understand that. That is a very trying issue, and she obviously had to go through quite a few phone calls to reach the goal of putting a roof over that person's head. But to that member I would say, 'Congratulations. Welcome to your workplace', the workplace that we all have. We are not there just four days a week. We do not take Fridays off. This is often a seven-day-a-week job for most people, and I am talking across the board to our Liberal and National friends over there as well. When you are passionate about your community, you help your community, and that is your job. So welcome to your job. There will be people that come to your electorate office with complex needs, very difficult needs, things that you need to help them with. That is your job.

I must say, it must be a bit of a privilege to live in a more metro area, because in some of the areas like the south-east we would not have the amount of services that the member for Richmond called out yesterday. So that is a bit of a privilege. I guess across the state, though – and I am sure we can all agree on this – homelessness does not take an RDO. Homelessness does not take Friday off. It just does not. Facebook posts do not give people housing, okay? There is a difference between being a political influencer and wanting to put your green triangle stamp on everything and actually delivering housing.

It is here that I point out something very ironic – very, very ironic – about the member for Richmond. You know, I do not like making things personal, but it has got to be called out. It was in 2020 that the

Greens-dominated Yarra City Council voted against a Collingwood social and affordable housing development that would have seen hundreds of additional homes added to local housing stocks, which might have put a roof over the head of the person that came to the member for Richmond's office the other day. That would have helped local renters and homebuyers. Who was the mayor of Yarra council in 2020 when this decision was made to knock housing off the agenda? Who was it? It was the member for Richmond. So for her to stand here and act high and mighty is just unbelievable. If you are not morally corrupt, if you have ethics, how can you stand in the way – or how can your party stand in the way – of a bill before the Senate in the federal Parliament that will provide 33,000 homes for Australians, ready to be built? People could move in within months. We have got someone who is not in the house at the moment, unfortunately, who is telling us that we should do more, that we are not doing enough and they are the doyens of housing. This is the former mayor of Yarra City Council talking, the mayor that knocked back hundreds of new homes for people in her electorate.

So it is shameful that we have to sit here and listen to people who have killed off housing projects. Who else in this house has killed off a housing project? It does not look like any of you have. Have you, member for Ringwood? I do not think he has killed off a housing project. The people that are killing off housing projects are the ones that will be in this chamber right now, bringing a matter of public importance this afternoon telling us we are not doing enough, when we have told them a number of times that we would listen. We want to go through consultation. We would rather that they, instead of being social media influencers, actually be policy influencers, meeting with the government and meeting with the housing minister to actually get things done. When we say 'get things done', I will say it again: the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is delivering more than 12,000 new homes.

Again, a Greens member before, the member for Brunswick, said, 'Oh that's kind of a medium build, not a big build.' Well, I did a bit of googling before. I did not need convincing, but I thought I would do the googling anyway. We have the biggest housing build in the nation – of any state – at the moment. We have also, from my study, got a larger housing build than most Commonwealth nations at the moment. We are leading not just nationally but some might say internationally, and I assume that soon we will have people coming from other nations to see how we did it, how we dealt with the housing crisis, which is not just something that Victoria is going through, it is not something that Australia is just going through as an isolated incident, it is across the globe.

The minimum investment guarantee by local government area from the Big Housing Build is another thing I would just like to bring the house's attention to. The minimum investment for Ballarat is \$80 million. The minimum investment for Bass Coast is \$25 million worth of housing; Baw Baw, \$35 million; Golden Plains, \$15 million; Greater Bendigo, \$85 million; Greater Geelong, \$180 million; and I could go on. I could go on, but I will not because this has all been in the media. This has all been out there for people to read. But what we have seen in the last couple of days is an ideological view which does not really connect to anything at a grassroots level. To be surprised that it is your job to help people is a bit of a shock to me. Even when we do have regular housing stock and there might be no-one that needs that house, we will still have people coming to our offices and asking for different types of accommodation – people who are at risk, people who are in trouble and people with certain needs. It is our job as local MPs – all politics is local, as JFK said – to help people.

To come into this house yesterday and talk about how Labor as a government is not producing any more housing is an absolute joke, and it is misleading our whole community. To talk about a member of your constituency who you helped while being the person who as mayor of Yarra council killed off hundreds of housing stock from being built is shameful. I just bring that to people's attention because that is something the people of Yarra might not know. They might not have put those two things together. But it certainly shows who from this side of the house is actually delivering and who from that small side of the house over there is just talking and has never delivered anything. If you could make bricks out of Facebook posts, they might be able to build one house, but misleading your constituents is very low. I commend this motion to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (15:12): Despite the best efforts of this government's marketing team, the big build is hardly contributing to better outcomes for regional communities and families. New figures released by the Victorian Housing Register show that nearly 67,000 Victorians are on the public housing waitlist as of March 2023, an increase of close to 4000 people over the previous 12 months. This is a 300 per cent increase since the government came into power. It is failing our most vulnerable Victorians. Average waiting times for those on the waitlist have blown out, with the urgent public housing category now nearly a two-year wait. Despite claims of record investments, public housing stock remains stagnant as more and more vulnerable Victorians are added to the waitlist each week. This situation is particularly dire in regional areas, including my electorate of Euroa. Right across my electorate we have waitlists for housing that are completely out of control. There are hundreds of people urgently waiting for housing in towns across the region, including Seymour, Benalla and the Broadford district. I am regularly contacted by people who are in desperate need of housing, and they are continually being told that there is simply no supply to house them.

\$2.8 billion has only got us 74 new dwellings in our state on a net basis. This is simply not enough. It is another example of the Labor government's inability to deliver their promises and manage the costs of a project. The shortages in public housing are having a significant impact when accompanied by the current cost-of-living crisis. Residents are already struggling with out-of-control rental increases, shocking house prices, soaring utility bills, exponentially rising interest rates and an ever-growing cost for their groceries and day-to-day items. Stable housing is essential to helping those in need to get back on their feet, but under the Andrews Labor government things are getting worse, not better. Housing stress is a major factor that impacts the livability and community benefit found in our towns.

Sadly, 25 out of 40 of the most disadvantaged locations in this state are regional areas. This includes towns in my electorate like Seymour, Benalla and Rushworth and nearby towns like Shepparton and Bendigo. These people are already doing it tough with struggling health systems, a lack of education and childcare providers, limited economic opportunities, domestic violence and many, many other factors. Addressing the housing stress in these towns is critical to improving the lives of many people in these areas. Vulnerable Victorians deserve better than a tired government that only delivers longer waiting lists, longer waiting times and no significant increase in new homes.

Today the Minister for Housing called it a 'social housing emergency'. You would think that if there was genuine concern about this matter, the minister would bother to respond to my questions on notice. All the way back in March I asked the government about housing in my region. I asked simple questions. Through the big build, how many houses have been built in our region? How many are under construction? Not a single response, so I asked again in May. Still no response. We desperately need solutions, but it seems like the necessary actions are not being taken.

The increasing number of people struggling to find affordable housing and facing homelessness is heartbreaking. We need real tangible efforts to tackle this crisis and support those who are most vulnerable. Unfortunately, despite the spin, today has revealed we do not have a government capable of tackling this issue. At the very least we need a minister who cares enough to respond to these cries for help. With all the claims of the government's big build, it is unclear if we have even seen a net increase in the number of houses in our communities.

Clearly the minister is too busy to respond, so I want him to hear directly from my community why this truly is, in his words, a 'social housing emergency'. The Benalla homelessness response group has been recently set up by volunteers to support the homeless in the area with absolutely no funding. The group formed because of increasing stories of the silent homeless, those who are couch surfing, people sleeping in cars near the lake, at the showgrounds and under the Benalla library as well as those sleeping rough and bush camping out of town. The group's hope is to set up a soup kitchen and gradually expand to offer accommodation, thanks to the selflessness of the local Benalla Lions Club volunteers. But once again we are leaning on our community volunteers to address the problems caused by the incompetent government. The Benalla homelessness response group was formed because this government has failed to help our most vulnerable Victorians yet again.

I recently had another resident visit my office and plead for housing help. A single father of four children, including a disabled child, was told there was a two-year waitlist and was encouraged to get a caravan. This is not good enough. Victorians deserve better. I want locals to be able to grow up, raise their family and own a home in their own community without having to save for decades. Unfortunately this is just not a reality at the moment.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the median house price across regional Victoria has increased by over 45 per cent. The median value of a home in Kilmore has increased from \$470,000 to \$600,000 – that is a rise of 28 per cent – while the median price of homes in Broadford has increased by \$145,000 over the same period. With strong growth in regional areas like the Mitchell shire, this government must work to level the playing field by increasing the housing infrastructure and education funding for regional areas. The issues in regional housing in terms of affordability, rental markets and public housing are out of control, and more needs to be done. Whether it is taxes, interest rates, borrowing capacity or the supply of homes, every metric for housing affordability is in reverse under the Andrews Labor government.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:19): I am very pleased to rise to contribute to the housing motion put by the Minister for Housing. Can I thank him for doing that, because it gives us an opportunity to focus on what is important in electorates like mine in Geelong. I am really passionate about housing and particularly about affordable public housing. I had the great privilege of growing up in public housing. I know how important it was to have that security, the affordability, for a family of eight. We were cramped into a three-bedroom house, but it was our home and it provided that security for my family for many, many years. As I said, I was born and bred in public housing, and I have always appreciated that. I think everyone has a right to secure and affordable housing, there is no doubt of that, but what we are seeing is a housing situation that is really difficult and challenging – right across the board, but I am talking about my electorate of Geelong. The difficulties people are experiencing – it is not only low-income people but people on middle incomes that just cannot find affordable accommodation in Geelong.

We do have a real issue there, and I think we need to start looking at how we address this problem. We cannot just keep saying, ‘Let’s build more public housing.’ There needs to be a range of different opportunities put to people, not just maintaining the status quo, and that is exactly what this government is doing. We are looking at not only public housing but community housing and the social housing that we know many people are enjoying now and have done for some time. I know we have some great programs in Geelong. We have the Northern Geelong Rental Housing Cooperative, which was established back in the 1980s. Many families enjoy that safety and security of tenure in their social housing, and it has worked very, very well. There are lots of different opportunities that have been established over the years in my community of Geelong, and we need to be broadening our view and looking at what housing options can be delivered not just by government but by developers out there that are keen to build and provide affordable and social housing in their developments. We have seen that in the seat of South Barwon with Armstrong Creek. There are developers out there that have included not only social housing but accessible housing for people with disabilities as well. There are developers out there that are prepared to do what they can to provide good, secure, affordable accommodation for people in our community.

A target has just been reviewed to have 16,000 residents living in the CBD of Geelong as part of the revitalising Geelong program. That is really important, and we will rely on the private sector to deliver that housing but also social housing, community housing projects and of course public housing. This is a really important issue for my community. We know that safe and secure housing provides a solid foundation for people, and there are difficulties in regions like Geelong. We have had hundreds of public housing and social housing properties delivered in recent times. We know that the 1300 properties to be delivered across regional and rural Victoria will make a huge difference to communities like mine, to communities in Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, all those communities that are screaming out for housing.

It is not just that focus of providing housing, it is about accommodating workers as well, and we know the housing shortage for our workforce is a particularly difficult one at the moment, particularly in the Geelong region where you have the Bellarine and the Surf Coast, which are on the outskirts of the region and which rely on public servants to come into their communities, whether it is police, teachers, nurses, whatever it might be. They need somewhere to live too, so this is a challenge right across the board. It is not just about providing secure and affordable housing for those that need it. It is about the workforce as well, which is really important.

The \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is delivering more than 12,000 social and affordable houses across metropolitan and regional Victoria, and we have already passed the halfway mark, which is really exciting. As I said, in my electorate alone there have been a couple of hundred properties delivered. There are more on the way, but we have also created nearly 2000 jobs across the Geelong region. It is so important that we remember that these things make such a difference in our community. People can actually get jobs which provide money for them to pay for affordable, secure housing. These are really important matters.

We have some amazing organisations in my community, and I want to mention them today because, as I said, we do have a homelessness problem in not just Geelong but right across the country. We have amazing groups like the Outpost, who provide support to homeless people – they provide meals for them of an evening. The Outpost is an amazing organisation. It is led by a woman called Amy, who is determined to keep that program going even though the City of Greater Geelong are looking at evicting them from the space that they are using. The Premier announced that we would support them in finding other accommodation to provide those meals every night to those people that need them. We have the Barwon network of homelessness in Geelong. This is a group of homeless organisations that are working with people who are homeless and providing valuable support to them and raising the issues and coming up with ideas about how we address the matters at hand in relation secure and affordable housing.

The government delivers housing; the Greens do not. That is the key point here. They can mouth off all they want. I thought it was interesting that the member for Brunswick raised that we are not talking about public housing. Well, we are talking about public housing, but we are also talking about social and affordable housing.

Vicki Ward: That's right. We can walk and chew gum.

Chris COUZENS: Yes, that's right. We can provide both but also look at what the private sector can deliver in terms of social and affordable housing as well. They can say all they like. They are not in government and probably never will be, but they will take the credit when we deliver great outcomes for our communities. I just want to make that point.

We also have many other organisations, such as the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, who provide housing support to their community, to First Nations people. They want to grow their ability to do that. The Lazarus Community Centre, Neami, Meli – they are all providing such a valuable service to my community, but they are also very positive about what this government is doing. They are not condemning us the same way some are. What they are saying is that they want to work with government to come up with the solutions to provide housing support for those that need it.

As I said, we need to be focused on that variety of housing options. We need to be looking at the future and how we might manage some of that. When you have got the Greens in the federal Parliament blocking legislation that will provide thousands and thousands of homes for people in this country, it is really disturbing that they can get away with it, or think they can get away with it. But all of us know – I think my community certainly knows – the work that this government is doing and how important it is that we continue down that track. We will have a considerable number of houses for my community through the 1300 houses that have been allocated for regional and rural Victoria. We have quite a few public housing properties that have been spot purchased in my region of Geelong.

There are all sorts of activities going on. Clearly we need to work hard on this, and I commend the Minister for Housing for the work that he is doing and all members on this side of the house that are actively working on this, acknowledging that we have a problem. Let us solve it. Let us work together with all in our community to ensure that we have a good resolution to this. I commend this motion to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:28): It gives me pleasure to rise today to talk on the housing issues we have. Being the only builder in the chamber, hopefully the government will listen to me and learn a couple of things along the way – probably not. But I will start off by saying this: there is probably not a lot I agree on with the government. Probably I do not agree a lot with what the Premier says, but there are two things I have in common with the Premier. One is golf and the other is my opinion of the Greens. I have listened to the commentary today, and honestly I have never seen a party in my life that has done its utmost to make housing unaffordable. Every decision they make, every policy they put forward, makes housing construction go up in cost, and that is a big part of the problem and why we are here today. I will get back to this debate, but I wanted to get that out there at the start, because there are a lot of comments that have come from that side of the house today that I actually agree with.

Let us talk about the supply issues we have at the moment. Part of the supply issue, I believe, is planning and the Green councils that continually jam stuff up so that we cannot get these houses out there and get them built as required. What we have to look at today is the history of the government and their delivery. This is an interesting fact about priority housing: back in 2014 there were 9900 people on the waiting list. That figure today – in March 2023 – is 37,079. That is quite an increase over the period that this government has been in power. I listened to the minister today very carefully, and this policy came in in 2020. What that tells me is the government actually wasted six years before they started this big build. They were elected in 2014 and it was not until 2020 that this became an issue, and now supply is an absolute urgency. The total number of people now on priority or with registered interest in housing is 67,985. That is a lot of people waiting, and the government have not improved these figures very much over their term in government.

What is concerning, though, is the cost. I think the minister might have jumped the gun a little bit earlier today when our side said it is \$1 billion for 1300 homes. I can tell you now that as a builder, if I had known this contract was coming up, jeez, I would tender for it, because at a cost of about \$700,000 a home I believe the government can do better and supply more housing. That figure is way too expensive for social housing. For those here that may look a little bit confused, I have priced social housing. I know what it costs, and at \$700,000 per home you should be delivering 2½ times more than that. This government should really be delivering somewhere around 2500 homes for that \$1 billion. I do not think anyone in this chamber would disagree with me when I say that if we are going to do this job, let us get the best bang for our buck. Let us get the most housing we can out of this \$1 billion investment. Instead of 1300 homes, let us make it 2500 homes, because that would benefit all of us in this chamber – everyone on that side and everyone on this side.

I suppose there was one thing I did not really appreciate until I got into this job – how many people come through our doors looking for housing. Obviously it is not just isolated in my electorate; it would be every person in this room, some more than others. I know the member for Morwell and the struggles he has down in Morwell, and what he said today is so true. There are so many people out there that do not have housing. Even in my electorate, prior to me being elected to Parliament and going through the candidate process when you are meeting people, I feel a little bit ashamed, to be honest, but I had no idea that at any point in time at night in my electorate there are 500 people who are homeless. They are sleeping rough, they are sleeping in their cars and they are doing whatever they can do to stay warm. They are doing whatever they can do to get food. They go to food hubs to get food. I am so grateful for my community. I did mention just before the winter break that my community got together, and we are renovating four units for homeless women, because homeless women are a big proportion

of this too. It is only four units, but it makes a difference. I am so proud of what my community is doing at the moment.

The advice I want to give the government is – I noticed today they said we have 132 different housing providers. 132 – can't we have a better system than that? How much of your \$5.3 billion budget or your billion-dollar budget is getting swallowed up in bureaucracy? 132 different providers – that is phenomenal. Why can't you streamline that? Why can't you make that more efficient so you have more money to invest in social housing? Because at the moment it has become one of the biggest issues in this state. As I said, the government was six years late getting out of the blocks on this. When we left government, priority housing was at 9900, and now that is at 37,000. That is too late out of the gate. I have no doubt that the Minister for Housing is a very, very busy man, because there are 67,000 people waiting. They cannot wait much longer, because things are getting worse. This situation has not improved.

So my advice to the government would be: re-look at how you are delivering these programs. Get your best bang for the buck. Let us get as many people into social housing, into public housing and into affordable housing as soon as we possibly can. My other word of advice to the government is: every time the Greens talk about building, every time the Greens even mention building, ignore them. They have no idea what they are talking about.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:36): I rise to speak in support of a motion that has been moved by the Minister for Housing:

That this house notes:

- (a) since the start of the Big Housing Build in November 2020, 7600 homes are completed or underway, with Victoria on track to deliver over 12,000 much-needed social and affordable homes; and
- (b) the new \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund will deliver more than 1300 additional homes.

As I said in my first speech, I am committed to working every day to help make our community a better and fairer place to live, learn, work, raise a family and retire in. However, fundamental to striving towards this socially just vision for my community is to help ensure that local people of all ages and backgrounds are afforded access to safe, secure and affordable housing – housing that is close to jobs, education, transport, health, wellbeing and social services; housing that provides a roof over one's head and homes that provide the foundations for better livelihoods. The labour movement has long recognised that housing is a basic human right, which any responsible political party of government must strive to improve the provision of. Whether it be for first home buyers, families, young people, retirees and renters or whether it be for people experiencing housing stress or homelessness through the provision of greater affordable housing, public housing and social and community housing, every Victorian deserves a safe place to live in dignity.

In this respect I am very proud to be part of an Andrews Labor government that continues to take real action when it comes to lifting and improving housing supply and standards through a number of initiatives, including through, of course, the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build program, which is delivering that record pipeline of 12,000 new social and affordable homes, an uplift of at least 10 per cent in new social housing dwellings and 2400 affordable homes across Victoria. The fact is this is the biggest ever investment in public, social and affordable housing by any state or territory government in the history of Australia. The big build has also been accompanied by a number of other housing policies, such as the government's previously introduced rental fairness package, which cracked down on rental bidding, improved rental property standards, helped tenants stay on longer leases and limited rental increases to once a year to give renters more financial stability.

However, it is the Big Housing Build which is particularly playing the driving role in constructing the thousands of new homes for Victorians in need whilst creating thousands of new jobs. Every new social and affordable home being built through the government's big build program is a home that is taking pressure out of the housing market and increasing supply and stock. Every new dwelling being

delivered through the big build is also providing a home to a family in need whilst improving housing affordability and putting downward pressure on overall rent prices in the private market.

In my community I am very proud to report to the house that the Victorian Labor government is taking that real action via the Big Housing Build program to improve and revitalise local public housing, social housing and affordable housing stock. Across Merri-bek the Andrews Labor government has to date invested more than \$200 million via the big build to deliver and upgrade more than 800 homes – 800. However, as part of this ongoing rollout I would like to draw the house's attention to the Harvest Square project in Brunswick West, which I am particularly proud of. This landmark \$86 million big build project in Brunswick West will deliver a significant number of new homes for those who need them most.

Being delivered in partnership with Homes Victoria, AV Jennings and Women's Housing Limited, Harvest Square will create a total number of 198 new modern, sustainable and high-quality one-, two- and three-bedroom homes in the inner north, with the development to consist of 119 new social and community housing homes, 111 of which will be new social housing apartments that will be Homes Victoria dwellings. Eight of these will be community housing homes that will be dwellings operated by Women's Housing Limited, as well as 79 new market homes, with provision made for 10 per cent of market homes to be released for first home buyers housing, while 5 per cent of the development will include provision for Disability Discrimination Act 1992 fully accessible homes, which will include accessibility friendly drop-off areas, paths, lifts and car parking. Inside the homes, kitchens, bathrooms and storage will also be very accessible.

Environmentally, Harvest Square has been sustainably and efficiently designed, with homes to be more comfortable as well as less expensive to heat and cool, carrying a 5-star green star rating and a 7-star Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme average rating. I am very pleased to also report that Harvest Square will provide for new safe and publicly accessible open and green spaces, including a green spine running through the site delivering up to 3200 square metres of open space, which will connect Dunstan Reserve to the north of the site – home of the mighty Brunswick City Soccer Club – with Albion Street to the south of the site. The project promotes good design and incorporates the expertise of the Office of the Victorian Government Architect in its development and provides for clear visual movement linkages between public domains such as streets, footpaths, bicycle paths and open spaces.

Strategically located near the 58 tram route along Melville Road, CityLink, Pascoe Vale Road and the Craigieburn rail corridor, Harvest Square is extremely well situated for future residents to access jobs, learning, health and social services. But above all, the Harvest Square project will replace the former Gronn Place, which was well and truly past its use-by date. Harvest Square is replacing the former 82 no longer fit-for-purpose Gronn Place dwellings with 119 new world-class social housing homes, a 45 per cent increase in new social housing homes on the site – 45 per cent. I am particularly proud of the project's partnership with Women's Housing Limited, a statewide not-for-profit organisation that provides low-cost housing to women at risk of homelessness. As stated in October 2020 by CEO of Women's Housing Limited Judy Line:

Women's Housing Ltd has worked closely with the Department of Health and Human Services and AV Jennings to bring this project to life, and we are delighted to be part of this exciting housing development. The old run-down walk-ups at Gronn Place will be replaced by new energy efficient homes that are not only better to live in but more affordable for our tenants. We see Gronn Place as a great example of social housing growth in Victoria ...

That is the view of Women's Housing Limited here in Victoria. The Harvest Square project is also supporting a massive 770 jobs, with construction of the Harvest Square social housing and market apartment stage of the project having commenced in early 2022 and with the social housing stage on track to be completed by 2024. I was very pleased to have recently visited Harvest Square with the Minister for Housing as well as local councillor Lambros Tapinos on Wednesday 26 July last week to celebrate the project's topping out milestone. I would like to also acknowledge former local MP Carlo

Carli, who chaired the community consultative committee on the project, as well as Parliamentary Secretary Sheena Watt, who has done amazing work on this project.

However, while the Andrews Labor government has invested to deliver this real project, I think it is also important to note that there were others who, sadly, did actively oppose Harvest Square and, if they had had their way, would have stopped Harvest Square from proceeding. Can anyone guess which inner-city political party took this position? I wonder if anyone can guess. I am of course referring to the Greens political party and the Greens councillors on Merri-bek council and the Greens members of Parliament in this building. In this respect I refer the chamber to the minutes of the Merri-bek council meeting of 16 December 2020, which considered and voted on replacing Gronn Place with the then Harvest Square proposal. Can anyone guess how the Greens councillors voted?

Vicki Ward: Tell us.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Well, I regret to inform the house that at the 16 December council meeting, surprise, surprise, the four Merri-bek Greens councillors voted against Harvest Square being built. They voted against it, and in doing so let the record show that the four Merri-bek Greens councillors voted against increasing local social and affordable housing in Brunswick West – absolutely shameful. Luckily, cooler and more reasonable heads prevailed at the meeting, with the majority of councillors, including Cr Lambros Tapinos and Cr Annalivia Carli, thankfully voting in favour of supporting Harvest Square.

However, the Greens opposition to Harvest Square did not just start and stop at the December 2020 meeting. In fact it dates as far back as 3 June 2018, when the Greens councillors joined with the Leader of the Victorian Greens and the Greens member for Brunswick to actively protest against more social and affordable housing being built at Gronn Place. Do not just take my word for it – I encourage members to have a look at their social media pages, which promoted all of this activity. It was also Greens state parliamentarians who regularly and loudly voiced their opposition to Harvest Square, and basically what the Greens are doing now with Barak Beacon in Port Melbourne is exactly what they did with Harvest Square in Brunswick West. On 24 August 2019 the Greens member for Brunswick organised a protest on the site to oppose Harvest Square. In this respect I refer the house to the contribution of the Leader of the Greens in the Legislative Council on 28 August 2019 in which she talked up the Greens opposition that had taken place. I refer to her comments where she said:

On Saturday, 24 August 2019, local residents joined with my colleague Dr Tim Read and me as we came together to protest the ... so-called public housing renewal program ...

‘There is nothing progressive about this program’ is what she said. Hypocrisy from the Greens at its finest, agitating fear and uncertainty amongst the community and claiming that 119 new social and community dwellings – a 45 per cent increase on the site – was not progressive policy.

It is hypocrisy from the Greens to also claim that the new social homes dedicated for women’s housing and women in distress, as supported by Women’s Housing Limited, is not progressive policy. It is hypocrisy from the Greens to oppose increasing housing stock to support people in need, first home buyers and people with disability in the northern suburbs. How is that not progressive policy? What is even more hypocritical is that if you go to the website of the Greens member for Brunswick, he specifically lists six of his policy priorities as a local member, including that he supposedly supports ‘housing development that works for people’. The Greens plan for housing includes fairer housing, including building more affordable housing. According to that doublespeak Greens logic, however, Harvest Square does not fit the bill. I am very proud to be here supporting this project.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (15:46): I rise today to speak on the housing motion moved by the government. In the 2020–21 Victorian budget the Andrews Labor government announced a \$5.3 billion housing build, promising to ensure that more Victorians live with roofs over their heads. Such a formidable name, the Big Housing Build, yet so far we have only seen gross incompetence by this Andrews Labor government and a little build. This is particularly the case on the Mornington

Peninsula where public housing stock has gone backwards by a net minus 13 over the eight years since the Andrews government came to power in 2014.

According to reports received by the Mornington Community Support Centre and in-person evidence, around 30 per cent of this current stock is also vacant, sitting empty and not being repaired. Seemingly, not much of the big build has come to the peninsula thus far, all while homelessness on the peninsula sits at 1000 to 2000 people on any given night, with the peninsula now having the sixth highest level of homelessness in Victoria. In addition, we have seen the Andrews government announce a \$1 billion Commonwealth Games patch-up Regional Housing Fund set to cost \$770,000 per home, plus land, to build only 1300 homes. The peninsula is classed as metropolitan, but I do not think we will be seeing any more homes built locally under this program either.

Right across Victoria we have had a massive increase in housing waiting lists for homelessness, and 1300 extra homes in the regions will not come close to resolving this problem. The latest figures show 67,120 Victorians are waiting urgently for a home or are otherwise in dire need of relocation due to inadequate or unsuitable housing. Numerous Victorians are trapped in limbo as the wait for public housing has hit an all-time high. In comparison, the waiting list was about 34,500 when the coalition left government in 2014. That is more than 30,000 more people added to the waiting list since then. In addition, the priority list was around 9900 in 2014, but as of March this year it was 37,079 and these are families, not individuals.

So much for the big build. This is a crisis. Yet Victoria's pool of social housing has only grown by 74 units in four years. Data from the latest Department of Families, Fairness and Housing annual report shows that there were 86,887 social housing dwellings across Victoria as of 30 June 2022, a net increase, as I mentioned, of 74 since 30 June 2018 when there were 86,813. Also as mentioned, so many pre-existing public houses are sitting vacant and unutilised. New South Wales has a population of 8.18 million and they have over 160,000 social houses. In comparison, Victoria has a population of 6.65 million and about half the number of social housing dwellings at just over 82,000.

In fact Australia's 'most progressive state', Victoria, has the lowest social housing stock across the nation as a proportion of residential properties. Social housing now makes up just 2.9 per cent of households, whereas when the coalition left government in 2014 it was 3.5 per cent. The minister is claiming nearly 7600 state-owned homes have been built or are underway, but they have actually only completed much less than this and they have still not reconciled how many have been sold or demolished and have not published the latest stocktake, which is now nearly two years late.

The Andrews Labor government is also selling off an average of two public housing properties every week, despite the ballooning waiting lists. Far too often I am writing ministerial representations to the Minister for Housing on behalf of my constituents in desperate need of public housing properties or in dealing with public housing issues. One example was from February 2023, on behalf of a number of residents in relation to a violent incident and a family that was at risk. Despite now writing three times to the minister over the last several months, I still have not had one response.

This week, in the lead-up to Homelessness Week next week, from 7 to 13 August, homelessness services and community groups across Victoria have been coming together to raise awareness of homelessness. The Southern Homelessness Services Network is a network comprised of funded specialist homelessness services, who are here in Parliament and who I caught up with over the lunchbreak. I also met with CEO Ben from the Mornington Community Support Centre just yesterday, and again today in Parliament, to discuss homelessness and the housing crisis in and across the Mornington electorate and across the Mornington Peninsula more generally. The Mornington Community Support Centre is an invaluable local organisation that provides resources and advocacy to support vulnerable community members – including those in Mornington, Mount Eliza, Mount Martha and Moorooduc – and they have been doing so for around 40 years. We discussed the housing crisis in the Mornington electorate and across the peninsula, specifically the many public houses that

remain vacant on the peninsula and the high level of people who are homeless people, including now many families.

It is nothing short of disgraceful that we have hundreds of state-owned homes sitting vacant while the most vulnerable members of our community, including children, sleep on the streets, couch surf or have uncertain accommodation arrangements. I will continue to request that the government provides concrete statistics on the number of vacant public houses, albeit we already know that the extent of the issue is gargantuan. I would guess that the data is not publicly available on this because it is a point of shame for this Labor government, and that the stats would merely reflect what we already know on good authority: that there are hundreds of vacant homes.

I wrote to the Minister for Housing in April and asked him to provide me with further data on the number of vacant public housing properties in the Mornington electorate and urged him to address the issue of vacant housing in our electorate. Unfortunately, we still have absolutely no clarity from the government on the number of vacant public housing properties in the Mornington electorate and on the Mornington Peninsula. In fact the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, who are also here today for a showcase in Parliament and who I joined during the lunchbreak, recently passed a motion on 2 May 2023 to request again that the government puts a spotlight on the unaffordability of housing by declaring a housing crisis. They mentioned that the cost of owning or renting a home on the Mornington Peninsula is rising fast. It is now more expensive to live on the peninsula than in Melbourne, with the median rent for a home now significantly greater than the greater Melbourne average.

Rental increases in lower socio-economic townships are worsened by rental property shortages, as many holiday home owners are moving here and working from home. This will not be helped by Labor's land tax increases. Basically it is a renters tax that will reduce rental stock and put upward pressure on prices. And a rental freeze will make things worse by pushing owners to sell and reducing rental stocks further, putting upward pressure again on prices when landlords do increase rents. The number of people waiting for social housing on the Mornington Peninsula is not getting better, it is growing. There are now over 3900 households on the waiting list across the peninsula, and 90 per cent of applicants are eligible for priority access.

I was involved recently in a forum with over 100 participants to tackle the homelessness crisis on the Mornington Peninsula. I look forward to the report soon being shared with everyone who took part in that forum as well as all of the key stakeholders in our area and the greater community with recommendations and ideas. Locally, I am informed that we also have some, as I said, empty public housing waiting to be filled, which is difficult to understand. I understand a number of these properties are apparently newly built, and I have asked the minister to investigate why they are sitting vacant. Every property that remains closed to the public should be available for use, and every property that is not available means one more person is living rough, if not more. We continue to read headlines as reported on the front page of the *Mornington News* on 25 July 2023 entitled 'Nightly search to find shelter'. Aldo Taranto, local constituent and also a rooming house outreach worker, mentions there is an ever-growing number of homeless people accommodated in rooming houses or boarding houses in south-east Melbourne, including on the Mornington Peninsula.

I believe the housing crisis is in part a supply and demand issue, and it is concerning that we have so many properties on the Mornington Peninsula that are vacant when the shire is the sixth-worst area for homelessness in Victoria and where we need much more public housing being built. We need to be doing a lot more around public housing and the housing crisis. I urge the Andrews government to take this issue seriously and particularly to take action on the Mornington Peninsula, where many locals are suffering.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:56): I am pleased to rise to speak on this critical issue of housing. We know that nothing is really much more important for a human being than having a secure place to live. I just want to note and thank locals from my area who have taken the time to come here today, including from Park Towers and other areas across the seat of Albert Park – that is lovely. I know that

we have a shared concern and passion for seeing Victorians safely housed, so it is lovely that people have made the effort to be here today. That is really wonderful and part of the transparency of Parliament as well.

I think what is really important in this discussion is also making sure that it is truly factual. Our \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is delivering more than 12,000 social and affordable homes across metro and regional Victoria, and we have already passed the halfway mark while also creating – and this is the other thing when you think about Labor and Labor values – 10,000 jobs a year. That is the issue: when we are looking at these big build projects or indeed any of the projects that Labor invests in, we look holistically, because obviously having a job is an important part of being able to buy the things you need – food and shelter and otherwise.

Now, when we look at where we are at, 2800 homes have already been completed and are welcoming renters. I think this is in stark contrast to some of the, can I say, distorted narratives and commentary that I have heard of late. I find it extremely disturbing, because for the benefit of fellow Victorians, they deserve to know what is actually happening. So I will just repeat that again: 2800 homes are already completed and welcoming renters. More than 7600 homes have been completed or are underway. That is really important, because I personally find it very disturbing when there is a misrepresentation of what is actually happening in our state and the good work by those constructing the houses as well. We know that they are quality builds. They have to be energy efficient. We also have a significant investment in specialist disability elements for these builds, because we know that accessibility is incredibly important. So we are providing energy-efficient homes which have accessibility and also have a community-minded aspect. They definitely have that centralised focus of making sure that the community is united and that all is one at the end of the day, because we are all Victorians when it comes to it.

I want to say as a further point before the time runs out, every new social and affordable home built through government investment is a home that is taking pressure out of the housing market as well as providing a home to a family in need. This investment also puts downward pressure on overall rental prices in the private market and improves housing affordability. So there again you can see the holistic approach to this issue.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Public housing

The SPEAKER (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Richmond proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house calls on the government to ensure public land is used to build public homes by abandoning its ground lease privatisation model, noting that:

- (1) Victoria spends the least per capita of any state on public housing and has no plans to build more;
- (2) the Andrews Labor government is currently privatising four public housing estates in Victoria in Port Melbourne, South Yarra, Prahran and Hampton East; and
- (3) under the ground lease model the majority of these estates will be handed over to private developers for expensive for-profit housing, when this public housing land should be used to build thousands more public homes in the midst of a housing crisis.

Before I call the member to speak on the matter of public importance, I would like to draw attention to the decision to reopen the public galleries that was recently made. We are always pleased to welcome people into this building to view Parliament's proceedings. I would like to remind members that it is not in order to refer to people in the public galleries during debate. Further, any interactions from the public gallery are also not acceptable. This includes taking photos or video of debate, interjections, clapping or any disruptive activity.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (16:03): I rise today to address the matter of public importance. Margaret Kelly is the last remaining resident of the Barak Beacon public housing estate in Port Melbourne. For 25 years Barak Beacon was Margaret's safe, peaceful home, but last month the Andrews Labor government took Margaret to court to evict her from her home. Margaret will be forcibly evicted on Monday. Not long ago 89 households shared Barak Beacon across five low-rise buildings. They were built in the 1980s. They were solid, well-designed buildings for families and workers. But under the Andrews Labor government plan this estate will be demolished and the majority of the land will be given to private developers to build private, expensive housing in the middle of an unprecedented housing crisis, with no plan to build public housing.

There are currently over 125,000 people on the public housing waiting list and on any given night 30,000 people experiencing homelessness. There are currently only 126 properties that are considered affordable for low-income families in Victoria and zero – yes, zero – properties that are considered affordable for parents on youth allowance or JobSeeker. In regional towns tent cities are growing. Across the state, retirees are sleeping in cars. Young parents are couch surfing, and on Friday a young woman, a survivor of domestic violence, came into my office with a suitcase because every crisis centre and housing agency had turned her away. Successive governments have failed to do their job of making sure everyone has a secure, affordable home.

Victorian Labor has been in power for 20 of the last 24 years, and during that time the number of public homes has actually declined. There are now 600 fewer public homes in Victoria than there were 10 years ago, and with Victoria spending the least per capita of any state on public housing, this is an utter failure of this government to address one of the most pressing issues of our time. For all their talk, under neoliberal Labor's plan this housing crisis will get worse. Estates that have been given away to private developers are sitting empty right now. Elizabeth Street in Richmond – demolished, sitting empty since 2012. Walker Street, Northcote – vacant for five years, sitting empty. Right now, as we speak, excavators are crashing through the walls at Margaret Kelly's home at Barak Beacon.

The reality is that the Andrews Labor government has abandoned public housing. Over successive years they have branded and rebranded their privatisation agenda to make it look like they are doing something, but whether it is called the Big Housing Build or the public housing renewal project or social affordable housing or the ground lease model, they are all smokescreens for abandoning public housing and funnelling public money into property developers' pockets. The government's ground lease privatisation model is seeing residents like Margaret Kelly evicted from their homes and displaced from their communities, their homes demolished and replaced with expensive private housing. But Margaret is not giving up. Margaret and other public housing residents are listening to the debate today alongside incredible community members, activists and campaigners who have joined the campaign to save Barak Beacon. Many who have kept vigil and occupied the site for 21 days now are young people who will face the worsening impacts if this government fails to act. But Barak Beacon is not an anomaly, because right now Labor is privatising at least 18 estates. The latest four – at Port Melbourne, Prahran, South Yarra and Hampton East – are being packaged up in a neat four-for-one package for one lucky developer.

Here is how this ground lease privatisation model works: across these four estates, taxpayers are funding the privatisation of public housing and public land to the tune of \$700 million. That is \$700 million to demolish 502 public homes – keep that figure in your head, 502 – and construct 554 community housing units. That is a net increase of 52 homes across four estates, each community home costing taxpayers \$1.3 million. If you consider that much of this public housing did not need to be demolished in the first place, the cost would be much greater.

These numbers are obscene, and once we hand over this land, we are never getting it back. Labor must abandon its disastrous privatisation model and ensure that public land is used to build thousands more public homes, not expensive investment properties, because housing should not be a lucrative income stream. It should not be a speculative investment property. Housing should not be a carrot dangled in front of wealthy Labor donors, because housing is a human right. Surely the MPs sitting opposite me

would not want Margaret Kelly evicted. Surely they would not want families turfed out on the street, survivors of domestic violence begging for a bed. But Labor MPs are caught between doing the right thing and funding their next election campaign.

Last year the Australian Labor Party declared over \$1 million in donations from various property developers and the property industry, and that is not to mention hidden sums handed over through loopholes and back doors and in suitcases. The Premier himself was caught having a \$10,000 dinner with Victoria's dodgiest developer – the very same developer who has donated \$1 million, mostly undeclared, to the Labor and Liberal parties over the last nine years in a bid to influence government decisions. As long as Labor accepts donations from property developers it will remain captured by their interests. Pressure is growing on the Labor government to change course, forcing Labor to weigh up the value of their donors against the electoral cost of letting the housing crisis get worse.

The impacts of this housing crisis are becoming impossible to ignore, and Victorians are at breaking point. But heroes like Margaret Kelly are standing up to the government to say 'enough'. Labor will blame everyone else in spite of being in the seat for the last 20 of 24 years making the decisions. They will say it is the councils, it is the Greens, it is the nimbys. If only those nimbys would get out of the way, Labor could have done their job. Well, in Greens areas that get a bad rap from this government, like my own municipality of Yarra, over 90 per cent of housing applications get approved, and Yarra, Port Phillip and the City of Melbourne, areas of high Greens representation, have accommodated half of greater Melbourne's new housing in recent years.

Despite what they will tell you, nothing that the Greens have done or will do at the federal level is to blame for Labor's failure – in fact quite the opposite. Our federal Greens colleagues are exposing the Housing Australia Future Fund Bill 2023 for the neoliberal scam that it is. Blocking it so far has resulted in more housing being funded than simply waving it through, because the HAFF is a swindle so that Labor can gamble \$10 billion on the stock market and maybe – maybe – they will pay out \$500 million to subsidise some housing. Five hundred million dollars across the whole nation – a drop in the ocean. Do you know what else costs \$500 million? The Reserve Bank, the one that has been hiking up interest rates, renovated their offices – that cost \$500 million and so did the renovation of the Australian War Memorial. The Sydney Opera House renovated their concert hall; that cost \$300 million. That is the piddly amount of investment that the HAFF would seek to give out. They do not even need legislation to spend it. They could spend \$500 million on housing tomorrow if they wanted to, and Victorian Labor could spend money on public housing right now too.

There is \$5.3 billion for the Big Housing Build, and because of Greens pressure federal Labor suddenly found \$2 billion for housing they said did not exist, some of which will go to Victoria. Labor's Commonwealth Games failure has produced another \$1 billion, which should be used for housing. There is a plan to spend it on housing. It comes to \$6.3 billion, which will build an awful lot of public housing. But what will this neoliberal government do? Well, they have already spent \$2.8 billion in the neoliberal experiment they call the Big Housing Build for a net increase of 74 social homes – just 74 homes. Watch carefully as they quietly siphon the rest of it to their developer buddies while using empty words like 'affordable'. But it does not have to be squandered. This government now has the opportunity to fix this mess and build new public housing on public land, and there is a costed plan.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed from the chamber if they do not cease interjecting.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: Architecture firm Office has presented alternative plans to repair, retain and reinvest in public housing at Barak Beacon, building hundreds more public homes for a fraction of the price. The plan makes sense. While this government is hell-bent on demolishing and privatising public housing, the Greens are pushing for more public housing on public land. In my own electorate

we are urging the government not to give away 3 hectares of public land to private developers and build public housing instead.

Listen carefully to the speeches that follow, because I can bet you they will not use the words ‘public housing’. They have legislated it out of existence – that is why – to confuse the public between social, community and public housing. But they are not the same thing. Public housing is secure. It is rent controlled, and renters are protected, with rent being capped at 25 per cent of their income. Community housing, while it has a role to play, was never intended to completely replace public housing. It was meant to plug small gaps left by the government, and it does not afford the same protections or conditions for tenants.

You will also hear the MPs opposite using the word ‘affordable’, but do not be fooled. Think of it more as a brand name than a description, because Labor’s definition of ‘affordable’ is not affordable. In fact I checked the website yesterday, and their updated definition is no more than market rate. I am literally quoting from the Homes Victoria website when I say that the program promises:

Rents will never be more than market rent with the added protection of a cap set at 30 per cent of a median income.

Well, the median income in my area is \$110,000 a year, so rent will be capped at \$33,000 a year, but the maximum you can earn to be eligible for this housing is \$71,000 a year. That means that if you earn the maximum amount under the capped amount, you will still pay 46 per cent of your income. The definition of housing stress is spending 30 per cent of your income on rent. Let us not forget that unlimited rent increases are currently legal, so under Labor’s plan the market rate can be whatever the market decides.

All that Labor’s dodgy affordability housing model guarantees is more housing stress. What we really need is a freeze on rent increases to stop more people from facing homelessness and a massive and urgent build of public housing – publicly owned, publicly operated housing. More public housing means fewer people competing in the private housing market, increasing the supply and putting downward pressure on housing prices. That is how you make housing affordable. The only thing standing in the way of more public housing here in Victoria is the Andrews neoliberal Labor government. I dare those opposite to at least say the words ‘public housing’. I dare you to look Margaret Kelly in the eye and say that Labor is doing what matters. Look her in the eye and tell her that you want her out of her home.

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (16:16): I am absolutely shocked. We are in the middle of a national housing crisis, which I went to this morning in a debate on the housing program the Big Housing Build. We have, through cost-of-living pressures and interest rate rises, people being pushed down the housing continuum, a waiting list that has increased despite the small reduction that I mentioned previously in the June quarter figures, over 30,000 people on the priority waiting list and people in desperate need right across the country and here in Victoria; I absolutely acknowledge that. That means that governments and parliaments need to build more houses. We need to get on with the job of building more homes for more people, particularly social housing, so that people can get into homes when they need roofs over their heads.

On the front steps today the Victorian Homelessness Network organised a display of little paper houses symbolising the need for many more real houses for people to live in. The theme of that event was ‘Housing ends homelessness’, and I could not agree more. For all of the programs that we run in terms of homelessness and the support we provide and the funds that government invests in a whole range of service delivery areas, we all know, I think, that investing in housing is not just the right social decision and the right moral decision but also a good economic decision, because it means we do not have people falling into those other areas of disadvantage.

The Greens do not get an MPI very often because they are a minor party in this place; they have a proportionate turn in terms of being a raise a matter of public importance. In the middle of a housing

crisis, which the Greens have had plenty to say about, for their matter of public importance to not put forward a way forward in terms of more housing for people who need it but to instead focus on one particular model that they do not like – the ground lease model – without any positive policy proposals to take forward I think is just amazing. It is a great shame that they have decided today, in the middle of this housing crisis, to take this opportunity to attack the government and one of the housing models that we have got rather than talking about the ways in which we could work together to deliver more housing. This goes to what the Greens are doing here in particular with their campaign around Barak Beacon, and I will come to that in a moment, and the particular residents of that housing estate who are being relocated so we can get on and build more social housing at that site.

This ground lease model has had one tranche already delivered at Brighton, Prahran and Flemington – those sites are under construction. The Bangs Street, Prahran, site will deliver 228 new social housing dwellings at that site, so nearly doubling the amount of social housing on that site, as well as a mix of affordable and private houses to have a mixed development there. But you do not see the Greens down there campaigning against the Bangs Street development, because that is one of their seats. This is a political issue for the Greens.

They are running against the Port Melbourne site because it is a Labor-held seat. I think that is despicable, because they are picking a particular community to run a campaign in based on politics, not based on pure conviction of their concerns about any particular model. There are sites at Bangs Street, Prahran, and New Street, Brighton. In terms of the ground lease model 2, which the Port Melbourne site is part of, there is a site at the old Horace Petty estate in South Yarra; Essex Street, Prahran; and Bluff Road, Hampton East. But none of those seats are target seats for the Liberals, and so they are not running a campaign there. It is quite shameless that they are doing that. I would be interested to see if the Greens are opposed to Bangs Street, Prahran, as part of the same model – if they are opposed to the extra social housing that will be delivered through all of these sites at those locations – because we will be quite happy to tell the residents of those communities that the Greens oppose the delivery of those new social housing developments.

To go to a point raised by the member for Richmond in relation to public housing, we on this side of the house see a strong social housing system as a very strong public housing system and a very strong community housing system. They are not mutually exclusive, and we are funding and supporting both of those. Seventy-seven per cent of the social housing dwellings in Victoria are public housing, and the lion's share of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement payments that we get goes to supporting our public housing renters. I am very proud of that. To suggest anything otherwise is just completely false.

Of course we see a place for community housing providers as well. We know they play a really important part in delivering housing for Victorians for a whole range of reasons. Aboriginal Housing Victoria we work very closely with as a community housing provider because they know Aboriginal communities better than we do. If we are going to move to self-determination, we need organisations like Aboriginal Housing Victoria to play not just a provision role but a stewardship role as we move towards self-determination. Women's Housing Limited do wonderful work with us in providing housing for women who need social housing as well.

The confected outrage that we see from the Greens campaigning on this particular site at Port Melbourne but choosing not to campaign at other sites because it does not suit their political ends is just shameful. We have seen this campaign run before as well. If you look back at some of the clippings from the past, there has been similar public opposition to projects that the government has pushed on with. At what is now known as Harvest Square, the old Gronn Place, in Brunswick West, again a community campaign opposed this – the same lines run out by the Greens. Then once we push through and increase the amount of social housing on that site – and we are delivering new, modern, energy-efficient social housing at Harvest Square – the Greens disappear. When we announced Ascot Vale, the same again: the Greens ran a campaign screaming. Ascot Vale now has residents moving back in. Those residents who were relocated out have first right of return. I remember speaking to one of the

residents at Ascot Vale who had moved back into her new home, her new apartment – a modern, energy-efficient, comfortable secure home, much better than the old, run-down housing that was there before – and she was delighted to be back into that home. We have seen this model of protest from the Greens time and again. Markham estate is another classic example where the Greens teamed up with their friends across the table here, the Liberal Party, and in the upper house to block that development time and again. Of course the Andrews Labor government, the only party in this Parliament that will push through and deliver more social housing for Victorians who need it, pushed on and have now delivered Markham, and residents are moving into that particular development as well.

This is a pattern of political protest. It is a formula that the Greens have developed to latch onto a particular community and run a campaign around one particular site, and then they move on. I can say to the people of Port Melbourne: once the government pushes on and builds new social housing in Port Melbourne and at these other sites, you will not see the Greens again. They are only there to run a political campaign. They do not have any care for the delivery of more social housing for people who need it. As I said at the start, this matter, which is all about one particular model of delivery, which I will come to in a moment, highlights the fact that they are not interested in actual solutions, because they would have set out what they see as the needs for housing in this state. They would have set out –

Ellen Sandell: We have. We have a policy; it's on the website.

Colin BROOKS: Has that policy been costed? I wonder if the policy the Greens took to the election has been costed.

Josh Bull: It's on a website.

Colin BROOKS: It was on a website, yes.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, Minister.

Colin BROOKS: My apologies, Speaker. The ground lease model is a model where we retain ownership of the properties and the land. The speaker before me, the member for Richmond, indicated that somehow this was privatisation, that we were going to offload the land. I want to make it really clear that under the ground lease model it is a ground lease and the government, the public, maintain ownership of the site and the properties. For the Greens again this goes to their political campaign to mislead people about these projects, and then they will move on to another project. It is a complete furphy. The government owns the land. The government owns the properties.

The ground lease model is also a great model because it provides more housing. It provides social housing for people who need it, and it goes without saying, but I will make sure it is on the record, that the residents who are relocated out of these homes have first right of return back into them. That is an important thing: that these people are supported to move into another home, and then if they choose to, when the construction is completed, which I admit can take sometimes a number of years, they will have the opportunity to stay where they are or to move back into the brand new accommodation.

I should say I acknowledge that asking someone to move out of the home that has been their home for a number of years is a difficult thing. It is disruptive, and it is not easy. I absolutely acknowledge that, and I can understand people, particularly the individual that the member has referred to, being upset at having to move. But given those commitments we have got around supporting them to relocate and first right of return, the government also needs to consider its broader responsibilities to the Victorian public – to the 31,000-odd applications on the housing priority waitlist. Those people are deserving of consideration for a social housing dwelling as well, a roof over their heads, and so we have a responsibility not just to the people in our social housing but to those who want to get social housing and therefore to build more of it. That requires us to move on, deliver more social housing and redevelop estates, and that is disruptive. Again I am disappointed that the Greens would latch onto a campaign, where residents are I think sometimes genuinely concerned about some of the issues that are at play here, and take a cynical view of trying to campaign off the back of those people's concerns.

Just in terms of the ground lease model, it is important to remember residents have first right of return. It is about uplifting social housing. It is about providing a mix of housing so that there is affordable housing. I think the member for Richmond confused the calculations for affordable housing in her electorate. There are two different calculations. One is for rural Victoria, one is for metro, and she has used the rural Victorian one in her calculation. But I will stand to be corrected on that. The calculation used in metro Melbourne is 10 per cent below market rent, so we can point the member to the relevant section of the act.

Importantly, not just more social housing at these sites but more housing in general – and in particular in a rental crisis, when people also are feeling the pinch in terms of rentals – providing more housing supply for more affordables and more market rentals, is not a bad thing. It is a good thing, more supply into the market. This is part of our Big Housing Build, the ground lease model that the member for Richmond has referred to. It is part of our Big Housing Build, \$5.3 billion, 12,000 homes across the state. I have talked in this place before about the accelerator fund from the federal government, another just under half a billion dollars for more social housing in Victoria, and then recently the Premier announced the \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund for social and affordable housing in regional Victoria. There is a strong pipeline of social housing that we will be delivering across the state, and it is only Labor that is getting on with delivering that.

Just this week in the Senate, and this was mentioned by the member for Richmond, we see the Greens and the Liberals and the Nationals teaming up to stop the delivery of the housing package in the Senate. I was just speaking to a homelessness worker upstairs, and she used the same language that I used this morning at the doors with the media. Across the country, for a whole range of reasons which I talked about before, we are in a housing emergency. We need more housing urgently. It is an emergency like a fire, and you need to send a fire truck. What we have is the Greens argument that it is the wrong sort of fire truck. I think most people would say just send the fire truck. Let us deal with the emergency with social housing instead of getting in the way. If you are not going to be part of the solution, get out of the way. Get out of the way and let us get on and deliver more social and affordable housing. Go out the front steps today and talk to those people who are concerned about homelessness or the people who work with homeless people. They are all saying, ‘Get on with the job and get the Housing Australia Future Fund passed through the Senate.’ They are all saying the Big Housing Build is doing a great job. These are people who understand the need for more housing supply, that the Andrews Labor government is delivering it and that the federal government wants to deliver it. People can have an argument about whether it is too much or not enough at another time, but get out of the way and get that funding passed through so that those of us in the states – all of the members behind me support social housing in their communities, both public and community housing – are able to get on and deliver more housing for our communities. Because as I said this morning, every member in this place from every part of the political spectrum understands the need, because it is coming through our doors, it is coming through our phones and our emails. We understand in our own communities what the housing crisis means for our local communities. We all understand on this side of the house that the only way you deal with it is to provide more supply.

I say to the Greens: instead of cynical political games and campaign after campaign in different parts of Melbourne, get out of the way and let us get on with the job of building more housing for Victorians who need it the most.

Darren Cheeseman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for South Barwon, you are warned.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (16:31): I rise to contribute to the matter of public importance put forward by our friends the Greens. I would have to say I am in the unenviable position of having to agree with all sides in this argument that we have indeed a massive housing crisis in Victoria at the moment. We can all dispute and argue around the edges about how we solve that problem, but at the end of the day, as we saw on the steps of Parliament out the front today, there is a huge workforce of

community groups and services – not for profit, for profit, government agencies and others – essentially an enormous workforce that is at the coalface of dealing with this problem on a daily basis.

As I have travelled around the state and spoken one on one with many of these workers, the single biggest problem that they face, apart from all the normal trials and tribulations of going to a job each day, is the fact that this job is dealing with people's lives, their livelihoods, the way they wake up, their mental health, their ability to get a job and their ability to access education. At the moment in the state of Victoria, day after day after day after day, they are turning people away and every indicator is heading in the wrong direction.

Women escaping domestic violence are not waiting the time the budget papers this year said that they would have to wait: 10 months for a home. They are waiting nearly 24 months, over 20 months. That is nearly two years before a mum and her children escaping domestic violence have any hope of accessing a fair and safe home to live in. That is not good.

For young people – I was speaking to the people from the Barwon south-west region who represent my area – there are no homes at all. If you are a young person, if you are lucky enough to get a voucher for a motel unit at night, that is all you get. You have no hope. No understanding, no concept, no message, no soothing words from a support worker are going to get you into a bed any time soon. It is desperate. For us to be sitting here in this house debating over who builds it and how they build it is wrong. We need to be going 'How do we get people into beds?'

The concern that this side of the house has consistently raised is we have heard from this minister and his predecessor about the big build. It is 12,500, sometimes it is 13,000. In fact Minister Wynne two years ago at Public Accounts and Estimates Committee told us it was going to be 15,000 homes. It is not, chamber. It is not. It is a sleight on the spend of money. We are at best at 3000 homes, but the official record from this government, from 2017 to the last time they reported how many homes we have, is 74. It is not 774. It is not 7074. It is a total gain of 74 homes in the state of Victoria since 2017. We have added 4000 families a year to this list. There are 300 per cent more people without homes in the state of Victoria since this government came to power after nearly \$6 billion, and we have added 74 homes. The minister can shake his head, but it is his record. It is his reporting.

In fact at the budget hearings this year, only six weeks ago, the minister's department said it was an oversight that they had not printed how many public houses we have in this state. There has been no reconciliation. How can this government, the largest landlord, the largest controller of houses that could ease the pain and suffering of Victorians, rock up and have forgotten to count how many houses they have? If you cannot measure what you are doing, you cannot possibly go to the community and say you are doing a good job. It is a disgrace, it is a let-down and it is a disappointment.

For those with just a simple calculator on your phone, when the minister and the Premier stood before the people of Victoria and said, 'We're scrapping the Commonwealth Games because we can't afford them. We're going to spend \$1 billion on 1300 homes in regional Victoria' – I welcome that spend of money in my electorate and others around regional Victoria, absolutely welcome it – do the sums. Thirteen-hundred homes into \$1 billion: this minister is planning to spend the best part of \$1 million per house. For heaven's sake, you can go to any country newspaper and see you can buy at least two homes for the price of that. It is a wanton waste of money, a wanton and terrible, scandalous waste of taxpayers money, but most importantly that lack of prudence, that lack of responsible government, is costing people their dignity. It is costing people their ability to function, but worst of all it is leaving people in the most precarious circumstances for months and years at a time with no end in sight.

We talk about the ability for us to get on top of this problem in a country and a state so enriched with land and opportunity, with a stable government that owns and controls land from one end of the state to the other, and yet we cannot unleash the opportunity and the potential that that land can provide.

While I welcome the fact that our friends the Greens have raised this very important issue as a matter of public importance, I will disagree with the Greens on the ground lease model. We cannot pick and

choose and start having a fight and stop development of public housing over which way it works. The only discussion should be: how many new homes are we making available? As of March 2023, 67,985 families are now on that list. Back in 2014 when we were last in charge of this place there were 30,000, which was a figure way too high even then. But it has gone so far in the wrong direction, so far, and it just proves that money alone does not solve this problem. It requires good management, it requires a government that understands what is important when measuring and trying to solve this problem and what is important is how many new homes we make available for the people of Victoria that need them, whether it is the government that builds them, a developer that builds them or mum-and-dad investors.

People are currently sleeping in their cars, sleeping in tents, sleeping in caravans. I am ashamed as a member of Parliament that in my country town, where I have grown up, where I was born and bred for 51 years, I have elderly women sleeping in their cars in front of the police station. I am ashamed that that is the state that we are in, that we cannot find a parcel of land in a country town to provide enough respectable, safe housing and accommodation for people.

Instead I look at the state's estate and I go to places where buildings and accommodations are torn down and they are sitting empty and idle, vacant lots of land that are not going to have houses on them in one year or two years. I hear on the radio, as I did yesterday, there are private real estate agents flogging off – and I use that word deliberately – up to 30 public houses at a time of rental crisis. What on earth sort of management are we seeing from the state when we are turning these around? In fact I know that these houses are often quite all right, because I went and gatecrashed an auction about two months ago, and I can tell you now there was nothing wrong with those homes. They had new kitchens, new bathrooms. Yes, they did need a paint, Minister, because sadly our maintenance schedule on public housing is absolutely appalling. I can take you if you have not been. I can take you around to Clifton Hill, to an apartment around there where people have had heaters pulled out and the walls not patched up; they have not been painted for years.

Our maintenance and management of our public housing is a disgrace. We are spending this much money and wasting this much money, yet we cannot clean spouts, we cannot manage heating, we cannot keep kitchens and bathrooms and floor coverings up to a spec that we would expect landlords, particularly the state's largest landlord, to be able to look after and monitor. Today I am glad we are having the debate about homelessness. I am glad we are having a debate about the way this government and this state manages it.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Except you shut the debate down before on housing. You shut it down.

Richard RIORDAN: No, we have had this discussion. It is an important discussion. The Minister for Health can interject, but the issue quite simply is: the only way to measure success is by how many new homes we are making available. We have a government in charge that after two years still has not done the reconciliation on what they have built, what they have demolished and what they have provided. The minister can put as many hard hats and as many fluoro vests on as he likes and have many photo opportunities, but the homeless people, those waiting for a home, do not want to see your photos, Minister. They want to see action. They want to see a home they can go home to, and they want to be safe.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (16:41): Thank you to all of the previous speakers in this debate so far, although I do think that the win for best performance goes to the member for Richmond. I mean, seriously, we have all had the opportunity to witness her confected outrage before in this chamber, but I think she may have taken it to a new whole level today. Unfortunately, though, theatrics do not build the safe and secure homes that Victorians desperately need right now, and neither do simplistic tweets and neither do catchy slogans, the other weapons in the Greens arsenal, yet we have seen them plastered all around our inner-city suburbs and on fancy cupcakes paraded by the member for Richmond.

Nothing demonstrates the utter hypocrisy of the Greens political party more acutely than their position on housing. The level of cognitive dissonance it takes to convince themselves that they are champions of housing while simultaneously being directly – directly – responsible for blocking it from being built is beyond disturbing. The fact that the member for Richmond can stand up there and moralise to us about housing when she herself as the mayor of Yarra council was responsible for scuttling social housing in Yarra is utterly despicable. How do these people look themselves in the mirror? How do they reconcile two completely incongruent positions in their mind, one that demands more housing and the other that demands it not be built? What kind of self-justifications do they mutter to themselves at night when they pull the sheets over their heads and dream about the Greens revolution?

Our Labor government is serious about addressing the housing crisis in Victoria and about our responsibility to not only build more housing but renew the old stock to make it fit for purpose and up to modern living standards. Many of my colleagues today, including the Minister for Housing, have outlined exactly how we are putting that into effect through our \$5.3 billion housing build, our \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund, our affordable housing rental scheme, our rental reforms and other initiatives that are giving more housing choices to more Victorians.

Of course even more genuine reform is sitting on the table with the federal government's \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund, the HAFF, a fund that would support the construction of 30,000 new social and affordable housing properties with a minimum \$500 million each year over the next five years, a fund that includes provision for 4000 properties for women and children experiencing family violence and older women at risk of homelessness. If the Greens truly want to support an increase in public and community housing, they should pick up the phone to their Greens mates in Canberra and ask them some hard questions about why they are teaming up with the coalition to block this bill. They say you can judge character by the company you keep. Well, the Greens are keeping very close company with the likes of the coalition, One Nation and the United Australia Party up there in Canberra – very close company indeed.

The Greens pretend to care about people doing it tough, but time and again they show up only for themselves. Their federal member for Griffith even penned an article effectively arguing that refusing to pass the HAFF bill is part of a strategy to sow disaffection, to mobilise and weaponise disadvantaged sections of society in support of the Greens. Nothing could be more sinister, and it was rightly called out by the Prime Minister, who pointed to a fundamental truth of the Greens political party – that they are frauds. They do not care about the policy outcome, they want the fight. They want the fight because it is their only way to get attention and, more importantly for them, to recruit.

Meanwhile the federal government has just injected an additional \$2 billion into social housing, and it will be a lot more if the HAFF passes. But the Greens political party think it is more worthwhile to throw a tantrum for relevance rather than take meaningful action. So fragile are their egos that they are willing to risk the most significant housing reform policy our nation has seen in decades. How petty. How utterly immature, how disingenuous and how dangerous. We are in the middle of a housing crisis and all the Greens care about is how much political capital they can squeeze out of it. The hard truth is that the Greens political party do not want to see real reform in the housing sector because as long as they are able to block real projects that will deliver real homes for those who need them, they know they can keep campaigning and fearmongering and recruiting.

We know the play because we have seen it before with the radical right; the mean-spirited and manipulative tactics are taken right out of the populist recruitment handbook. They are deliberately designed to exploit people's vulnerabilities and escalate disadvantage in order to weaponise it against their political opponents. The theory behind these tactics is very well documented and understood, and their use of them has been effectively admitted by the Greens member for Griffith.

As the member for Mordialloc rightly pointed out earlier today, it is all cynically based on the polling in their electorates. They have done the numbers and with calculated ruthlessness they are willing to prevent homes from being built for political gain. I heard the Greens member for Brunswick earlier

today trying to justify their opposition to new housing by saying not enough of it is public housing. This is where the Greens argument completely lacks nuance and strength, because they are utterly incapable of recognising the value and place of community housing within the sector. Community housing run by not-for-profit providers is absolutely vital in allowing models of housing that cater to specific cohorts. That includes housing specifically for women and children fleeing family violence. It includes housing run for and by Aboriginal Victorians, housing for older women, housing for people living with mental health issues and housing for young people. Are the Greens really proposing that we scrap these models of housing provision? Really?

That is not the only falsehood dished out by their marketing team. Another one is that we are not building public housing any more. Wrong. The 1000 homes project is public housing. The Markham estate is public housing. We certainly are building public housing. In fact the vast majority of housing stock in Victoria remains public housing. The Greens seriously need to do some soul-searching. They need to stop trying to gaslight Victorians into falsely believing that they give a damn about vulnerable people. They do not. They are so far from being interested in actually helping people. The truth is they are not for more public housing, they are for publicity, and it does not matter to them what communities they trample in the process. It does not matter to them what wounds they open and who they exploit.

Nothing matters to them so long as they can put their slogan on a rock poster to try to convince people they have some moral substance and position themselves to take credit for Labor's reforms. Victorians see through it, the housing sector sees through it, tenants see through it, people living pay cheque to pay cheque see through it, and none of us can afford to wait for the Greens to run the housing crisis through their slick marketing machine. Front up and support the HAFF. Do not wait until October. Do the right thing.

In my community of Northcote I have spoken to many people who are living in housing stress, fearful of what the future holds. These are people and families that are working hard, doing it tough and who deserve the dignity, security and foundation of a home. In Northcote we need a variety of housing options from social housing to affordable rentals and to make it easier for people to buy their first home or to run the one that they own. That is why we are currently building over 200 new homes for people who need them in our inner-north suburbs. In partnership with Unison we have transformed a 22-bedroom rooming house in Fairfield into 38 modern, self-contained units for vulnerable women. We have constructed and opened a new family refuge, Virginia's Place, at a secure location to provide safety and dignity to women and children escaping violence. Locally we have also facilitated exclusive opportunities for first home buyers to enter the market without competing with investors. We are building key worker housing, and we are working hard to give more residents the opportunity to live in energy-efficient homes through our rebates and programs.

There is scarcely a conversation right now that is more important than the one that we are having collectively on housing. We need to be able to build more homes to manage the growth of our state, embed sustainability in our suburbs, create jobs and keep pace with services and infrastructure. None of these policy considerations are easy to navigate, but as a government we have a duty to tackle them. That is why we are working towards our housing statement, which will deliver a considered and cohesive plan for our state's growth. At a very basic level it will mean getting more homes built, and that means every level of government needs to front up. Yet across Yarra, Darebin and Merri-bek the Greens have consistently voted to oppose critical housing projects for vulnerable people. Others have elucidated some of those examples very well in the debate this afternoon, but it is emblematic of the appalling attitude that the Greens continue to have on housing – an attitude that could not care less about the people who need these homes. It is an attitude of utter contempt for the housing sector and housing providers. It is an attitude that is right now hurting Victorians, and each and every one of them should be ashamed.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (16:51): It is a pleasure to rise and make a contribution on the matter of public importance put forth by the member for Richmond, which without going through the clauses of the MPI generally relates to housing affordability and availability. I just want to add that I believe

there probably could have been one dot point added to the MPI, and that is that when it comes to housing availability and affordability we should be looking to address the rental crisis in this state, and to do that we must stop punishing landlords.

Building more public housing is certainly a big part of the answer to our housing problem. There is no doubt about that; I do not think anyone would disagree with that. But it is certainly not the whole answer, and we need to look at the housing availability issue. Our state is contributing to this problem with policies that are pushing landlords either interstate or away from the market altogether, meaning that there are less properties available. When you have less properties, you end up having higher prices for home seekers. As a result, more people – and we have seen this in the first half of this year – are adding their names to the public housing waiting list. When landlords are forced into selling their properties, there seems to be an assumption that they are being bought by people who are in the rental market who are saving to buy a home. I represent the electorate of East Gippsland, and we have a lot of holiday areas – Paynesville, Lakes Entrance, Metung and Marlo. When a home gets sold there, it is not usually purchased by someone who is currently renting a home, it is purchased by someone who is purchasing a holiday home. So we have a home that goes out of the rental market, and then we have greater demand arriving in that cohort that is seeking a rental property.

There seems to be a perception that all landlords are rich and can afford these increased charges that are being imposed on them, but the simple reality is not all landlords are rich. Some also seem to think that they can continually add costs for landlords and they will not look at other investment options if we just keep taxing them, and that is not the case. Certainly some landlords are wealthy – absolutely they are – but data shows the majority of our landlords are people who own one additional property and are mum-and-dad, middle-income people who have simply chosen property investment over the stock market or a fixed-term deposit. In fact the top 40 occupations of landlords in this state include workers in child care, workers in the disability sector and aged care, motor mechanics, truck drivers, receptionists, sales assistants, schoolteachers, nurses and police officers. I would not imagine that they would be the top income earners in our communities, and the reality is we have got a raft of new regulations and taxes that we are imposing on these mum-and-dad investors, meaning they are either selling their properties and investing in another forum, like the stock market or fixed term, or they are moving their investments interstate. What does that do? It drives up further demand in our rental sector as a result of state government actions.

On top of the recent changes, the issue that we have is it is all about to get a lot worse. From 1 January the tax-free threshold for land tax rates will reduce from \$300,000 to \$50,000 for the next 10 years. This is going to hit more rental property owners. It will force their hand. In addition there will be an extra fixed annual charge imposed, starting at \$500 for landholdings that are valued from \$50,000 to \$100,000, and it rises to \$3675, \$3500 above, for the top end of the market. Talk to any real estate agent. I talk to the real estate agents in my electorate, and they tell me that because of these increased costs that government is putting on landlords they are leaving the marketplace. They are selling up and investing elsewhere, and at the end of the day that simply further widens the gap between those seeking a rental property and the amount of rental properties that we have.

We have got the Greens, who have time and time again proposed a rent freeze. I could not think of a better policy to drive even more mum-and-dad investors out of the rental market. These mum-and-dad investors have got interest rates going up. They have got land taxes going up. They are considering where they are going to invest their money, and we are going to put a rent freeze on them that will force their hand into investing elsewhere. In my area and I am sure many other areas of the state, those homes, when they get out – in Paynesville and Lakes Entrance and these places – will not be sold to people who are seeking rentals. They will be sold to people from the metropolitan area who are looking for a holiday home. What does that mean for my area? I am sure this is duplicated around the state: more and more people on the rental waiting list because of the actions of the government if they introduce a rent freeze as suggested by the Greens. Even a rent cap would provide another disincentive for landlords to stay in that marketplace. They would look at other investment opportunities.

Wouldn't it make more sense with these mum-and-dad investors, rather than look at punishing them, to perhaps look at incentivising them? Say to someone who owns a rental property, 'If you want to get out of Airbnb or whatever you're doing with your rental property, just commit to providing your rental property to the marketplace for five or 10 years, and we will make you exempt from these new land taxes we are introducing.' Let us provide people with an incentive to invest in the real estate that will increase the amount of our rental properties. To give an example of the impact of things like the land tax money grab that we have recently had, I note the commentary from the CEO of Stockdale & Leggo, one of our biggest real estate companies, and she said when the land tax change was announced:

... all our offices across Victoria received ... calls from landlords saying ... they wanted out ...

The number of rental properties being built has dropped to the lowest in 10 years. Why would you invest in building rental properties when we have got all these disincentives and extra costs? They are looking at other forums to invest their money in because the returns out of rental properties are just no good. First National Real Estate chief executive – another leading real estate company – Ray Ellis, said that if we introduced a rent freeze, which is being proposed by our friends up here the Greens, he feared the move would result in an estimated 30 per cent reduction in rental supply, at a minimum. If we want to push down the path of having a rent freeze, expect 30 per cent of your landlords to sell up. The majority of those homes will not go to renters. They will go to holiday homes in my patch. I am assuming all around coastal Victoria they will go to holiday homes, and it just rips a whole lot of rental properties out of the marketplace. We need to think very, very carefully about how we are going to handle this very, very complex issue.

In addition to that, we have had the federal government recently announce massive numbers of international students coming into our country. Reports show that international students took up 70 per cent of new housing units in the last financial year. Now, I support our international students coming into the country, but many commentators now for the very first time are debating the benefits of international education against the impacts on young Australians looking for a home. We have never had that discussion before, but it has got to become part of a commonsense, mature discussion about these issues.

The reality is we have had a series of policies and taxes that have pushed middle-income landlords from the marketplace, and we are seeing the results. Halting the war on our mum-and-dad landlords and providing a framework that will indeed encourage people to invest in property, to become landlords, will result in more rental properties for those that are saving up to buy a home. More rental properties at affordable prices will be very, very beneficial. We need to look at that as being a key part of the solution to housing affordability and availability.

I will finish up by saying we also need to do some work with our councils around the state. We have councils that are knocking back housing subdivisions that would ease housing availability and affordability simply because they have a couple of local objections, and it gets overturned at VCAT because council is too scared to make the decision. We need to look at that element of this problem as well.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (17:01): I am moved to stand to speak on this matter of public importance. As many in this house know, my marriage ended as a consequence of gambling, and I found myself with two young boys being the sole breadwinner and needing to house my children. I faced that need for a safety net front on. I was lucky to have family. I bring this up and I put this at the forefront because I want people to remember that what we are debating here, what we are talking about, is women who need housing and people and families who need a home. This is not about grandstanding. This is not about a recruitment drive for the Greens political party. This is people who need homes and houses. That we find ourselves now in this dire, dire housing affordability crisis and people can play political games like this, that they can dispute a model of provision, is just obscene. I want you all to remember that what we are talking about here is people that need a house, people that need a home, women that need a safety net. They do not need the Greens political party telling them

that their house is modelled in an incorrect way, that somehow or another this is a neoliberal conspiracy. This is about women who need a home.

I would like to commend the contribution from the Minister for Housing earlier. He is an extraordinary man who has worked so very, very hard to deliver this. His contribution was even-tempered and real and factual, and that is what we need now in this debate. We acknowledge that this is the single most important issue facing our country now. It is imperative that governments across Australia act now to provide social and affordable housing. This is not the time to run a recruitment drive, to score political points or to bring stunts to Parliament. It is time to find innovative solutions to the housing crisis, to work collaboratively and not in eternal opposition, to find partners to work with, to get on with this big build and to build houses for people who need housing.

In this matter the Greens seem absolutely hell-bent on demonising community housing organisations. The Greens political party want us to believe that community housing is privatisation. That is factually incorrect given that government continues to own it, but more than that, it is morally abhorrent. The groups that we are talking about here, let us have a little talk about them – Aboriginal housing trust, Salvation Army Housing, Melbourne City Mission, Women's Health West, Women's Housing Ltd, in my patch UnitingCare, Haven Home Safe and Centacare. Do they sound like rapacious private enterprises? Do they sound like neoliberals? No, these are people that care about people, who want to look after them and get them housed. They do not do this just for their own seats – to win their seats, to win a few votes.

If you have a look at UnitingCare in Ballarat, they are a fine, fine organisation. What they do is they provide wraparound services, so we get people into housing and they have the support that they need. I do not call those people neoliberal, I call them supportive community housing that are there to support people in the community. They offer an insight, but more than that, they bring their own support. They are not-for-profit organisations, and as charities they can borrow additional funds and attract grants and philanthropic donations as well as contributing their own funds. I think what is really important is that they also bring a knowledge and an understanding of the cohort that they work with – for example, the Aboriginal Community Housing group. As mission-driven and values-based charitable housing providers they are exempt from GST, land tax and stamp duty. They can borrow from the private sector. They can help to build more houses for more people.

The base proposition here is that basically we need more homes, and it seems to be the single most important fact that eludes the Greens. They can run around and they can demand caps on rents. That is fine and dandy – or to use the words from the member for Richmond, whoop-de-do. Whoop-de-do if we put a cap on those rents. If there are not the houses there, then we are not going to be housing people. What we need to do is increase the stock. Whoop-de-do to you and the concern that you gave to this government's commitment –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair.

Michaela SETTLE: to renters through the rental reforms that we made, which were described, as I say, by the member for Richmond as whoop-de-do. I hope renters remember that. More than that, what they must remember is that the way that we can address the housing crisis is to bring more stock. We need more stock. While they continue on that side to block all efforts by this government and the federal government to increase stock, people will lose out. I am talking about people like Sharon Jose. In June 2023 our wonderful Minister for Housing visited Ballarat, and we visited Sharon in her new two-bedroom unit with her cat called Fraidy. She talked about the importance of finally being in a home of her own after countless stints in temporary accommodation. She said it was better than she could have ever imagined – and guess what, it was managed by CatholicCare, a community housing organisation. My concern here is for the many people who are in desperate need, those families that are out there waiting for a house right now that is being blocked by the Greens. I think really more than anything for those of us on this side of the house it is the utter, utter rank hypocrisy of this motion that leaves such a bad taste. At every turn the Greens have blocked housing in this state and across the nation.

Now, we did have a motion earlier. I know these figures have been read out before, but can I just remind everybody in this house that in 2017 Greens councillors in the City of Darebin led the vote against the development of new social housing. Greens councillors in the City of Darebin opposed and delayed the Preston renewal project by 12 months. In 2020 Greens councillors in Merri-bek voted against the redevelopment of the former Gronn Place. That same year in the other place the Greens teamed up with their Liberal mates to vote against the much-needed social housing at the Markham estate. In 2020, led by the then mayor and now member for Richmond, the Greens-dominated Yarra City Council voted against Collingwood social and affordable housing. Remember that. Remember all the times that the Greens have stood against governments providing social housing for women and people in need. Remember that. While they grandstand, this government is getting on and delivering. In 2020 we announced the big build, a groundbreaking investment. That was before the Greens had worked out that this was a great slogan for them. We were getting on and delivering.

I want to in this moment pay tribute to the previous Minister for Housing, the Honourable Richard Wynne. Richard Wynne did more for housing than any minister in this country, and it is a travesty – it is an ugly, ugly travesty – that his seat is now filled by someone who will work tooth and nail to block housing, at every turn has blocked housing, as a mayor and in that seat of Richmond. It is a travesty when that seat was held by the Honourable Richard Wynne who did so much for community housing. We have the big build, and it is more than any jurisdiction has ever done before. I would like to acknowledge Richard for all he did.

I would also like to point out in the minute I have got left that I come from the regions. Those over there probably do not know my advice is: head towards Yarraville and keep going, and you will find the Western District. In the Western District we have had \$119 million committed in Ballarat, we had \$20 million committed in Moorabool and we had \$15 million committed in the Golden Plains shire. But the Greens do not care about the regions. Do you know why? Because there are no votes for them in the regions. Instead they hang out with their neoliberal mates, their good friends, as we were told earlier, the Liberals to block social and affordable housing for people that need it, for mothers, like I was, on the line needing support. You can have all of your morals. You can have your high horse. This is about people, and you should start thinking about people and making sure that we support policies that put people in houses, not Greens in seats.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Kew, I just would like to reiterate the Speaker's words earlier to remind members it is not in order to refer to people in the galleries. Further to that, any interactions from the public gallery are also not acceptable. This includes taking photos or videos, interjections, clapping or any disruptive activity.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (17:12): A very passionate response to follow. I have to say, in listening to the contributions this afternoon, I think it has been amusing to hear the Greens members and the member for Richmond in particular refer to the Andrews Labor government as a neoliberal government. It is not quite the apt description I would use.

Danny O'Brien: What does that say about the Greens?

Jess WILSON: What does that say about the Greens? But I am pleased to rise today to speak on this motion around the state of housing in Victoria. We have seen over recent times, in fact today, hours dedicated to talking about the issues when it comes to housing in Victoria – social housing, affordable housing, being able to get first home buyers into the market – and we have seen over recent months the government time and time again talk about the fact that they are going to bring a housing statement to the fore and explain how they are going to deal with the housing crisis in Victoria.

We certainly do have a housing crisis here in Victoria. We have a housing crisis in Australia. Yet we are hearing a lot from the government and from others about the issues without any solutions on the table. We are hearing policy ideas floated in the media from day to day. We are hearing about new property taxes, the accommodation property tax, the holiday tax – the Airbnb tax is one option, and I

know that the member for Nepean is very concerned about that, not that he is here anymore. Time and time again there is a lot of talk about the housing crisis but very few solutions on the table.

Now, this government has presided over the worst housing affordability crisis in living memory. It has never been harder to buy a home in this state. It has never been harder to rent a property in this state. We have seen and heard today in contributions from this side of the house about the fact that the public housing list, the priority list, has grown considerably over the past eight years. This government certainly has an addiction to property taxes, as we know, and that is going to result in the private housing market becoming less and less accessible for people needing to access it, and that will only put further pressure on the public and social housing sector.

The government's track record in this space leaves a lot to be desired. When we look at every metric when it comes to housing, Victoria particularly under this government is the worst-performing state in the federation, and of course social housing is no different. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, social housing accounts for just 2.9 per cent of Victoria's residential properties. Now, this is the lowest of any state or territory in the federation. The proportion of social housing has declined in Victoria since Labor took office, from 3.5 per cent under the previous Liberal-Nationals government in 2014 to 2.9 per cent now. As we have spoken about today in this house and as has been identified in a previous motion before the house, Victoria spends the least per capita of any state on public housing.

Of course we are here today because social and public housing is an incredibly important social safety net for vulnerable Victorians, and we need to make sure that everybody has a roof over their heads regardless of their financial circumstances. I think we have heard contributions from everyone in the house today about the number of people coming to our own electorate offices to talk about the fact that they are in desperate need of housing support. But if we look at the facts, when we left government in 2014 there were about 9900 applications with priority status on the social housing list. As of March this year that number had grown to 37,000 – in fact over 37,000 – applications on the priority list. These are not individuals, these are families, so the number of people actually needing access to public housing is much larger than those 37,000 applications. These are people who are looking to escape domestic and family violence, and we have seen that list itself grow to 20 months up from a promised 10 months. Ten months itself is far too long a period, but seeing that grow for those who are in desperate need of safe and accessible housing is very, very concerning and is something that this government should be absolutely ashamed of presiding over.

When we look at social housing and speak to some of the community housing providers – some that operate in and around my electorate – they make the point that they are under increasing pressure to provide support that the government is not providing. While they are working incredibly hard and trying to help those who are in need of housing and putting a roof over their heads, the problem is that when it comes to accessing capital for new builds, there is a lack of notice for letting housing providers know that there might be availability of new funds or grants, so they are not able to plan in time – they are not able to get those applications in in time. So when it comes to the \$5.3 billion that this government talks about investing in social and affordable housing, long-term planning is a critical part of that – long-term planning when it comes to the regulatory environment and actually understanding how the community housing sector can work in partnership with the government to provide that much-needed housing.

We have heard a lot today as well about the fact that the Albanese government is putting forward a large housing package, and we know that the Premier has said that the Victorian government will be accessing hundreds of millions of dollars of that. What was really concerning about that was when the Premier spoke about receiving those funds, he spoke not about the fact that those funds would be dedicated to building new homes, new affordable housing and new social housing but that those funds might be actually used to purchase existing property. Now, we have heard today from everyone around the house that the fact is that we have a housing affordability crisis in Victoria, and we have a housing accessibility crisis in Victoria, but ultimately that is all driven by the fact that we have a housing supply

crisis in Victoria. Housing supply is not going to be assisted by the fact the government is going to take hundreds of millions of dollars and use that to step into the property market and bid for existing homes rather than increasing the supply of new stock that we desperately need. New dwelling approvals in Victoria are at record lows. We have seen over many, many years now, over the past decade and more, that new dwelling approvals are falling behind in Victoria compared to other states. The result is that less people are able to get into the housing market. It drives up prices, which means we are seeing fewer and fewer people in the housing market.

The other issue that has been raised today is around the Commonwealth Games and the billion dollars that will be committed to so-called legacy investment. I am not sure how that legacy will exist given we do not have the Commonwealth Games in the first place, but these 1300 homes that are spoken about are averaged to cost around \$770,000. That is a huge amount of money per property. I know that the member for Narracan spoke about this previously with his expertise in the building industry, and I have spoken to many builders in this space who say that that is far in excess of what it should cost to build affordable housing and only means that we are going to see less stock coming into the market with figures that high. Only the government can deliver such inflated prices. Just like we are seeing cost blowouts on the Big Build and the Commonwealth Games, everything that this government touches seems to cost more and more and more rather than actually being delivered in a way that delivers value for money for Victorian taxpayers and actually delivers a greater supply of homes by reducing the initial cost of those properties.

We all spend time in our own electorates looking at the increase in homelessness, and I know that many people in the chamber today on this side have highlighted the fact that their own electorates are on the top of that list when it comes to the increasing rates of homelessness. I would just like to pay credit to the local housing providers and the community groups that step into the brink in this space. In my own electorate Servants Community Housing does amazing work to support those people who are on the cusp of homelessness to provide housing options. But also the local communities help those who are sleeping rough at night and those who are not able to find a roof to put over their own head by connecting them with community housing providers. In my own electorate Boroondara Community Outreach does a huge amount of work in this space connecting those people that come and explain their situation and do not have a place to sleep that night with the people who might be able to provide that. This matter today just highlights what a dire state Victoria is in when it comes to the housing crisis.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (17:22): I am very pleased to be making a contribution to this matter of public importance today. We have been discussing housing and homelessness all day, and this week it is a very important discussion to be having. I note that the Greens did not bother to turn up before midday today; they did not bother to come into the chamber and support the government so that we could continue the debate on housing. They were absolutely missing in action; none of them were in here. I will always fight for more public, social and affordable housing in my community of Footscray. I said that in my first speech, and I will say it again today. I am so proud to be part of this government. Richard Wynne, a person who has been acknowledged previously by my colleague the member for Eureka, is someone who spent every single day of his working life fighting for people in public housing and fighting for better outcomes for the most disadvantaged people in our community. He really achieved something in his career by delivering this \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build. That was a really proud moment for this caucus and for the government.

There is something in the saying that you are judged by the company you keep. I do not know how I would sleep at night if I had joined with One Nation and the Liberal Party to block the construction of 30,000 homes in the Senate. I would not be able to sleep at night. The thing is we know what the Liberal Party stand for – they are up-front and honest about it; they do not really support public housing. We know what One Nation stands for. The issue here is that the Greens political party pretend that they care about public, social and affordable housing, and then they go and do the opposite thing. It is more insidious because they will say they stand for one thing, and then when it comes to actually

effecting real and meaningful change, they cannot bring themselves to support the government of the day because that does not suit their political purposes. One of the most important things I think is putting your values into action, and I am so proud to be part of a Labor government, as a Labor member for Footscray – proudly from Footscray – where we get to put our values into action every single day.

In Canberra what is happening is that the Greens political party – it is extraordinary really for them to be siding with One Nation and the Liberal Party to block public housing, but that is exactly what is happening. We know that some in that cohort genuinely do not believe in the fundamental human right to a safe and affordable place to call home, but we on this side of the chamber get it. I think about my colleague in the other place Sheena Watt and her brave and extraordinary first speech, where she described what it was like as a young Aboriginal woman living in a caravan. And right now we have got the Greens political party, who will happily refer to community housing providers and the build as a ‘neoliberal arrangement’, when those sorts of organisations provide housing for Aboriginal people in our state. You should be ashamed.

It is walking on both sides of the street, which is another saying that comes to mind when I think about the Greens, because in reality it is nothing more than a hollow brand. There is absolutely nothing underneath the surface. It is like this meme bot that just produces memes, taking credit for Labor reforms day after day, and Insta posts and TikToks, organising stunts on housing when they could have been in here participating in the debate this morning but were nowhere to be seen. You have accumulated power, so why not use it to effect some real and meaningful change? That is about putting roofs over people who need a home, you know? Because that is what this is about.

I think often about someone who was a member for Maribyrnong, a man called Moss Cass, and he was a great Labor reformer. He said that the only point of having power is to do something bold with it. So what I would like to encourage the Greens to do is to do something bold today: leave the chamber, get on the phone, call your mates in Canberra and tell them to pass the money in the Senate. Because what that means, some industry analysis from the Community Housing Industry Association has said, is that 25,000 vulnerable people are missing out on housing because of the Greens’ decision – 25,000 people. Is that worth this political stunt? I do not think so.

The Greens in essence today have said that they do not support community housing. The member for Brunswick described it as ‘woolly’ in his contribution before. There is nothing woolly about the tiny homes in my electorate that are being supported by Launch Housing and that support men who predominantly have been homeless and suffered from mental illness all their life. That model has a place in our system alongside public housing, alongside affordable housing and alongside options for people to get into the rental market or for people to buy their homes. What we need is more supply. This is all about supply. I do not claim to be an economist, but I do understand the issue of supply and demand. Right now we have a supply problem and we need more housing, and the Greens in Canberra are shamefully blocking it.

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge some of the people in my electorate who make great change every single day. One of them, Jocelyn, is in the gallery right now. She has an Order of Australia. She runs McAuley social services, and what her organisation does is provide long-term wraparound services for women fleeing family violence. The Andrews Labor government is very proud to support McAuley House. It is not a very neoliberal arrangement. It is the kind of housing that allows women who have been in the worst possible situations to recover, and it is valued. I am so grateful for her work and for everyone at McAuley Community Services.

There was a group of homelessness workers that I wanted to bring into the gallery today, but unfortunately we could not get them in. The gallery was full. But I want to acknowledge who those people are, because every day they help people with homelessness and housing issues under very difficult circumstances. Jocelyn, Tania Farha, Judy Line, the amazing Rhonda Collins – and if anyone from the Greens had bothered to come out at lunchtime, they would have seen Rhonda speak passionately. She is the CEO of Latitude housing for young people. Rebecca Cleaver, the CEO of

Wombat Housing; Cheryl McKinley, the homelessness manager at the Salvos; Deborah Gorsuch, the housing team leader from Uniting Wyndham; the incredible Sarah Langmore, the Western Homelessness Network manager; and Donna Bennett from Hope Street – these are people who work every day to deliver real change every single day.

You are in the privileged position to be in this place, to be an elected member where you can use your power for good and to effect real change. So I would encourage the Greens to work collaboratively with the government rather than stage these sorts of stunts, which only do a disservice to this very important issue. You can do something bold with the power you have accumulated, unlike the former mayor of Yarra who used her position to block 100 social housing units and 100 affordable houses. That was a shameful thing to do.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (17:32): It is always interesting in here to get up and see a little bit of argy-bargy, but there is no argy-bargy like the government versus the Greens. They like to give it to us, but there is no better ringside seat than when the government takes on its good mates the Greens.

Brad Rowswell: That's why we are here.

Danny O'BRIEN: I can only assume it is why everyone is in here, because it certainly is not to listen to me; I know that. All the government members, pretty much all of the ones over there, got elected on Greens preferences, but here they are ripping into them every time they get the opportunity. It is just extraordinary. There is no fight like a family fight, is there, when they really get into each other, and that is what we are seeing here. But this has actually been an interesting debate, because sometimes we do get told in politics that we are all the same: 'You've all got the same policies. You're indistinguishable from each other'. Well, this has actually been a pretty interesting debate to highlight the differences between all the parties in this place – at least between the Labor Party, the government, and the Greens. No better demonstrated is this than by the fact that the Greens think that this Labor government is neoliberal. What does that say about the Greens? Where are they? Somewhere next to Trotsky? I don't know – Marx? I am not sure what it is, but if this government is neoliberal, I will be winning *Australia's Next Top Model* next year. This is just extraordinary.

But it is true, what I am saying. The point is accurate that there are very big differences between the parties on these issues. We have got the Greens, who think that the government should own everything, basically, and the government should only build public housing and social housing. We have got the government, which even though the member for Footscray just talked about supply does not actually get the supply issue and thinks that taxing housing is going to help it, and us on this side, who realise that it will be private investors investing in housing – mums and dads putting away something for their future and providing a place to live for someone who wants to rent – who will actually solve this problem. So the words are supply, supply, supply.

When it comes to actually addressing the housing crisis, we have seen this government absolutely botch it every step of the way. Since this government came to power, we have seen 49 increased or newly introduced taxes, and 23 of those new or increased taxes have been on property. In the midst of a housing crisis what have we seen in the last couple of years? We have had a windfall gains tax introduced on property development. What do you think the property developers are going to do when they get a windfall gains tax?

Brad Rowswell: Tell us, Danny.

Danny O'BRIEN: Are they going to just cop it? Are they just going to say, 'Well, that's an increased cost to business'? No, they are going to pass it on to the cost of housing, aren't they? And then this year the geniuses in the Treasury office, at the height of a housing affordability crisis, a housing availability crisis when rents are going through the roof, what are we going to do?

A member: Tax.

Danny O'BRIEN: Another new tax. We are going to introduce a rent tax on landlords. The Treasurer had the gall in his Treasurer's speech this year to refer to economics 101; he said, 'If you know economics 101'. As I said at the time in the budget, I have actually done economics 101. It is literally a course description.

Tim Richardson: How did you go?

Danny O'BRIEN: I aced it, thank you, member for Mordialloc. I did very well, unlike the Treasurer, who clearly has not paid any attention whatsoever. Because if something is in short supply and you add a cost to it, a cost that cannot be avoided, it is going to be passed on. And what is going to happen then? Rent is going to go –

Members: Up.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you very much. It is going to go up. We have the government at this point in time adding additional taxes – 49 additional or new taxes, and they have increased 23 of them on property. And the government is now surprised that we have got a housing affordability crisis.

James Newbury: They did not do economics 101.

Danny O'BRIEN: They did not do economics 101, that is right, member for Brighton. This all comes on the back of the new rental laws that were introduced in 2021. Some rebalancing of the rental laws may well be appropriate. I think that there is a balance in this. You always have to make sure the renters have rights and that landlords have rights. But we saw the changes introduce a ban on rental bidding, new rental minimum standards, which has forced a lot of landlords to have to spend a lot of money in the last couple of years. We have got no eviction without a reason, allowable modifications by renters, which has had a big impact on those people who are providing rental accommodation. Landlords, many of them are telling their agents, 'I do not want to see my house modified without approval.' And there are new rules with respect to both pets and urgent repairs.

Again, some of this may well be justified, but the evidence has already shown that landlords are getting out of the market. We have seen this in recent weeks in relation to the government's new land tax changes. An article on 23 June on realestate.com.au said:

Victoria has been dubbed the nation's worst state for landlords and faces economic headwinds and housing shortages as population growth soars.

Who would have thought? That came from a survey by the REIV that said nearly 90 per cent of real estate agents in Victoria have had an increase in contact from landlords who are looking to recover increased costs as a result of the Victorian governments new and increased land tax on investment properties. What did I say? Economics 101: if you add a cost, it gets passed on.

The member for Gippsland East, I do have to mention him because he gave an excellent speech. It was very good. It did not probably get the credit it deserved, but he made the point that our rental providers in the main are mum-and-dad investors. Seventy per cent of them only have one second property, and 43 per cent of those earn less than \$100,000 a year. This is not wealthy landlords in the main. This is not people with multiple properties. That is the reality of our housing affordability and the housing availability in Victoria where 70 per cent of rental properties are provided by the private sector.

For the Greens to be saying no private stuff and put in a rental cap, let us stop everything – what do they think is going to happen? If you make rental availability less attractive, there is going to be less of it. I know what they will say because they have said it to some degree, 'If landlords are selling up, that is good because more people can then afford to buy a house. If there's more supply, house prices will come down.' Yes, in theory, to a bit. What if you are a 23-year-old just starting to make your way in the world and you need to rent? You are not going to be able to go out and afford to buy a house. This is just economic lunacy from both the government and the Greens.

On the public housing question, back to what this is really about, I give the government credit for the Big Housing Build. We absolutely needed to increase the level of public housing stock in Victoria, and – we know this from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee – that is because the Victorian government was a long, long way behind the rest of the country on a per capita basis in terms of public and social housing availability. That was in the ROGS data in 2021. The Productivity Commission *Report on Government Services* made it very clear we were at the bottom of the table, so we actually needed to keep up. Those opposite have mentioned the former member for Richmond. He acknowledged that; he actually accepted that we had to do a lot more. So it is good.

But we have also just heard from the minister before and we hear from the government regularly how they are going to deliver 12,000 new homes. We are going to have 8200 new homes. That is a net gain. So far – and again this has just come back from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings this year – there is an increase of 2900, so we are still a long, long way from anything like what the government is claiming that it is going to deliver. That is in the context – other members have raised this – that in the past 12 months, in the 12 months to March 2023, 3681 people, or households, were added to the public housing waiting list. 842 of those were priority families. So we have got an increase in the waiting list, more and more people, and we are not keeping pace with the investment, even with what the government is doing. That is something that the government needs to address.

In my own electorate – the Big Housing Build is \$5.3 billion – in South Gippsland shire there are six new homes, six. I have got people coming to me all the time looking for housing, whether it is private housing, whether it is rental or whether it is public housing. The government needs to do better. The \$1 billion it is pledging to apparently spend on regional housing after the Commonwealth Games debacle it absolutely needs to deliver to rural areas of the state. It needs to do a lot better, and it needs to ignore the Greens when it comes to policy on housing in this state.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (17:42): I am so proud to be a member of this government, because on this side of the chamber we understand the importance of housing. We know that public housing, social housing and affordable housing provide many Victorians with the safety, security and dignity of a home. We do not sit on the other side of the chamber virtue-signalling or filming TikTok videos full of faux outrage. On this side of the chamber we live our values. We are taking action on the housing crisis in this state, and we are investing billions of dollars in housing in this state.

The matter before us states that there are no plans to build more housing in Victoria, and this is simply not true. The Andrews Labor government has invested \$5.3 billion in the Big Housing Build to deliver more than 12,000 new homes across Victoria. Already more than 7600 homes have been completed or are underway. More than 2800 of these are completed and welcoming residents, and we are willing to work with partners in the federal government to invest every single dollar of the \$500 million recently announced by the Prime Minister in our Big Housing Build to deliver even more homes. Just a fortnight ago the state government announced a further \$1 billion Victorian Regional Housing Fund to deliver at least 1300 new homes right across regional Victoria. That is \$6.8 billion invested in housing in this state, delivering more than 13,300 new homes. So it is simply not true to say that there is no plan to build more homes. This government has a plan for more homes, it has invested in more homes and it is delivering more homes – more homes than the Greens political party will ever deliver.

This matter also claims that four public housing sites are being privatised. Again, this is not true. These sites are in public hands, and they remain in public hands. We are not the party of privatisation. These four projects will deliver a total of 1400 new homes, including 650 social homes, and that is an increase from the previous 502 social homes across these sites. This is a model that actually delivers even more public, community and affordable housing into the market, and it is 1400 more homes than the Greens political party have ever delivered or ever could deliver.

Those in the Greens political party would like you to believe that there is no more public housing left in the state. Well, that is not true; 70 per cent of government housing is public housing. There are 64,000 public housing properties across the state. That is 64,000 more homes than the Greens political

party can ever deliver. On top of that is a further 22,000 social homes, 20,000 community housing properties and 2000 properties managed by Aboriginal community controlled organisations. The member for Northcote put it well earlier that the Greens political party do not understand the nuance in Victoria's housing system. They do not appreciate the value of having community housing provided specifically for women experiencing family violence or being run by Aboriginal community controlled organisations for First Nations people.

There is no bigger issue in our state than the housing crisis, and a number of members today have spoken about their experiences in hearing from residents facing homelessness and housing insecurities in their communities. These are stories that I hear every week in Lara: families in private rental properties struggling to make ends meet and joining the public housing waiting list, people who are couch surfing, moving from place to place and trying not to overstay their welcome, people who are sleeping in their cars and people who are camping in parks or camping near community facilities to feel more protected by lights and security cameras overnight. These are devastating stories. I have heard from community organisations who distribute tents to people experiencing homelessness and who are shocked by how quickly all those tents were taken up. I have heard concerns about a growing number of women, particularly older women, who are facing homelessness. When you hear these stories, you realise pretty quickly that there is more to do when it comes to housing.

To me, that is the difference between the Andrews Labor government and the Greens political party. While those in the Greens political party are moving self-righteous motions that will achieve nothing, shooting off angry tweets, making TikTok videos and not actually contributing towards increasing housing supply, the Andrews Labor government is getting on with the job. We are getting on with building more homes and replacing tired public housing that desperately needs to be upgraded. We are partnering with the federal government to build more houses and we are partnering with the community housing sector to deliver homes to Victoria's diverse communities.

Housing is not just about having a roof over your head. It is about feeling safe and secure and comfortable in your own home. I know that my office supports so many constituents who need assistance with housing, and I am sure that is the same for many others on this side of the chamber. Earlier this year we helped a public housing resident who was seeking a higher front fence. Their property was on a main road and they were having issues with other local residents that concerned her and her children. Thanks to the wonderful team in the minister's office and our local department staff, we swiftly moved to have a new fence built at her property. This is just one example of how we on the side are helping people in public housing feel safe and more secure, and I am sure people on this side have countless examples of all the work they are doing.

What really disappoints me is the complete disregard for regional Victoria by the Greens political party. We can give you a map if you like. Geelong is a little further down the freeway past Yarraville, as the member for Buninyong pointed out earlier. The reality is that the Greens do not care about regional Victoria. They are out of touch with the unique pressures facing regional Victorians and regional Victorian families. While the TikTok videos and the rock posters might sound like a good campaign for inner-city Melbourne, I can assure you they fall flat in our regions. In our regions, the \$1 billion regional housing package has been welcomed by the community and the housing sector. The community is thrilled with this investment and that a further 1300 homes will be built. This is an investment that the Greens political party would never make because there are too busy running campaigns in inner-city Melbourne hunting for more votes.

Today we have heard from the self-aggrandising Greens political party about the importance of public housing and just how critical it is. Well, if the Greens political party think it is that critical, then perhaps they should consider supporting funding for housing instead of blocking it. Because right now in the federal Parliament the Greens have that opportunity, but instead they are blocking legislation that will unlock billions of dollars of investment into housing right across Australia. The Greens political party preach the need for more housing, but when they get the chance to do something about it, like right

now in the Senate, they just wreck it. So we have the Greens political party blocking critical housing funding of billions of dollars in Canberra like it is something to be proud of.

This Labor government knows that having a safe and secure place to call home gives people a solid foundation to thrive in life. Our Big Housing Build will deliver 12,000 more homes across Victoria, right across the state, and an additional 1300 homes across regional Victoria. We could deliver even more homes right across the state if the Greens political party supported the federal legislation to unlock billions of dollars in funding. So maybe when you go home tonight, it would be an opportunity to call some friends in Canberra.

We know that Victorian families are in need of these homes and that every new and affordable home our government is building is providing a roof over the head of a family in need. Every house that we build is a house that the Greens political party could never build and would never build, because it is only a Labor government who cares, who is making the single biggest investment by any state government in Australia into housing. We know there is more to do; there is always more to do, and unlike those opposite in the Greens political party who block public housing investment at every opportunity, we are getting on with it and building these homes.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (17:50): It is my honour to hopefully conclude the debate tonight. Back in 2016 I stood in this very place and raised my concerns that the public housing waiting list in Victoria had blown out to 33,000 applications. At the time I called that a crisis, because it was, yet here I am seven years later standing in the same place with that number now sitting at 130,000 people. Under the Andrews Labor government's watch the waiting list has blown out by 100,000 people – and they are not just numbers; they are actually people. Many of those people come to my office seeking help when they have tried everything else, and I want to share some of their stories today, because I think it is really important that we remember who we are talking about.

I want to share Ali's story. I have changed his name to protect his family's privacy. Ali came to Australia as a refugee in 2015. He lives with a disability. His family is on a low income. In 2017 they started struggling to pay their rent, so they did what they thought was the right thing to do and applied for public housing. But because there are so many people on the priority waiting list and because they already had a house, even though they were struggling to afford the rent, Ali's family was approved for public housing but were put at the bottom of the list. Then two years later, in 2019, they were evicted from their private rental and became homeless.

When they were first evicted Ali and his family were supported by the Salvation Army to access temporary crisis accommodation, but as anyone who has interacted with the homelessness system knows, crisis support is only temporary and runs out long before you are ever offered a long-term safe place to live. Over the past five years Ali and his family have had to stay in motels, couch surf with friends and family and sleep in their car because they still had not got a public home. During this time they were separated, staying in different places while they waited. Last Eid Ali had to rent out a friend's garage for the week just so his family could spend some time together for the celebration.

Before becoming homeless Ali was a leader in his community, but being homeless he found it difficult to engage with his community. He and his wife separated for five months due to the stress of the ongoing homelessness. Their daughter had no internet access during her final year of school and had to work out of libraries to complete her VCE. She was later hospitalised with poor mental health. This is a family who came to Australia seeking a better life. My office worked with Ali and his family for over a year, and I am happy to say that we were recently able to help get him into a home, but it took five years of being homeless. It should not have been that hard.

Housing is a human right. No-one in life, none of us in this place, can succeed in life without a safe place to sleep at night. It should be a key responsibility of government, just like health and education. But the thing is that instead of taking on that responsibility, governments of both persuasions, Labor and Liberal, and not just here in Victoria but across Australia have decided to wash their hands of it. I

think it is really important to actually just really clearly outline what has been happening here, because I have been in this place longer than many of the people on the opposite side and I have seen for myself exactly how we got to this point. It is particularly interesting to see the commentary from people like the member for Northcote, whose election campaign received a \$10,000 donation from a property developer. I am not quite sure that that really fits with some of her commentary – a property developer that is the subject of an anti-corruption commission investigation through IBAC, I would add.

What actually happened is that maintenance in public housing here in Victoria got so bad it got to crisis point. This stock was falling down. The government had a choice. They could invest – rebuild ageing public housing, build more, fix it up – but instead what they decided was it was a liability and they would get rid of it or at least try and find a way not to pay for it. Of course Labor does not say that. Labor says they are building more affordable homes, but that is actually not really what is happening. Let us talk about what is actually going on. The government has a model called the ground lease model. The government takes public land – that is, land that belongs to everyone in Victoria and has existing public housing on it – and essentially give it to private property developers. They will say it is a lease, but just like privatising the Port of Melbourne and VicRoads, long-term leases are a model of privatisation just made to sound more palatable. What they do is they then demolish the public housing. They move the tenants out. They say, ‘Don’t worry, we promise that you’ll be able to come back.’ Then they take the land and they use it to build a whole bunch of private homes, giving those profits to the private developers. They rent or sell them for profit at market rates.

The government have bought this neoliberal ideology. It sounds good, right? The government does not have to pay much. Developers will rebuild public housing for them. Win-win, right? But if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is, and there is a catch – in fact there are many catches. First, we are essentially gifting public land to developers. They make a mint on land that we could have actually used to build public housing. Once the land is gone, we are not getting it back. Secondly, the housing that is rebuilt is not actually public housing at all but community or affordable housing managed by non-government organisations where people will likely be paying more of their income on rent than public housing tenants and do not have the same rights. It results in a loss of public housing overall. On top of this the government says it will result in a net increase in social homes, but actually most of them are much smaller apartments, so overall the number of people, the number of bedrooms, is actually reduced, so fewer people can live there. In a case like Barak Beacon estate in Port Melbourne it means that public homes in good condition are being bulldozed so developers can sell private apartments with beachfront views – what a boon for the developers. Labor will try to spin it, but it is selling off public land for private profit.

We have actually had experience of this in my own electorate of Melbourne. In 2005 the government demolished public housing in Carlton and sold the land to developers for a tiny fraction of the market value. The developers made about \$300 million. They did this because they said they needed to integrate public housing residents with private tenants, but as the project went on, the developers started to change their plans. They separated and segregated the public housing buildings from the private apartments. The private apartments were offered exclusive access to a garden and a courtyard that were actually separated from the public housing residents by a 1.8-metre-high wall. Then in 2012 public housing in Kensington was sold for 5 per cent of its true value to developers – they made \$45 million from the redevelopment – and 265 public housing properties were lost from the estate. The minister talks about Ascot Vale. We have someone in the gallery here watching who is from the Ascot Vale estate. Only apparently one person is living in the affordable housing in Ascot Vale at the moment.

Instead of learning from these mistakes, the government doubled down on this model. I get it. They do not want to pay for the maintenance of public housing. But guess what? You are the government. You have to. We get so many people through our office. We had someone who had their bathroom roof fall in from water damage that they had been reporting to their local housing office for months but could not get fixed. I visited an elderly man recently who had lived for 10 years with a broken kitchen exhaust fan despite reporting it was broken, a mother whose front door would not lock and she

could not sleep at night – these stories just go on and on and on. In North Melbourne, in my electorate – I want to tell one more story – Khali was forcibly removed from her public housing in Abbotsford Street because it is part of this model that is being developed. She was evicted in 2018. She was told that she could come back to this estate. She was rushed out. She felt pressured to accept a property that was not suitable for her family, but she did it because apparently she could come back. She was told she could return in two years, by 2020. Demolition did not even start until 2021. Then the time line was pushed out to 2023. Now it has become 2024, so it has not even started. Residents like Khali have been waiting for five years to come home, but now there is actually no guarantee that the property will be even big enough for her to return. On top of this the government has scrapped the community consultative committee of that project that would have given residents a say.

We can build public housing. We do not need to rely on this privatisation model. This state budget allocated over \$400 million in new money for the racing industry and only \$100 million for homelessness services. This is not a matter of not having the money. This is a matter of not having the political will. There are people watching this debate. They are watching what this government does. They want more public housing – proper public housing – and they will watch what this government does.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (18:01): Look, I am conscious that clearly during the course of the matter of public importance debate there are a number of speakers who have not filled the time allocated to them, but with the 1 minute and 28 seconds that is allocated to this debate, I am very, very happy to make a small contribution.

I think that nothing could be more fundamental than the opportunity for a fellow Victorian – in this place we speak about numbers, we speak about statistics, we speak about theories and things that are far removed from the realities of community and life. But when we speak about housing, we should remember first and foremost that we are talking about our fellow Victorians. We are speaking about mothers and fathers. We are speaking about brothers and sisters. We are speaking about people who are hard on their luck, people who are tragically exposed to the cycle of dependency. On this side of politics we want to do everything we can to enable those people and to empower those people to stand on their own two feet, to get on with their lives and to be net contributors to our community. That is our determination when it comes to matters of housing.

Further, what we want to see is that everyone who needs a house gets a house. What could be more fundamental? Because a roof over someone's head provides for them the opportunity to contribute back to the community, and that is something which will always be a guiding principle for this side of the chamber, unlike for those on the government side and from the Greens who have contributed today.

Motions

Big Housing Build

Debate resumed.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (18:03): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Bills**Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023***Statement of compatibility*

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (18:04): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023.

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 Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 (the **Bill**).

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

Overview of the Bill

The Bill is an omnibus Bill that makes amendments to –

1. the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* to incorporate requirements the responsible Minister must comply with when making a T-3 reliability instrument under section 14JA of the *National Electricity Law* to trigger the retailer reliability obligation; and
2. the *National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008* to improve the civil penalty arrangements for a breach of a declared system provision prescribed to be a civil penalty provision under that Act and minor technical amendments to update references to the Gas Distribution System Code to the Gas Distribution System Code of Practice made by the Essential Services Commission.

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

The Bill does not raise any human rights issues.

Consideration of reasonable limitations – section 7(2)

As the Bill does not engage any human rights protected by the Charter, it does not limit any human rights and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter.

Conclusion

Accordingly, it is my view that the Bill is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter.

Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Energy and Resources

Second reading

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (18:05): 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 Victorian Government is committed to managing the transition of the energy sector to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045 while ensuring the reliable supply of energy to Victorian consumers.

This omnibus Bill amends the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* and the *National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008* to deliver better outcomes to Victorian energy consumers in two ways.

First, the Bill will amend the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* to strengthen the Retailer Reliability Obligation (RRO) framework established under the National Electricity Law, which was recently amended to enable jurisdictional Energy Ministers to trigger the RRO.

The Bill will introduce Victorian specific decision-making criteria and consultation safeguards to be used in the event the Victorian Minister needs to trigger the RRO in response to an emerging risk of significant electricity disruption. The decision to trigger the RRO, will be made in consultation with the Australian Energy Regulator, the Australian Energy Market Operator, as well as the Treasurer and the Premier. It will ensure the decision is informed by the most up to date information regarding the energy sector and the broader economy.

The RRO puts in place responsibilities on retailers and large customers to secure contracts with electricity producers during periods of forecast lack of supply. This in turn encourages forward contracting – which importantly helps underwrite much needed new investment in electricity generation and avoid supply shortfalls.

Secondly, the Bill will improve the functioning of Victoria's wholesale gas market by enabling regulations to be made to increase the maximum civil penalties payable for parties that breach the rules. The change will provide additional flexibility to the Australian Energy Regulator and the courts in determining an appropriate response to instances of non-compliance and help ensure any civil penalties issued reflect the severity of the conduct and act as a deterrent.

This will ensure the compliance and enforcement regime is fit for purpose so that the Victorian gas market delivers better outcomes for consumers and align the level of civil penalties with those in place in other east coast wholesale gas markets.

Finally, the Bill updates several outdated references to the ESC Gas Distribution System Code in the *National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008*. This will help improve the accurate interpretation of the Act.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:05): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 16 August.

Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (18:06): I have the call from last night, and I was in the midst of talking about the government's SEC policy, which has attracted a lot of support from those on that side who do not really seem to understand it. I took great pleasure in asking some questions about this in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings only a couple of weeks ago and trying to marry up what is actually happening with the SEC with what the government promised. One of the things that came to my attention was I asked interim CEO of the SEC Mr Miller about the investments that the SEC would be making and would it be solely Australian co-investments. He said the details had not yet been worked out, and I said, 'Is the government precluding foreign investors from bidding for work with the SEC?', and the answer was no, there is no preclusion.

I was reminded that the Premier said repeatedly through the election campaign that the Labor government was about offshore wind, not offshore profits. Now, post election, we get a different story, which is pretty similar to what we have been hearing about a lot of things. The Commonwealth Games is one that comes to mind. Logging is another one that comes to mind. Rail projects are another one that comes to mind. There are a lot of things. We were told 'offshore wind, not offshore profits' yet now we hear from the SEC there is no prohibition on them taking investment from foreign corporations. In fact it may well be that the new state government entity will be investing in renewable energy projects with foreign companies, which would be a complete breach of the Premier's repeated promise in the election campaign.

Probably more fundamentally, while that was the spin of the government during the election campaign, my concern with the SEC and what this government is doing is it is putting in public capital at a time when private capital is very anxious to invest in renewable energy. We heard the member for Bentleigh say that the SEC will allow us to deliver renewable energy. Well, the renewable energy is being delivered anyway. This is my concern that I have always had with this SEC policy: there is absolutely no reason for taxpayer capital to be put at risk in these projects. I asked the question, 'What will the government invest in?' Mr Miller indicated – in fact I could probably read the actual sections – that

basically they are looking for a project that is already very well advanced using a mature technology and something that they can get happening very quickly. Indeed the Minister for Energy and Resources herself said it. When I asked about it she said:

This is absolutely no doubt about bringing forward projects that may otherwise be later in their delivery or indeed not happen at all.

Which begs the question: why is taxpayers money being spent on projects just to (a) speed them up when they were going to happen anyway or (b) if they were not going to happen at all? Presumably that would be because they were not commercial projects. How is the government going to give some satisfaction to the taxpayer that their resources are not going to be risked or frittered away or wasted on projects that were going to happen anyway or that were not commercial and did not stack up? Of course I asked a bit further about that. I asked Mr Miller if the SEC or the Treasury had set a rate of return that they were expecting from investments, and the answer was 'not yet' even though the government is expecting to invest probably by the end of the year in a project. That was the estimate, and indeed the budget process actually has \$600 million in the budget for 2023–24 for investing in projects. I think I would have to say it is a heroic assumption that any of that money will be out the door before the end of 2023–24 given where we are at with this. But again, if it is, it just highlights that that is a project that was going to go ahead anyway and does not need taxpayers funds.

The other issue I want to touch on with respect to the government's spin on the SEC is that this was sold as somehow going back to the old SEC: going back to a state government owned corporation that runs the entire electricity system – the generation, the poles and wires, the retail arm and everything. Well, we had the minister rule out the poles and wires. She said straight out, no, we are not going into transmission or distribution. They have not ruled out going into retail, which horrifies me enough as it is. But more particularly, in terms of generation, the notion that the government investment in the SEC will bring down prices is such an economic and political fallacy, because it will be a tiny player in the future energy market. Do not take my word for it – I asked the minister herself. I said, 'What proportion do you think we'll be by 2035?' So by 2035 the government's policy is 95 per cent renewables, and of those renewables the minister says the new build will need to be 25 gigawatts of new generation by 2035. And I said, 'What will the SEC be of that?' Well, the SEC will be 4.5 gigawatts. So less than 20 per cent of new generation will be not only the SEC, because this will be co-investment with others, so the taxpayer component will be even less than 20 per cent. And yet somehow we are supposed to believe that these investments – which are going to be in projects that are going ahead anyway or are not commercial enough for the private sector to push them, and then they are going to be less than 20 per cent of the total market – are going to bring down the price of electricity for Victorians. I just find this to be a massive, massive con.

Steve Dimopoulos: Sometimes the private sector needs its hand held.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, the private sector is doing it all very well on its own, Minister. You know, I have been talking about the offshore wind in my electorate, where they are lining up to invest in the offshore wind industry, which the government itself, as I said last night, is trying to claim as its own project when in fact it is not. It is investing in Hastings instead of Barry Beach – closer to the offshore wind – which is only going to increase the cost for the offshore wind in my opinion. But this is all part of the spin that this government is putting together with respect to the SEC and energy prices, and it will fall flat on its face.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (18:13): I rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023, and the purpose of this bill is to ensure a safe transition to renewable energy for workers and our communities. I would like to thank the Minister for Energy and Resources and her team for all the work that they have done in bringing this bill to the house. The Andrews Labor government is working diligently in transitioning Victoria to renewable energy and making us the renewables capital of our nation. Since coming to government in 2014, we have more than tripled the amount of renewable power generation compared to what we inherited from those opposite – a mere 10 per cent in 2014 to over 35 per cent in 2022. This is well beyond our 2020 renewable energy target

of 20 per cent, which we easily surpassed, and as a result we have increased our 2030 renewable energy target from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. This transition is good for everyone. It is creating more jobs and cheaper energy for Victorians as well as preserving a healthier environment for future generations.

This bill is about keeping our workers and our communities safe and secure while doing the work on transition. This bill seeks to ensure that our energy safety regulations are keeping up with the constantly developing and vastly expanding renewable energy industry. We are looking to apply the same energy safety obligations to traditional and renewable energy companies operating in Victoria. We will also strengthen the enforcement and investigative powers of Energy Safe Victoria, the independent energy safety regulator.

Unfortunately there have been many recent incidents that demonstrate the urgent need for these amendments. In 2018 the Terang and Garvoc fires were caused by a clash of high-voltage powerlines, and Powercor were found to be responsible. These fires resulted in 6000 hectares of land being destroyed, including homes and farms. Powercor was only fined \$130,000, which is gravely insufficient. It is why this bill is so important. The amendments will see the appropriate penalties imposed on companies that neglect to fulfil their safety requirements. No community should have their lives and assets risked because corners were cut on safety.

More recently the fires at the Victorian Big Battery and the Cohuna solar farm in 2021 demonstrated the need for these amendments, which will allow Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) to regulate facilities such as battery installations and solar farms. Energy Safe Victoria will have greater oversight and control to monitor the changes to facility safety management plans and will have the power to review these plans every five years. The current regulations are based on a structure of the energy sector from back in the 1990s, a sector composed of mainly large corporations and ones that did not consider the introduction of renewable energy to our state. With the steadfast implementation of renewable energy we have seen the establishment of smaller renewable energy companies. As a result it is imperative that our regulations keep up with the changes in our energy industry so we can ensure that such renewable energy technologies are implemented and operated safely.

I am proud to say that this bill is not the first thing that we have done to address the problem. We have done a fair bit of work to get to this stage. In 2017 the minister for energy initiated the independent review of Victoria's electricity and gas network safety framework. Essentially this review was tasked with designing the safety regulations, obligations and incentives around the energy industry to remain up to date with our renewables. In 2018 the Andrews Labor government supported 42 of the 43 recommendations made by that review. To date over half of these recommendations have been completed, and more of these recommendations are on track to completion. Additionally, this bill is addressing three of those recommendations. We have improved the ESV inspection and audit program, and we have transformed the ESV from a single-member agency to a three-person commission. We have created a stronger regulatory framework, and we have also strengthened the ESV's workforce so that we can ensure that more Victorians, including energy workers, are kept safe.

The safety of workers and our communities is of the utmost importance. That is why this bill will allow the Governor in Council to declare certain electricity installations, under advice from the Minister for Energy and Resources, to be a certain class so specific safety duties and obligations will apply. Such obligations will mean that extra safety measures are put in place, and levies will be paid to the ESV so sufficient oversight can be provided. These obligations will be in line with those already in place for major transmission and distribution companies. Furthermore, this bill will see adequate penalties applied to energy companies that cut corners on safety, increasing fines by up to a maximum of six times the existing amount. These penalties have not changed since 2007, and it is time that they are updated. Currently the penalties applied do not match the impacts done to the lives, properties and environment of our affected communities. We have already seen the damage done by the fires in 2018 and 2021, and we do not need to see a repeat of that. Higher penalties will incentivise energy companies to fulfil their safety obligations in order to decrease the likelihood of the aforementioned fires.

Currently such safety management plans can be amended without the ESV oversight. As a result ESV struggles to ensure that all safety management plans are sufficient and are being followed. This is concerning, and it is pleasing to see the changes this bill brings. Additionally, this bill will require electricity suppliers and gas companies to preserve incident sites such as of electricity emergencies so Energy Safe Victoria can investigate properly and therefore apply the correct penalties if required and ensure that these sites are fixed. At present companies can remove evidence from a site, making it difficult for ESV to determine what caused an accident. This is simply wrong. This bill seeks to put an end to this.

This bill will also strengthen Energy Safe Victoria, our energy safety regulator. Every day ESV ensures that the gas, electricity and pipeline companies are following safety regulations to keep their workers and communities safe. Furthermore, ESV provides licences to electrical workers, which is something I am sure that our friends from the Electrical Trades Union approve. The ESV is also providing compulsory training for electrical workers around the new safety regulations and technologies before their licences are reissued. This helps to reduce the risks in this industry. The effectiveness of such programs has already been elucidated. The ESV has reported less safety incidents this year, which is great to see.

This bill is so important for the safety of energy workers and our communities. It is great to see the Andrews Labor government working hard to transition to clean, renewable energy, ensuring our planet is safeguarded for future generations. Simultaneously we are working to make sure that the renewable energy is being regulated and operated safely. The Andrews Labor government will always stand up for the safety of our workers and take real action on climate change, and it is great to see this bill does both. I commend the bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (18:20): It is nice to know everyone is so excited when I get up to speak. I am happy to speak on this bill, the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023. Those opposite might be happy to hear that this side of the house is supporting this piece of legislation. This bill is a fairly broad range of reforms, largely making our energy system more focused on delivering outcomes for consumers. While I do not want to go into all of them, I want to touch on a few key ones.

Over the last decade we have seen some real change in the available technology when it comes to energy generation. Obviously with the government's push on renewables and the amount of solar panels now being installed and wind farms and everything else, this side of the house has no problem with this bill when we talk about the safety of workers, consumers and the general public. It would be horrifying to think of a blade off a wind farm turbine falling and hurting someone, so I think any legislation that comes into this house to protect the safety of everyone is good legislation, and the government has done that in this bill.

Where I do get a little bit concerned – and it is a concern with the new SEC, the way the government is transitioning and what is going on with the SEC – is in my electorate, for example. I know it is in VCAT at the moment. It has gone through a planning process, but it is at VCAT at the moment. It is a 250-acre solar farm in the middle of agricultural land. When we talk about this bill, this is my concern. The problem we are going to have is that because the new energy is going to be so spread out across the state we are going to have solar farms dotted all over the place. We are going to have wind farms dotted all over the place. How are we really going to make sure this is safe? Because if something goes wrong in regional Victoria, it is not a little mistake. It often ends up being catastrophic. If we have high north winds, for example, and dry grass this high next to bushland, we are going to have another 2020. We could have another 1939 if we are not careful.

I feel as though in the government's rush to transition we are playing a little bit of catch-up with this bill. I think what the government has to do is really look at the way they are going to deliver the energy and the safety at the same time, because if they do not get it right, they will put Victorians at risk – at great risk. This bill also talks about gas safety, and I am glad today we have been talking about housing

affordability, social housing and gas in this legislation. I feel as though the government, in stopping gas on 1 January 2024, are rushing this through. I think they have rushed this through mainly to deflect from the Commonwealth Games. I mean, the Commonwealth Games has been a disaster, so the government has gone, 'Look, we're going to rush this through to just deflect away from the Commonwealth Games.' But the problem with gas and getting rid of gas is it is no different to building. You are starting with renewables now. Great. You are doing wind farms. You are doing solar farms. What you must do is get those foundations right first before you take another energy source out of the market, because at the moment you have not got it right. We are not totally renewable, so if you are not totally renewable, why would you take another energy source out of the market? You are not quite there yet, and I think it is premature that the government says we are going to knock off gas in 2024, especially when we have got other states, being South Australia and New South Wales, saying they are pro gas. This side of the chamber is pro gas because we acknowledge that we need gas as part of our energy source in this state.

I know those on this side and the government will differ on that, but we strongly believe that gas is essential to our energy market. The problem is when you take gas away, the one thing nobody has talked about is the cost. The cost to convert a house from gas to electric is not cheap. It is not cheap if you start replacing electric central heating units – away from split systems. If you start replacing hotplates with electric hotplates, you have got to buy new pots and pans because they are not compatible. When you are talking about water, a Rinnai Infinity is a lot cheaper than a solar-driven hot-water unit. You are talking quite a lot of money, and the average Victorian just cannot afford that. I have done the math on a conversion on an old house, a 1970s house with a straight gable roof, and the cheapest way you could do it will cost \$30,000.

The other point about this renewable push is you have to make sure you have the supply in the street. So if you have only got a two-phase supply, not a three-phase supply, and all of a sudden houses start converting, is there going to be enough supply in the street? This is the problem with the new SEC. There are too many unknown variables at this point in time. I mean, when we talk about total renewable, have we factored in no gas? What is the government's plan on gas? Are we going to stop it altogether? Is there going to be no gas in 10 years time? Because if there is going to be no gas in 10 years time, I am extremely doubtful that the new SEC will be able to cope with the demand and the supply that Victorians will need. I am extremely doubtful, and the reason I am doubtful is because the government has not been very clear on it. When they factored in renewable, did they go, 'Okay, we're going to factor in renewable. We need X amount of gigawatts to do this, but if we get rid of gas, what pressure is that going to put on the system? How much extra will we need?' I do not think that has been factored in. I do not think the government has taken that into account, and I do not think the government has really done proper case studies on whether it will work or not.

I make this suggestion to the government. Rather than paying millions of dollars to consultants, as we know the government does, I make this suggestion. It is a commonsense suggestion. I know in this place sometimes common sense runs thin, but I am very much a pragmatic, commonsense type of person. Buy a house, an old house somewhere, and convert it properly – electric central heating, electric hot-water units, solar panels and batteries. Run that house like you would a normal house. Turn the heater on for 3 hours in the morning in winter, turn the heater on for 3 hours at night and see if it actually works. Before we go too far down a rabbit hole that we cannot get out of, do a study. But do a practical study. You can do them all over the state in different environments. Do one up north and one down south – east and west, it does not matter – but do the study and then go, 'Okay, based on that, we need this amount of supply', because if you do not do that study and you get this supply wrong, do not worry about the safety bill, because we are not going to have power anyway. I urge the government to actually do some proper modelling, not rehash an old badge from 1992 when Joan Kirner sold it off – I am waiting – but do a proper model and see if it works. I agree with this bill, but I had to take the opportunity to put those points in, and I encourage the government to listen, do the modelling and get it right. I commend this bill to the house.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:29): Thank you for the excitement in the chamber at this time on a Wednesday evening, but it truly does give me much pleasure to make a contribution to the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023. At the core of this bill is worker safety and community safety. If you have a look at the context of where this bill comes in, it is certainly worth looking at. I am a part of a government that is helping Victoria drive to being one of the fastest energy transition states in the world. We have tripled the share of renewables in power generation, and that has been done in just eight years time. We have helped nearly a quarter of a million Victorian households – a quarter of a million Victorian households – install solar panels on their roofs, reducing bills and giving them control over their energy. We have held the Victorian renewable energy target auction, the country's largest reverse auction for renewables. We have also installed the Victorian Big Battery, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, and made Victoria the home of big batteries. Through these actions we have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by more than any other state in the country since 2014. Indeed we have only just begun.

Having comfortably surpassed the 2020 renewable energy target of 20 per cent, we have increased our 2030 renewable energy target from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. We have set a 2035 target of 95 per cent, and that target will be backed by separate targets for offshore wind and energy storage. We will have at least 2 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2032 and 4 gigawatts by 2035. We will have 9 gigawatts by 2040. To support this increase in renewable capacity we have at least 2.6 gigawatts of storage capacity by 2030 and at least 6.3 gigawatts by 2035. With all of that we have also been able to bring our net zero emissions target from 2050 to 2045, which will require the transformation of our entire energy system, including transport and industry, but our energy safety legislation has not kept pace.

This is nothing short of the most fundamental technological transformation that we are seeing in our lifetime, and it truly is exciting. It means more jobs, cheaper energy and cleaner air. But to ensure that the safety of workers and the community is maintained, our energy safety rules must keep pace with technology. The legislation does that by making commonsense amendments to Victoria's energy safety legislation. The amendments themselves will align the energy safety obligations of renewable energy companies with those of the traditional companies and strengthen the investigative and enforcement powers of the independent safety regulator, Energy Safe Victoria. Recent incidents highlight the urgency of these amendments, as has been well documented in this place over the last few days. Two serious fires in 2021 at the Victorian Big Battery and the Cohuna solar farm highlighted the limitations. Energy Safe Victoria must regulate facilities such as solar farms and battery installations. Energy Safe Victoria was unable to intervene or regulate those sites until the fires had occurred, hence the need for this bill.

It will modernise Victoria's energy safety legislative framework to improve community and worker safety. In doing so it will create and target the regulation of new and emerging safety risks that are posed by emerging technologies as the state undertakes a rapid energy transition to renewable energy, recognising the very fast changing pace of the environment that we are operating in. The reforms will strengthen the safety compliance framework by increasing obligations for electricity and gas companies, including owners and operators. The legislation gives Energy Safe Victoria legislative power to compel owners and operators of critical and complex installations, such as batteries, to reduce safety risks prior to energisation.

The bill also ensures that newer technologies like batteries, wind farms and solar farms are held to the same standards as existing generation and network technologies. It will also provide Energy Safe Victoria with an enhanced enforcement toolkit to effectively regulate the transforming energy sector. At the 2022 election we committed to a comprehensive review of energy safety legislation for the long term. These proposed reforms are a really good first step representing a range of quick wins. The bill will help ensure the safety of workers and our communities as we continue on this journey of transition to a renewable energy future.

Our government is unapologetic about our energy safety regime. We have a robust energy safety framework, and we are proactively updating that to ensure that we continue to keep workers and the community safe. There are inherent risks that come with all electrical infrastructure, but these are risks that can be mitigated through the appropriate energy safety rules. We always endeavour to implement recommendations made by our state energy safety regulator, as safety is a non-negotiable to this government. As a government we have always prioritised safety. We introduced legislative reforms through the Energy Safety Legislation Amendment (Victorian Energy Safety Commission and Other Matters) Act 2020, which transformed Energy Safe Victoria from a single-member agency to a three-person commission which commenced in January 2021. That is supported by a CEO and a technical advisory committee as well. At the 2022 election, we committed to a comprehensive review of energy safety legislation for the long term, but these proposed reforms are a really good first step, representing a range of quick wins, as I mentioned. We will continue the transition to renewable energy, and we will maintain our proactive approach to safety. That is why we need this bill.

When it comes to energy bills in this place, we know that the opposition have at every stage opposed any bills relating to energy targets or climate action, and in terms of their poor record, I am about to outline it. Since 2014 the Liberals voted against or tried to gut the following energy bills in Parliament: the Climate Change Bill 2016, opposed; the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Bill 2017, opposed; the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Amendment Bill 2019, opposed; the Energy Legislation Amendment (Licence Conditions) Bill 2020, opposed; and the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Fairness) Bill 2021, opposed. This is an opposition that opposes climate –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this bill is a forward-looking bill, as the government would say, in relation to energy legislation amendment. This is not a matter of public importance. This is not a grievance debate. I understand the member has not got enough to say about the bill. But it is not an opportunity to sledge, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the bill at hand.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): This has been a very wideranging debate, and the member for Narracan also put in some opinions about it. I will ask the member for Narre Warren South to continue but also to please speak to the bill.

Gary MAAS: To continue, the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Fairness) Bill 2021 was opposed. By opposing our renewable targets, by opposing legislation in this place, the opposition are denying Victorians thousands and thousands of jobs, and don't they hate it.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I heard what you said earlier. I do note that no member at that time made an interjection, and we do not retrospectively review members' contributions. But I would say that the member is not relevant at all.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): There is no point of order.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:39): I rise today to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023, a bill that I am happy to support. It may not get quite as exciting as your contribution, member for Narre Warren South. This bill is about modernising the quality of the safety frameworks around the delivery of energy in our state, particularly those in renewable energy sectors. While of benefit to our communities, renewable generators such as solar and wind farms have so far not been made to uphold the same level of accountability that traditional energy companies have. Strengthening the existing energy safety compliance framework is set to be done by a series of reforms, particularly the amendment of the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005. These amendments to these bills aim to improve community safety through more effective and targeted regulation of new and emerging energy safety risks, including those posed by emerging renewable technologies. Looking through the amendments, it is clear to see the changes this bill will introduce.

A member interjected.

Annabelle CLEELAND: It gets better. Extension of the mandatory requirements listed under the Electricity Safety Act 1998 means major electricity companies will prepare an electricity safety management scheme and a bushfire management plan. This means businesses identified as posing a greater safety risk to surrounding land through the operation of their electrical installations will now be required to demonstrate a clear plan for mitigating those safety risks. It is hard to criticise amendments that will further work to keep our communities safe, particularly coming from a regional area that is home to several electrical installations and is prone to bushfires.

The prevailing situation is particularly concerning this year, as numerous factors suggest we might be bracing for an exceptionally challenging fire season. Increasing undergrowth in our forests as well as mild winters and high rainfall have created the perfect fuel for potential fires. The looming threat of extended periods of hot, dry weather exacerbates these conditions, increasing the likelihood of catastrophic events this summer. While the changes outlined in the bill are a positive step forward in ensuring electrical installations are safely managed, it remains critical we do not lose sight of the broader context. We need to acknowledge and address the mounting bushfire risk posed by the undergrowth and changing weather patterns. We have already seen issues with our emergency response systems following recent disasters, including the October 2022 floods, and encouraging these businesses to better prepare for these events will protect our communities. Businesses will also be subject to certain safety duties and obligations commonly seen with major electricity companies under the Electricity Safety Act 1998.

These amendments follow a range of policies introduced at state and federal levels over the past two decades, a time when the electricity sector has been replacing carbon-intensive generation with zero-carbon technologies. At the same time, the sector has been moving away from a small number of large-scale facilities owned and operated by a handful of companies towards smaller scale, more widely distributed electricity production. This significant growth in new energy technologies, particularly in renewable energy and storage, has exposed critical gaps and other weaknesses in the energy safety legislative framework that are being addressed through this bill. The current safety framework was developed based on the risk profiles of regulated entities in the late 1990s, which did not factor in the more recent uptake and investment in small-scale renewable or battery installations. The risks posed by these installations are real, with two serious incidents in 2021, which I think just about everyone has mentioned, underscoring the inability of Energy Safe Victoria to regulate these facilities before these incidents occur.

This bill will also include a series of minor technical amendments to help facilitate these changes. These include amendments to the administration of safety management plans by these businesses, ensuring they remain current to technological changes in both electrical installations and the supply of gas. This bill establishes some stricter guidelines following incidents at these renewable energy providers. The amendment will now require an electricity supplier to preserve the site of a serious electrical incident and a gas company to preserve the site of a gas incident, allowing for inspection by an enforcement officer or authorised inspector. Enforcement of these guidelines will be more heavy-handed. Energy Safe Victoria will now be able to hold on to seized items from affected companies or persons for a longer period of time. Energy Safe Victoria and the Minister for Energy and Resources will be given the power to enter enforceable undertakings with regulated entities as an optional tool rather than court proceedings, and the maximum penalties for offences by energy entities relating to maintaining safe networks will be increased.

As a regional member, improving the capacity of this government to manage the transition towards more renewable energy sources is particularly important. Our regional areas, including the Euroa electorate and the wider north-east of Victoria, are set to be the hubs for many renewable energy projects. Regional communities have had every right to be concerned about some of these projects. I have heard of constituents worried about the impact a project might have on their agricultural land. I have heard them speak about the increased risk of fires, about protecting the biosecurity of our farms and primary producers and about ensuring coherent emergency management strategies, and I have

also heard them worry about increases in landholder insurance premiums. While this bill does not address all of these concerns, there are some inroads made.

Another concern about these regional projects has been ensuring that the local communities surrounding them are properly looked after and incorporated into the decision-making process. At the moment in my electorate I have been holding discussions with citizens about the proposed Fera wind farm, something that will impact hundreds of residents between Seymour and Ruffy. Italian company Fera is set to build a 600-megawatt wind farm in the region, with suggestions it could feature up to 100 wind turbines standing 200 metres tall. Residents have been adamant they are not what some might call 'nimbys', instead saying that they are concerned about transparency, changes to proposals and the impact the construction will have on the natural and social fabric of the region. This is in no way an indictment of renewable energy sources but rather raises valid concerns about what this bill hopefully aims to address. A major project like this must be held to the same accountability that we see in other sectors, and I welcome this legislation, as it aims to provide this. The Fera wind farm is just one major project in the region and one that will now hopefully follow stricter regulations when it comes to safety, fire management and more, as this bill is set to pass.

Other projects in the community such as the solar farms in Winton and Glenrowan will also benefit from these amendments. While renewables are rapidly developing across the region, bridging the gap between regional communities and mega corporations is critical to economically and socially positive developments. Making this transition to renewables in the right way can and must bring prosperity to our communities. By sharing the benefits, be it through employment, economic profits or development, we can make sure this switch is not at the expense of the people who call these places home.

There is something I wanted to revisit to finish up, and that is how this bill can be of benefit to communities like the Euroa electorate – communities that have unfortunately been prone to several disasters and left vulnerable due to poor emergency planning and preparedness. My electorate has seen issues with flood preparedness and the use of emergency response systems – something that hopefully will be addressed in the inquiry into the October floods. These issues, while mostly relating to flood responses, send a clear message that preparedness and responses to emergencies must be handled better. When Pyalong faced severe storms in 2021, residents expressed concerns about how they were able to access electricity and communicate with emergency services as well as get in touch with loved ones. These sentiments were shared following the October 2022 floods, which greatly impacted much of the Euroa electorate. In the case of a fire, it is worrying to think that these issues would be present too, particularly if the fire had been caused or exacerbated by electrical or gas installations. Preparing the companies involved to actively prepare for these worst-case scenarios is to me the most important provision made in this bill and why I am happy to support it.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (18:48): Here we are again. I am delighted to rise today to join my good friend the hardworking member for Narre Warren South in his contribution on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023. This is another important bill that we have on the agenda this week – one that will address the current issues associated with the energy safety legislation framework to improve community safety through more effective and targeted regulation of new and emerging safety risks, including those caused by emerging technologies. Energy reform has been a major priority of this government, and we all know how important clean, affordable, reliable energy is for all Victorians. I commend the minister for bringing this bill forward today and for the many initiatives that are being delivered for Victorians across the energy portfolio.

We have seen some really exciting and progressive announcements in recent days and weeks. The change to the residential gas connections announced just last week was an exciting and commonsense announcement. We know across the world the cost of gas continues to increase, and in addition there is a great deal of uncertainty around supply. That combination of factors sees Victorians at the mercy of private companies exporting gas overseas, which has a real impact on the costs for Victorians at home. In Clarinda energy affordability is a major priority for so many families. It is something that is raised

with me time and time again. That is why the Labor government is doing the work to make energy more affordable for all Victorians, getting them the best deal on their home energy bills.

As announced last week, from 1 January 2024 planning permits will only be issued for new homes and residential subdivisions connected to all-electric networks, with houses taking advantage of more efficient, cheaper and cleaner electric appliances. Going forward, all-electric can be delivered at no extra cost to the buyer and will slash around \$1000 per year off households energy bills or up to \$2200 for households that also have solar installed. In another exciting announcement last week, we have made it easier for Victorians to maximise their solar panel generation with a new \$8800 interest-free loan on household batteries. Households with both solar and a battery save around \$1500 on their energy bills each year. A battery will more than double the amount of solar-generated energy consumed in the home, saving money on energy bills and helping Victoria reach net zero emissions by 2045.

We have had several inquiries through the electorate's office on this announcement already, and we can hear the excitement from those who make those inquiries. People are excited about this announcement and are eager to utilise the offer. Just as background, the loans will be repayable over four years and in some cases will reduce up-front installation costs to zero. The loan will also be available in addition to the \$1400 rebate and \$1400 interest-free loan for solar PV if a solar and battery system are installed at the same time, saving eligible households another \$11,600 on up-front installation costs, which is a lot of money and a lot of savings for struggling families. So that is a huge saving and one that I am very proud that we are delivering, helping to make this program as accessible as we can. There are out-of-pocket installation costs, but this is really a significant saving.

We are continuing to deliver a power saving bonus program, which we are all very proud of. The current round is open until 31 August, and I was delighted to see another round announced in the budget. The take-up has been absolutely tremendous. At the beginning of this month more than 18,500 households in the Clarinda district had accessed the bonus. That is \$4.5 million in support of families with cost of living. We will continue to stand by and deliver for all Victorians on energy reform.

This bill here today is another example of that. It has two important overarching objectives. Firstly, the bill will address the current issues associated with the energy safety legislative framework to improve community safety through more effective and targeted regulation of new and emerging safety risks, including those posed by emerging technologies. Further, the reforms will bolster the safety compliance framework by increasing obligations for electricity and gas companies, including owners and operators. As mentioned, two important objectives will be achieved through the amendment of several acts – namely, the amendment of the Electricity Safety Act 1998 to create a new head of power for the minister to declare certain owners or operators of facilities as subject to increased obligations commensurate with major electricity companies, as well as changes to the safety management plan frameworks under the Electricity Safety Act 1998 and the Gas Safety Act 1997 to enhance safety compliance and increasing civil penalties for all breaches of duties in the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005.

These are important changes, and we need clean, affordable and reliable energy and of course safe energy. Over the past two decades there has been tremendous growth in new energy technologies of various scales and a rise in safety incidents relating to these new technologies, and critical gaps and weaknesses in the energy safety legislation framework have been exposed, as we have heard from previous contributions by members in this house. These are important and welcome changes. We have seen through consultation across a broad range of departments and agencies – including the police, emergency services, Energy Safe Victoria and Better Regulation Victoria – that there is broad support for the changes here in this bill. These changes will ensure that the new safety obligations and regulations match pace with the new energy technologies that are taking us forward into the future.

Again, I would like to thank the minister for bringing this bill forward today and for the many initiatives that are being delivered for Victorians across the energy portfolio, particularly those around cost-of-living supports. I am very proud to be a member of the Andrews Labor government that

continues to support families and individuals that need it in the current economic climate. We know that the cost of living continues to be tough on families, and the budget builds on existing support to help with everyday bills.

As I mentioned, we have funded our fourth round of the power saving bonus with another \$250 to help households pay their bills. The electricity discounts and winter gas discounts for eligible concession card holders are to be continued, as is the Victorian default offer, which in 2023–24 will still be cheaper than the price of standard offers prior to the VDO's introduction in 2019.

More broadly, there is free kinder for three-year-olds and four-years-olds, which will save families up to \$2500 per child each year. We have slashed the cost of train travel across the state, bringing regional fares into line with metro fares, and there are many other initiatives. We are expanding free TAFE, and I know that you are quite pleased coming from a teaching background, Acting Speaker Addison. These are important initiatives that provide relief where we need it most, supporting individuals and families with the cost of living in all of Victoria. I commend these initiatives, and I commend the bill to the house.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (18:58): I rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023. This bill will amend the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 to enhance energy safety compliance. As the member for Monbulk, an electorate which has been severely affected by bushfires in the past and where the risk remains high, energy safety is paramount. We know that the devastating Black Saturday fires of 2009 were in part caused by faulty powerlines. Many other fires across this state have also been ignited by electricity. Whilst we can accept that nature's electricity – that is, lightning – is well beyond our control, human-generated electricity is most definitely within our remit and something we must always strive to make as safe as possible.

Thankfully lessons have been learned and legislation and changes have been enacted to safeguard this infrastructure and mitigate the risk of future fires being set off by faulty infrastructure. Following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission into the Black Saturday bushfires, innovative safety features across the traditional energy network have been installed. Now, it is not something you normally do of an evening – sit there and google what these look like – but I did watch a few YouTube videos and demonstrations on the different technologies which we have implemented to ensure that our traditional energy network is safer. Firstly, we installed automatic circuit reclosers. They are next-generation network protection devices. They instantly detect and shut off power at a fault on high-risk fire days on 12.7 kilovolt single-wire earth return powerlines. The CSIRO has estimated that these ACRs reduce the likelihood of ignition on bare-wire powerlines by nearly half.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Commercial firewood industry

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:00): (261) I have had my fair share of airtime today, and I will keep going. It is still related to housing. My adjournment this evening is on an action I am seeking from the Minister for Environment. What my community really wants to know is to do with the current government's plan to cease native hardwood forest logging and operations, which actually occurred in my electorate in the beautiful Otways some nearly 20 years ago now, but we have still been able to maintain a commercial firewood industry, and that industry of course is vital. The action I seek is: will the minister confirm for not only my community but all regional communities who rely very heavily on firewood that their commercial operators will be able to continue beyond 31 December to provide a valuable, essential form of home heating, cooking and other things, which our firewood does?

The firewood industry has been around for a long time, and in fact in my own electorate there are many commercial firewood operators that are multigenerational. They tend to be small family operations. One I visited just recently, where five generations have been on the same coupe in the same area. There are areas of forest that have been set aside now for up to 150 years in some instances, in many parts of country Victoria. Of course up until relatively recent human history we have as a species always relied on firewood to provide heat, warmth, cooking and other things, so it is only natural that in the early formation of the state of Victoria there were many, many areas set aside for well-managed firewood allocations, and these still exist in so many parts of country Victoria today.

They are important resources, and it is really important that in the action that I am seeking from the minister this evening she actually gives it in writing. These people have equipment invested. They have customers who simply will not have time to reinvest in other forms of heating and cooking if the government does not give them adequate time – nor will the people providing them – to find alternatives and make sure next winter they will have a fuel source, because of course you do not magic up a firewood source. It has got to be cut, stored, stacked and dried. There is quite a lead time in providing this essential fuel. So, Minister, it is vital that you come clean for regional Victorians. It is a multimillion-dollar industry. It is a huge amount of energy supplied to homes, and in recent times with the minister deciding not to let people have gas, firewood will be relied upon. If we cannot have firewood, there will be many, many people in regional Victoria left literally high and not so dry next winter.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Before I call the member for Bass, member for Polwarth, the question was to the Minister for Environment; the action – there was a multiple action –

Richard RIORDAN: To provide in writing to me whether they will be able to continue commercial firewood operations.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Polwarth. I just want to reiterate what the Speaker was reading this morning, given we are starting the adjournment debate and I have already just had to make myself clear. The Speaker, I believe, said she observes:

... a pattern emerging in adjournment debate matters where members clearly set out the action they seek of a minister but without specifying the problem that needs solving. The purpose of the adjournment debate is to raise matters of public concern and request that a minister take some action to address the issue. I refer all members to Speaker Christie's and Speaker Andrianopoulos's rulings about the adjournment debate on page 1 of *Rulings from the Chair*. The adjournment debate is not an opportunity to give a set speech on a topic. Instead, members should give bring an issue to a minister's attention and seek the minister's assistance in resolving it.

Hence my taking the time to make sure we are on the right page.

Bass electorate small business support

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (19:04): (262) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Small Business, and the action I seek is that the minister join me in my electorate of Bass to meet and speak with small businesses and be part of a round table with Koo Wee Rup and Lang Lang traders. As the minister knows, 98 per cent of all businesses in Victoria are small businesses. While they may be small, these businesses are at the heart of our local communities, so often supporting all things local, from community groups to sporting clubs, donating raffle prizes to schools and kinders and providing such a welcoming and friendly service as well. We have amazing and hardworking businesses and tourism and trader groups right across the area, bringing people together, working as a collective, networking, supporting each other and visioning and activating their main streets and towns.

From Pearcedale to Tooradin, Koo Wee Rup traders, Lang Lang District Business and Community Group, Grantville Business and Community Association, San Remo to Wonthaggi, the Phillip Island Business Network and across to the reinvigorated Inverloch Tourism Association, so many of our small businesses are also represented at our local markets, which are a much-loved focal point of our towns. They win awards and accolades aplenty for their exquisite local produce and products, including most recently the fiercely independent Howler brewery in Lang Lang, who out of

2800 entries from 21 countries claimed four silver medals for all four beers they entered at the Melbourne Royal Australian International Beer Awards. Paul the Pieman from Inverloch, at Australia's Best Pie and Pastie Competition, received 10 awards: one gold, seven silver and two bronze. I totally recommend the Mediterranean vegetable pie alongside a winning Howler beer. All are keen to explore our business support opportunities and other avenues, including the Tiny Towns Fund recently announced in the budget. We back our small businesses in so many ways, from the Small Business Bus to mental wellbeing grants, the Ready for Growth program and so much more. Our government puts our small businesses at the heart of our economic agenda. I look forward to welcoming the minister to Bass to meet with small businesses to hear the opportunities and priority areas that are important to them and discuss measures in the state budget that support and benefit local traders.

Western Victoria roads

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (19:07): (263) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me and a delegation from the Western Highway Action Committee and the South West Victoria Alliance of councils to discuss the critically dangerous condition of state government-managed roads in western Victoria and the need for urgent funding to fix our roads and make them safe.

The south-west alliance of councils covers off on all of the councils in the south-west of the state: Colac Otway, Moyne, Southern Grampians, Glenelg, Warrnambool and Corangamite. As anyone who lives in this part of the state would understand, it has the worst roads in the state. This is a finding that the RACV determined a number of years ago – that western Victoria, south-west Victoria, was the home to absolutely the worst roads in the state. As I hear from my constituents on a regular basis, those roads are not getting any better, and that is because Labor keep on cutting the funding to Regional Roads Victoria, which means they cannot do their job of resurfacing and waterproofing those roads. The water gets in and then we see these massive potholes created through the road surface. This is something we are seeing not just in that south-west corner, though. We are also seeing it in the northern half of my electorate.

The Western Highway action group have been fierce advocates for many, many years for duplication of the Western Highway. This is a different matter, but something they are very keen to see is the duplication of the highway extended beyond Beaufort right through not just to Stawell but to Horsham and eventually to the border. But because these works have been pushed back and pushed back – the duplication of the highway was due to be completed in 2016 – what we have seen is a gradual erosion of maintenance through that area, and now the potholes are just covering the highway. It is incredibly dangerous to drive on the Western Highway at this point in time. Basically from Ararat right through to Melbourne is horrific, but it is also dangerous west of Ararat. There are sections of the highway that have been reduced to just 60 kilometres per hour. It is so dangerous at night-time because you cannot see the potholes, and many travellers now know if you travel in the right-hand lane, there are fewer potholes than there are on the left, so people are travelling in a way that is not very safe and putting their lives at risk and putting other people's lives at risk too.

We need to make sure we have safe country roads and keep country people safe, so I do urge the minister to meet with these two important groups in my community. Both of these groups have written to the minister seeking a meeting, and the minister has not responded, so I put on the record tonight that I have asked the minister to join me and the south-west alliance of councils and Western Highway action group to talk roads.

Point Cook electorate kindergartens

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (19:10): (264) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, and it concerns early childhood education. Minister, how is the Victorian Labor government supporting our children and families in kindergartens in the electorate of

Point Cook? I invite you to join me to visit a kindergarten in the electorate. Recently I have had the pleasure of visiting many local early childhood centres within the community, such as Creative Garden Early Learning Point Cook; Goodstart Point Cook, which the minister has actually already attended, and I thank her for her visit at that time and the wonderful artwork from the children there; as well as the exceptional Guardian kinders in the south and east of Point Cook.

Research of course tells us that 90 per cent of a child's brain development occurs before the age of five, and that is why high-quality, play-based education is critical for the development of life skills and for the future of our children and their education. Thanks to the government's Best Start, Best Life reforms, kindergartens in the electorate of Point Cook will be providing free three- and four-year-old kinder for up to 15 hours a week. It helps families. It helps with the cost of living, and that is up to \$2500 per year. By removing the cost barrier to early education, we are also supporting primary carers, predominantly women, to make the choice to return to the workforce if they wish.

We are also seeing in the kinders that I have visited so far updates to people's education certificates and diplomas as they upskill on the job. It is a great thing that is going on in the education sector locally. I would appreciate any further information that the minister can provide on how the Andrews Labor government is supporting early childhood learning right across Point Cook, and I look forward to a visit from the minister to accompany me to an early childhood learning centre.

Berwick electorate roads

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (19:12): (265) I rise to raise an adjournment for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in relation to Clyde Road, Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road and Thompsons Road in the Berwick electorate, some of the big issues we have in that part of the world. What we have been hearing recently, particularly from the government, is around the intersection of Thompsons Road and Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road, where there are going to be upgrades. They are promising an upgraded intersection, lights et cetera to ensure we can improve safety, and it is something that in our community we would welcome. There you go – it is not often you hear it, but we would welcome that. However, it is a bit sad when we start to speak to some of the government departments, who tell us now that that funding, which everybody was willing to go on the front page of the *Berwick Star News* and look all excited about, is five years away. Part of that, the government's argument is, is because of planning – because they need to plan for that intersection. However, we have known that growth is coming to that area ever since one government – the government opposite – took away the green wedge zone in Clyde and turned it all into housing yet had no plan for what they were going to do with Clyde Road, Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road, Thompsons Road, Glismann Road and Linsell Boulevard. You can go through every road down there; they had no plans for what they were going to do.

The action that I call for from the minister is I would like the minister to go for a drive along Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road and Clyde Road during the peak hours of the morning and the afternoon – I do not say they have to do it with me; I am happy for them to do it in the ministerial limousine with their own driver – to see how long it takes them to get from Clyde North into the city. An example is that I trained at the BFT gym in Clyde North, an amazing local business which has wonderful support from our community. To get from the gym, which is just near Thompsons Road, back to the Monash Freeway and into the city took me 1 hour and 23 minutes. The sad part of that trip was it took 35 minutes just to get back to the freeway; that is only a couple of kilometres.

The roads out there at the moment have been neglected for so long. The planning has been so poor. The council and the government have failed to work together. The continuous argument that the developers will be doing their part and the government will not put money in to make sure these roads have continuous upgrades has to end, because the residents out in Clyde North deserve better. Yes, they have got O'Shea Road now, which has helped. However, the road from Clyde North to get onto the Monash Freeway and come into the city is appalling. I am calling on the minister to go and trial those roads during those peak hours, and I am more than happy for them to take the member for Cranbourne, the member for Bass, the member for Narre Warren North and the member for Narre

Warren South if at the end of the day it is not just for a photo for the paper but for actual funding to fix our roads.

Rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluk) Action Plan

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:15): (266) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Water, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me and meet with community groups in the Bellarine to assist the community in understanding the progression of the *Rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluk) Action Plan*. The Barwon River and catchment has some of the state's most stressed waterways, and significant population growth as well as climate change are expected to place increasing pressures on the health of the catchment's waterways and its natural landscape. Simultaneously, the waterways are very much high-value places for people in my electorate to connect to nature and with each other and to support their health and wellbeing.

In recognising these challenges, the recent state budget had invested \$10 million to establish a Green Links fund that will provide a long-term strategic plan in response to these biodiversity and amenity priorities. Having traditional owner and community support for this plan has been a wonderful initiative, but I know that the local community groups in the Bellarine would greatly appreciate the minister coming down to the Bellarine to discuss any upcoming plans. So the action that I seek is that the minister join me and meet with community groups to assist the community in understanding that progression of the rivers of the Barwon action plan.

Mornington electorate sports facilities

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (19:16): (267) My adjournment matter is for the Premier. The action I seek is for the Premier to meet me and representatives of local sporting organisations such as Mornington Little Athletics to discuss the impact of the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games on them along with their need for facility upgrades and investment. The Andrews Labor government's decision to cancel the games due to its own financial mismanagement has robbed local athletes of an opportunity to compete in front of their home crowd. It has robbed Victorians of the opportunity to be inspired by seeing their chosen sport at the highest level in person. It has robbed us of local tourism opportunities. It has robbed us of opportunities to inspire young Victorians to dream and further their sporting careers. One example is Marcus La Fontaine Pollard, a local under-18 Australian long jump champion. Marcus is a member of the Mornington Peninsula Athletic Club and was looking forward to the Victorian Commonwealth Games. Now his and his family's costs to attend the games will be greater, and he will not be able to perform in front of hundreds of friends and family locally and thousands of Victorians.

The cancellation of the games adds a further issue for local sporting organisations in the Mornington electorate and beyond, many of whom need urgent facility upgrades. For example, Mornington District Basketball Association needs new courts, and clubs such as Mornington soccer, Mornington civic bowls, Peninsula Pirates baseball, Mornington junior football, Moorooduc junior football, Mount Eliza bowling and many others need upgrades. I fear these local sports clubs will also suffer because of the same financial mismanagement that led to the games cancellation in the first place, with state Labor's debt projected to go to more than \$300 billion over the next decade and interest payments soon to pass \$22 million a day. The rationale for cancelling the Commonwealth Games was an updated cost of \$7 billion, which would have made it the most expensive games in history – way more than the government's original costing of \$2.6 billion, which it confirmed in the budget only months ago.

However, there are reports that games compensation and cancellation costs may be more than \$1 billion, not to mention the \$2 billion cost of games legacy projects that the state have committed to building anyway. This would make the cost of not having the games more than the total cost of having the 2022 Birmingham games, which was just \$1.8 billion. This comes after the Premier promised before the election that:

We will deliver the projects we said we would deliver. We will not be breaking promises and cancelling projects.

But he has done just that, and instead of looking at cancelling things like the white elephant \$200 billion-plus Suburban Rail Loop, he has embarrassed Victoria on the international stage and robbed athletes and Victorians of opportunity and inspiration. He has also put at risk Victoria's ability to secure other major sporting events if organisers are not confident that Victoria can follow through. Premier, I do repeat my call to you to join me to discuss the impact of the games cancellation with my local sporting clubs along with their need for facility upgrades and investment.

Gambling regulation

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:19): (268) The adjournment matter that I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation and concerns the Andrews Labor government's gambling harm reforms. The action I seek is that the minister provide more information on how the new reforms will reduce gambling harm at venues with electronic gaming machines in my electorate of Narre Warren South.

I recently commissioned the *Electronic Gaming Machine Usage in Narre Warren South* parliamentary internship report from Melbourne University student Jack Keating. Jack's detailed report focuses on electronic gaming machines in a suburban and socio-economically disadvantaged context in terms of trials and current government mitigation mechanisms and provides recommendations too. The report found above-average density of electronic gaming machines in the electorate of Narre Warren South with one of the highest annual player expenditures, with households averaging \$1000 of gaming losses per annum – that is for each and every household in Narre Warren South. This figure has risen significantly over the last four years. Jack's full report – it is an excellent report – is available through the parliamentary library, but you can also download it at that much-visited website garymaas.org.au.

But seriously, and in the context of Jack's report, I welcome the recent state government harm minimisation reforms, including mandatory precommitment limits; carded play with limits of \$100, down from \$1000; and mandatory closure periods. I have long advocated for further reforms to reduce the impact of gambling on our communities and in particular my constituents. Jack Keating's report, recent reforms and the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's hearings on reducing the harm caused by gambling are all very good steps towards addressing these issues. There is still so much work to do. I would appreciate it if the minister could provide further information on how the new gambling reforms will reduce gambling harm at venues with electronic gaming machines in my electorate of Narre Warren South, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Hands Up Mallee

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:22): (269) My adjournment is for the Minister for Youth Justice, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit the city of Mildura and engage with the incredible members of the community and agencies who have come together to help tackle the escalating youth crime issue. The rising youth crime rate in Mildura is an issue I have raised in this place before with the Minister for Police and Minister for Crime Prevention, and whilst we eagerly await his visit to Mildura on this and some other matters, the community, who are leading a response together, are calling for ministerial engagement as a matter of urgency and in fact as a matter of public safety.

For context, retail stores in Mildura are having to close their main entrances during the day and tell actual customers that they have to enter through the rear door just to protect their staff and their stock. It is costing small business a fortune. In fact Kmart over the weekend had to close early – no-one wants Kmart to close early – just to protect staff and customers again from a group of 'rogue youths on a rampage', as it was reported to my office. Traders in Mildura city heart have reported brazen daily thefts. The rate of residential break-ins whilst home owners are actually home is rising, and the community are just at their wits' end.

We need ministerial engagement. This is above politics – this is a matter of public safety and for the future of these young people and for their families. The issue of youth crime in our community must be community led, and it is being community led. There are some incredible people such as Jane McCracken from Hands Up Mallee, who is doing an absolute power of work in this space, and we are so lucky to have her as a local community champion at Hands Up Mallee, bringing community and agencies together to discuss the fundamental issues, why they are occurring and what needs to be done to fix them. Hands Up Mallee are doing the work to change population-level outcomes alongside community, service providers and government, and they are simply asking for more of a government presence at the table. They want to work in partnership – that is the only way we will resolve this – and we are asking for your help, Minister.

Hands Up Mallee, along with this group of community members, who have been just brilliant in their response and their pragmatism, have done an incredible job to this point. They have done the groundwork and now need you and your department to buy into this solution. Hands Up Mallee should be applauded for the real and meaningful change they are trying to create, which is driven by community – but they cannot do it alone. We need you, Minister, to sit down with Hands Up Mallee and the groups that are already working together, like I have said, and get an idea of what pieces can be moved on this chessboard to bring about real, positive change for the sake of the community, who are at breaking point.

Free TAFE

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (19:25): (270) My adjournment matter is to the Treasurer and relates to his budget announcement to expand free TAFE, and the action I seek is that the Treasurer visit the Casey Warriors to discuss in conjunction with the local TAFE the opportunities that the expansion he announced as part of his budget package will benefit the people who use the club, the club participants. Arana, Suzanne and the terrific Numa Daniel are on the club executive, and they have been eagerly interested in the Treasurer's view on Rugby League because they know he is a very enthusiastic supporter of Rugby League. But they are most interested in the people who go to the club getting jobs, and the expansion of free TAFE they were delighted to hear about when the Treasurer made that announcement as part of his budget contribution. We are very much interested in and looking forward to the Treasurer providing that update.

Responses

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Suburban Development) (19:26): The member for Polwarth raised a matter for the Minister for Environment, and the action being sought was for the minister to confirm in writing that commercial operators could continue beyond 31 December to provide firewood.

The member for Bass raised a matter for the Minister for Small Business, and the action being sought was for the minister to join with the member to meet with small businesses in her electorate to discuss measures in the budget that support local traders, particularly in Koo Wee Rup and Lang Lang.

The member for Lowan raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action being sought was for the minister to join with the member and to meet with the south-west alliance of councils and the Western Highway action group to discuss roads in western Victoria.

The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep. The action being sought was for the minister to provide information on how the government is supporting early childhood education in Point Cook and for the minister to join with the member in Point Cook to meet in regard to this important issue.

The member for Berwick also raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action being sought was for the minister to travel to the member's electorate and to drive from Clyde

North along Clyde Road, Thompsons Road and Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road to see how long it takes to travel to the city.

The member for Bellarine raised a matter for the Minister for Water, and the action being sought was for the minister to meet with community groups in her electorate to provide information on the progression of the *Rivers of the Barwon* action plan.

The member for Mornington raised a matter for the Premier. The action being sought was that the Premier meet with the member and representatives of local sporting groups to discuss the impact of the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games and the need for facility upgrades.

The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. The action being sought was for the minister to provide further information regarding the new harm minimisation reforms at venues with electronic gaming machines in his electorate.

The member for Mildura raised a matter for the Minister for Youth Justice. The action being sought was for the minister to visit Mildura and engage with agencies who come together to respond to local issues regarding youth justice in her electorate.

The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the Treasurer, and the action being sought was for the Treasurer to join with the member in her electorate and to visit the Casey Warriors to discuss the free TAFE expansion commitments in the budget.

I will refer all of these matters to the appropriate ministers for action.

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

House adjourned 7:29 pm.