



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 19 March 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

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 ¹	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 ²	South Barwon	Ind	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 ⁵	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ⁶	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁶ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

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

CONTENTS

CONDOLENCES	
Hon. Digby Crozier	897
RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR	
Unparliamentary language.....	906
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Hospital funding	906
Ministers statements: energy policy	908
Ambulance services.....	908
Ministers statements: energy policy	909
Ambulance services.....	910
Ministers statements: schools funding.....	911
Teacher misconduct.....	911
Ministers statements: energy policy	912
Melbourne Airport rail link	913
Ministers statements: energy policy	914
RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR	
Constituency questions	914
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Polwarth electorate	914
Glen Waverley electorate.....	915
Morwell electorate.....	915
Wendouree electorate.....	915
Evelyn electorate	916
Northcote electorate	916
Naracan electorate.....	916
Melton electorate	916
Warrandyte electorate	917
Lara electorate.....	917
BILLS	
Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024.....	917
Introduction and first reading	917
Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2024.....	918
Introduction and first reading	918
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	918
PETITIONS	
Campbells Bridge wind farm	918
DOCUMENTS	
Homes Victoria.....	919
Project Summary: Ground Lease Model – South Yarra, Prahran, Hampton East and Port Melbourne	919
COMMITTEES	
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee	919
Alert Digest No. 4.....	919
DOCUMENTS	
Documents	919
BILLS	
Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023	920
Council's amendments.....	920
Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024	920
Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023	920
Royal assent	920
National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024.....	920
Appropriation.....	920
ANNOUNCEMENTS	
Ombudsman	920
MOTIONS	
Ballarat Gold Mine.....	920

CONTENTS

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Standing and sessional orders	926
MOTIONS	
Middle East conflict	927
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Program	927
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Firewood collection	933
Pauline Toner prize.....	934
Country Fire Authority Wattle Glen brigade.....	934
Lowan electorate projects	934
Natalie Rabey.....	935
Housing.....	935
Sandie Braun.....	936
SunFest	936
Aiden Gorozdis.....	936
Holi Festival of Colours	936
Ramadan.....	937
Country Fire Authority Epping brigade	937
Gippsland East electorate mental health services.....	937
Soul+Food.....	937
Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre	938
Balwyn High School	938
Women in Rescue.....	938
Tibetan New Year	939
Melbourne Youth Orchestras	939
Hastings electorate schools.....	939
Hastings electorate community events	939
Nepean electorate schools.....	939
Sorrento Cricket Club	940
Pakenham early learning centres.....	940
Pakenham electorate housing	940
Sammy's Community Pantry	940
St Brigid's Catholic Primary School, Officer	940
Pakenham and District Agricultural and Horticultural Show	940
Qaim Foundation iftar dinner	941
ASEAN–Australia Special Summit.....	941
Ramadan.....	941
Bakhdida fire.....	942
Boomerang Bags	942
Village 21	942
BILLS	
Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023	942
Council's amendments.....	942
Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024	949
Second reading.....	949
ADJOURNMENT	
Glen Huntly level crossing removals.....	970
Tareit electorate bus services.....	971
Wild dog control	971
Lakeview Senior College.....	972
St Bede's College, Mentone.....	973
Point Cook electorate schools	973
Timber industry	973
Sunshine police station.....	974
Regional health services.....	974
Family violence	975
Regional health services.....	976
Responses	976

Tuesday 19 March 2024

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

Condolences

Hon. Digby Crozier

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:03): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Digby Crozier and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Portland from 1985 to 1988, member of the Legislative Council for Western Province from 1973 to 1985 and Minister of Tourism and Minister for State Development and of Decentralisation from 1976 to 1978, Minister of State Development, Decentralisation and Tourism from 1978 to 1979, Minister for Local Government from 1979 to 1981 and Minister of Mines and Minister for Minerals and Energy from 1981 to 1982.

Digby Crozier was a servant of our state and the nation in every sense of the word. He was part of that postwar generation of Australians who put their country, their family and their community above all else. He lived a life guided and driven by the values and principles ingrained within him, and through his long service in this place he contributed so much to the fabric of our state.

In reading the details of his early life, it is easy to see why Digby could have done anything, been anything and lived anywhere. Born in London, schooled at Geelong Grammar and educated at Cambridge, the sky was his limit. But it was as a Victorian sheep and cattle farmer that Digby found his calling. He was a pastoralist before he was a politician. He recognised the importance of regional representation, and he knew the value of hard work. He understood deeply the enormous impact government could make on the outcomes of farming families and communities, and it was that understanding that drew him to this place. As Digby himself noted as a Liberal in the Legislative Council at that time, he was somewhat of a rarity having no prior family or former links to the Victorian Parliament. I can only imagine his delight and pride in the creation of his own political dynasty.

In his very short inaugural speech to the chamber – it was less than 600 words – Digby identified two causes that called him to stand: strengthening the role of the states in our federation, something we continue to agree with to this day; and serving his community. He brought that same purpose of mind to his positions in cabinet, and across many ministerial portfolios he led with bold and transformative change. His work did not just improve lives, it created new jobs, supported growing communities and set our state on a better, more prosperous path. As minister of state development, Digby fought hard to see Portland become home to the new Alcoa smelter. Today the legacy of that advocacy can be seen in the hundreds of jobs at that Alcoa plant in Portland, which still supports this very special part of our state, and the enormous growth that the smelter has continued to offer western Victoria for decades and generations. Reflecting on the work he undertook to get Alcoa over the line, Digby said:

We knew we were taking big chances in winning Alcoa for Portland. I remember one of the Alcoa chiefs at the time saying, ‘You have a window of opportunity.’ ... If we didn’t take it, it would slam shut ...

The smelter is there now and it is playing a positive role for Portland, the port and –

Victoria’s –

export earnings.

Digby was a man who stood up for what he believed, and he understood every single corner of his 37,000-square-kilometre electorate because he was such a big part of it. Though, as is the case with so many leaders of his time and indeed often as the case is still today, Digby did not do it alone. As a

former parliamentary colleague of Digby's once said, 'He could never have carried out his duties without the support of his late wife Jill.'

I am told that even after retirement both Digby and Jill remained committed members and dedicated supporters of their local Liberal branch. And of course in Parliament today his daughter Georgie sits as a member for Southern Metropolitan Region and Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council. As another daughter whose father and mother instilled in me so many of the values, principles and obligations I believe in and helped inspire my own interests and involvement in politics, I have no doubt that Digby would have been so enormously proud to see his daughter enter this place and that his legacy – that enormous legacy – continues to live on.

Digby Crozier helped build a better state for all Victorians but particularly for regional and farming communities. In his portfolio he led bold and transformative change, and he lived his values every single day. He helped make Victoria a better and more prosperous place for all of us. So on behalf of the government and the people of Victoria I extend my heartfelt condolences to his family, his parliamentary colleagues and his friends. I particularly extend our thoughts to his children Georgie, John and Annabel, his grandchildren Kate, Lachie, Sam, Charlie, Tom, Harry and Freddie and acknowledge his late wife Jill and son Will. Our thoughts remain with all of you. Vale, Digby Glen Crozier.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (12:09): I am delighted to join the Premier in support of this condolence motion for Digby Glen Crozier. The passing of Digby this year at the age of 96 marks the loss of a respected former Victorian member of Parliament and distinguished minister. Digby served his local community in western Victoria with honour and distinction. He was a dedicated minister and someone who made a significant contribution to our state and our community's enduring fabric. He was a titan of the Liberal Party, known for his respectful and courteous manner and his great passion for regional Victoria. But Digby was also known for his sense of humour, and in preparing this speech I had the opportunity to review his 1973 inaugural speech. His opening contained, to the great amusement of the house, the sage advice that an inaugural speech should be made as early as possible and should be concluded as speedily as possible.

Digby was born in London in 1927. His parents Nancy and Towser returned to Australia in 1932 and purchased a sheep grazing property near Casterton. From age seven Digby attended Geelong Grammar School, completing his schooling in 1944. He had a particular fondness for both history and English, interests that were supported by headmaster JR Darling and history master Manning Clark.

In 1944 Digby enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy at the age of 17½, during his final term at school. He was mobilised in June 1945 and was in the final stage of his initial training at Flinders naval depot in Victoria when the war ended. He performed a number of duties on the HMAS *Warrego* and was subsequently demobilised in 1946 with the rank of able seaman. After honourably serving his country in the navy, Digby attended Caius College in Cambridge, where he studied history, graduating with a bachelor of arts and then later a master of arts.

Digby's strong interest in politics developed in his senior years at Geelong Grammar and at Cambridge. After returning home to Australia in 1949 he became actively involved in the Liberal Party and remained such throughout his life. Digby volunteered at the pivotal 1949 election, handing out how-to-vote cards for the then Liberal candidate for Wannon and subsequent Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. He settled down and became a grazier like his parents, marrying Jill Salter in 1957. They were inseparable and had five children together.

A willingness to serve the Australian people is a strong, persistent value in the Crozier family. Digby's great-grandfather John Crozier was a member of the Legislative Council in South Australia from 1867 until 1887. I am proud to say, as has been noted, that Georgie Crozier in the other place is a fantastic friend to many of us, me included, and represents the Victorian people and the Liberal movement today as Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council.

Digby ran for and was elected as a councillor at Glenelg shire from 1965 to 1973, serving as president from 1967 to 1968. In 1973 Digby was elected to the Victorian Legislative Council as a Liberal member for Western Province. Over the next 12 years he represented Victorians living in the west of our great state before shifting to the Legislative Assembly, winning the seat of Portland in 1985. He served the Victorian people in Parliament for 15 years. His ministerial career spanned six portfolios across 10 years in the Hamer and Thompson Liberal governments, including minerals and energy, mines, local government, state development, decentralisation and tourism.

Digby's respect and popularity across the breadth of the parliamentary Liberal Party and indeed across the Parliament contributed to his elevation to the position of deputy leader in the Legislative Council in 1978. Following the defeat of the Thompson government in 1982, Digby was appointed to the position of shadow minister for minerals and energy and subsequently Shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

In terms of his ministerial accomplishments, Digby was instrumental to the Hamer government's push to decentralise Victoria's public service. In an effort to bring public decision-makers closer to where Victorians lived and were impacted by those decisions, Digby worked to grow the Victorian public service in regional centres instead of centralising them in Melbourne. This was part of a wider push he was committed to to incentivise development in Victoria's regions, especially in the industry and tourism sectors. Industrial and commercial enterprises often sit at the centre of regional communities, which makes them vital. Digby understood this fundamental fact, and it contributed to his strong and ultimately successful advocacy for Alcoa to build their new smelter in the city of Portland. Today over 400 Victorians living in and around Portland have a well-paying job thanks to Digby Crozier. Beyond this, over \$100 million is injected into the local economy in supply contracts, and our country enjoys a more resilient supply chain, with roughly a fifth of Australia's aluminium produced here in Victoria.

Digby firmly believed that Victoria's regions are deeply intertwined with our great state's identity and prosperity. This is why he supported the successive investments made by Liberal governments of which he was a part into Victoria's tourism industry. These investments have paid off, and today people come from across the country and around the world to explore regional Victoria, from historic goldfields near Ballarat to the picturesque Warby-Ovens National Park near Wangaratta.

After retiring from politics in 1988 Digby returned to sheep and cattle grazing. He remained an active participant in the community and was a member of both the Victorian Farmers Federation pastoral council and the Victorian Wool Industry Taskforce. Furthermore, he was appointed as chief commissioner of Glenelg Shire Council in 1994 by the Kennett government until the first elections were held in 1996.

On behalf of the Victorian opposition, we convey our appreciation to Digby Glen Crozier for his service to the Victorian people, the Liberal movement and our wider community and extend our sincere condolences to his family and friends. Vale, Digby Crozier. May he rest in peace.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:16): I rise to join the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in speaking on the condolence motion for Digby Crozier. From the outset can I say it is an absolute celebration of a life well lived. If you look at Digby's career before politics, during politics and post politics, he made a significant contribution to his community and to Victoria, and I think if you go to his community down in western Victoria, you will not find anyone who has a bad word to say about Digby and what he did for that community down there.

As has already been said, he was educated at Geelong Grammar and then at Cambridge. He served in the Royal Australian Navy from 1945 through to 1946. He went back and actually served in the civilian military forces from 1954 to 1960 and so had a very distinguished career in making sure that Australia was kept safe. Then he went back to the family property down near Casterton.

What he did before he came to politics, as I have said, was as a local councillor and as a shire president, and he was deeply immersed in the community there. He was very well supported by his family as he

went through that particular time. There was an article out of that august newspaper the *Hamilton Spectator* saying that when he was actually campaigning, Annabel, his daughter, was two weeks old and her basket was parked on top of the piano in the mayor's room in Horsham while Digby actually went out campaigning. So from a very early age the Crozier family was involved in Digby's career and supported his career right through that particular time.

As has also been said, in his inaugural speech in this place he took some time to talk about the constitution and the federal-state relations that go on in Australia and the fact that after 50 years of federation the states' powers had been reduced, and it was particularly under the threat or the fact that the federal government had the powers of excise and revenue raising and did not necessarily share the money with the states. I think we would be in unison in this house in acknowledging those particular things.

One of the things that we all find interesting as we look at the history of politicians is that in your day-to-day role as a local MP you get to do some very, very interesting things. I notice that at the Branhholme Bushwhackers Carnival he was a champion eel skinner. We all get to deal with some slippery customers as MPs, but I am sure that was probably one of the more slippery customers you would have to deal with – but those are the sorts of things that you do have to do in your political career.

After a distinguished time serving in the upper house Digby stepped down to run for preselection for the seat of Portland. I note with interest that one of the Liberal candidates against him was one Judith Troeth, who actually went on to serve this state with distinction as a senator after that particular preselection that she did not win at that time.

There is an interesting article in the *Sunday Telegraph* that talks about Digby's time as the Minister for Local Government when he sacked the Melbourne City Council. The article goes on to describe him as the toughest man in the Victorian political arena. He spoke to this journalist about the pain and pressure of being a political heavy, as he was called at that particular time. The issues that he actually sacked the Melbourne City Council for were as part of Rupert Hamer's 'making it happen' wave of activity. The council were sacked for alleged corruption in the running of their internal nursery at that particular time. But it was more a spark, I suppose, as it was described at the time, for government action, when they were highly critical of the planning inertia of Melbourne City Council – people can probably relate to that. The fact was that the mall redevelopment was dragging on for three years with no end in sight.

I think we have got projects like that at the moment in Melbourne. The government wanted to bring the city back to life and wanted more transparent, accountable planning processes and protocols in place. Digby at the time said the city was on the skids and Collins Street, the City Square and high-rise development all needed tidying up. He said the Melbourne City Council was an environment of frustration, not decision-making.

He had some interesting times when he was going through this particular part of his life. He was asked: how do you handle this pressure as an MP and as a minister and as a decision-maker?' He said:

When things get really hot I often recall Harry Truman's words, 'If you don't like the heat, get out of the kitchen.'

One of the ways he dealt with the heat in the kitchen – he did not get out of it – was that you do not let the criticism upset your routine to any degree. He still ran in the mornings, and he still did some gym work at that particular time. He went on to praise his family, saying:

This helps to balance the constant pressure public life can impose. My wife has been wonderfully supportive and the kids have learnt to accept the situation but they all make very real sacrifices.

The fact that Georgie, after living that life, came into Parliament says a lot for her character as well around those particular issues.

There was an infamous list of John Brumby's: the Premier's 21 top cronies of Jeff Kennett. He was in some very good company there with Peter Ross-Edwards, former leader of the National Party. I knew Peter well. I cannot see Peter Ross-Edwards being anyone's crony, as Digby Crozier was probably not a crony as well, but he was there with Leonie Burke, Ron Walker, Nick Papas, Tom Austin – former minister in this place – and Ken Crompton. I think John Brumby bit off more than he could chew when he took on that particular group at that particular time, and as I am told, it did not fare well in the debate in this chamber when that issue was actually moved as a motion in the Parliament.

I think Digby would be looking down on us and be very happy with the fact that he has actually got into 'Backroom Baz'. A lot of people here compete to get into 'Backroom Baz'. They think it is a badge of honour; I am not sure it is. But 'Backroom Baz' was very complimentary of Digby's service in this place, so thank you to 'Backroom Baz' for passing on those particular things.

I suppose I would like to finally finish with the words that his daughter Georgie Crozier put in the article in that august journal, the *Hamilton Spectator*, again:

Ms Crozier said her father was always supportive of her political endeavours and gave her great counsel.

"He followed what I was doing closely," she said.

"We spoke nearly every day where he would ask what was happening in the Parliament or what was happening in my current shadow portfolio (health) or more broadly the issues of the day.

"Dad remained interested right to the end on issues affecting the state, national and international political scenes.

"He understood times had changed from his time in Parliament, and often would comment on the current political environment especially the challenges of a fast-moving media cycle and a world where social media had huge influence on the electorate.

"Dad was amazing right to the end.

"We all adored him and we were so lucky to have him for as long as we did.

"I'm incredibly proud of his legacy and what he contributed in public life and to the community more broadly."

I think that sums Digby up perfectly. Vale, Digby Crozier, and particularly to his family and especially to Georgie our sympathies on Digby, who was such a great man.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:24): We all come to this place wanting to make a difference, wanting to stand up for our community, and Digby Crozier had that in spades. He was a community man. He put service above self, and we saw that in every part of his life. He lived his 96 years to the absolute fullest and did everything; he made every bit of his life. We have already heard from people today just what a massive contribution Digby Crozier made to Victoria, to his community and also for his family.

Digby was somebody that even from a very early age was able to put his hand up and volunteer and support the community. As a young boy growing up on the family farm, his desire to serve meant that he put his hand up for the Wando fire brigade, a precursor to the CFA, and fought in the bushfires on Black Friday in 1939 at the age of 12. So this is somebody that started his service to community at a very, very young age. He attended Geelong Grammar and enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy in his last term of school in 1944 at the age of 17. So we know from Digby's career and from sitting down and talking to our good friend Georgie Crozier what an inspiration Digby was to the family and to everybody that he came across. In fact, after he succeeded Digby as the member for Portland, former Premier Denis Napthine said:

Not only was Digby Crozier an excellent Minister; he was also a man of the people ... all I had to say was that I was taking over from Digby Crozier and his name was instantly recognised. Not only was his name instantly recognised by the electors, but also, in 99 per cent of cases, an elector whom I met would say "Digby achieved this for me. Digby did that for me." That was the type of person he was.

We have heard already that was not only as local member and not only as a member in the other place, the Council, where he served as deputy leader, but also in his time as minister. He spent 15 years in Parliament – 12 in the Council, three as the member for Portland in the Assembly and six as cabinet minister, including as minister for state development, decentralisation, tourism, local government, mines, minerals and energy.

I think particularly his focus around decentralisation was a real passion for him, and in fact he was somebody that stood up for the regions. He was part of the regions but stood up for the regions, and he certainly framed the phrase ‘A state of cities rather than a city-state’, which I know the member for Bulleen has championed, following suit. I think if you go back to then and what Digby was trying to do way back then, we would probably be a very, very different place in terms of the infrastructure and support and everything for places right across the state. That is what he was passionate about. Whether it be at council level, where he was prior to becoming a member of Parliament, or even afterwards, he championed that.

There are some great yarns about Digby’s experience: the fact that as a young boy the then Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies signed off on him being able to take part in an agricultural trip to the US. While he was there he got to see the young JFK in the Senate on his feet, and that inspired him and his politics in terms of seeing somebody very articulate and very passionate. I think he came back and said, ‘That man will go a long way.’ He was probably very right, as we all know.

Particularly through talking to Georgie I have come to understand that Georgie grew up in a household that was very much a political household – like many of us probably did – but people probably do not understand the important role that Jill, his wife, played. Jill was the rock. Jill was very much up and about when it came to Liberal Party activities and putting her thoughts forward and also to running the farm, which was a big part of it. The whole family got involved in that.

Digby was very proud of all his children. When Georgie took up nursing he was very proud, particularly because Digby’s wife Jill was a nurse and it was great to be able to see that Georgie followed in her mother’s footsteps initially. When Georgie became a nurse, during that period it became pretty tough to have her dad being a member for Parliament. She copped a fair bit of abuse during the strikes at the time. She wanted to be out there doing her best for her patients and the people that she was serving, and she came back and was talking to her dad about whether she should run for politics. Initially she was pretty hesitant about that, and they did a bit of a pros and cons list about whether she should or should not. Her first reaction was, ‘Dad, you know, I think we need more Peter Costellos in Parliament with finances and everything else.’ He turned to Georgie and said, ‘No, we need more people with a heart that understand things like our healthcare system. We need more nurses. We need more people like you.’ It was that pros and cons list that led to the pro of Georgie ultimately joining this place. Digby and the whole family again were very proud of Georgie and what she has become and the true friend she has become for all of us on this side of the house and the respect that she has got from all sides of the chamber.

I pay tribute to Digby for what he has done for Victoria – the legacy that he has left behind with his children, who have all gone on in their own ways and continued to achieve, unfortunately with the passing of Will more recently. Ninety-six was a big innings, but certainly we should all be very proud of what he has been able to achieve for this wonderful state. To his family: thank you. We pay our respects to him. Vale, Digby Crozier.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (12:30): I rise today to reflect upon the life and the legacy of the late Honourable Digby Glen Crozier, who passed away recently at the age of 96. While I never met Digby, I feel like I know Digby. This is for a couple of reasons. One is of course because Digby and his wife Jill and his family lived in my electorate of Lowan, at the beautiful property of Kalabity in Wando Vale near Casterton. It is a beautiful part of the world, and I am always amazed that every time I go to that region somebody will ask me, ‘Do you know the Croziers?’ And they will reflect upon, in a very, very positive way, the interactions that they have had with the Crozier family, particularly Digby’s life

as a member of Parliament, as a councillor, as a commissioner and, most importantly, as a very active and very well respected and well loved community member.

There is always one degree of separation, it feels, in the country, and certainly that is the case with Digby. Recently – in fact in January of this year – I met with somebody who reflected upon their time as the babysitter for the young Croziers at Digby and Jill’s property of Kalabity. Like any other human that I speak to who reflects upon their interactions with Digby and Jill, it was with a smile on their face and with enormous warmth and respect for the time that they were able to interact with the family. As I have heard on many occasions, it is not just about Digby as a parliamentarian – and he was renowned as somebody who was a good local member. Someone could bring any issue and Digby would have the respect to listen to that individual and to take their matter to the person that was responsible. He would never have a closed door and say, ‘It’s not my problem. There’s nothing I can do to help.’ He would say, as I heard being referred to just this morning, ‘I know where I can get help for you,’ and that is the mark of a truly good local member. After retirement Digby was still enormously active with his wife Jill in the local community. While we reflect upon a parliamentary contribution often through a condolence motion, it was his contribution in the community that people really do respect and remember enormously fondly.

The other way that I know Digby is through his beautiful daughter Georgie from the other place, who has just entered the chamber. I have heard stories from Georgie about Digby’s thoughts on the current government. Those comments were to spur his daughter on, but most importantly they show he was enormously proud of Georgie. I think that for all of us, all we want to do is make our parents proud. For Ms Crozier in the other place: I know that you have made your family proud. You have made your father proud, you have made your mother proud and you have made your brothers and sisters and all your beautiful nieces and nephews proud. It is all we can ever hope to do.

Of course Digby also left a significant legacy in our region in terms of the Alcoa refinery. Every year it creates \$800 million of GDP for our state and our country. It has created hundreds of jobs and many flow-on jobs as well. It has been a truly successful example of decentralisation and what can happen when you invest in the regions. That is something that Digby will always be remembered for. He was a member of Parliament who came from country Victoria, who had great farming roots and who understood what it meant to work hard in rural areas and understood what it meant to be a fierce voice in Parliament to ensure that you are always fighting for what is right and for country people. He will always be remembered, and he will always be remembered by the Wando Vale and wider Casterton community for his contribution. I offer my deepest sympathies to Georgie, John and Annabel and their families. I acknowledge Digby’s late wife Jill and late son Will. Vale, Digby Crozier.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:35): I am honoured to rise to join my colleagues and pay tribute to the Honourable Digby Crozier MLA MLC and to recognise the legacy of a man who gave so much to the western region of Victoria as a member of this place for 15 years. Digby had a well-earned reputation for being a hardworking local representative dedicated to his community and highly respected from Casterton to Warrnambool, Horsham to Portland and Hamilton to Geelong and right around this great western region where he proudly served for many years.

I would also like to offer my deepest sympathy and pay my respects to my colleague Georgie Crozier, her sister Annabel and her brother John, who are keenly feeling the loss of their beloved father. Georgie, who is following in her father’s footsteps, is continuing the family legacy of providing good governance and service to the Victorian people. I know Annabel and John are great supports to their sister in her role. Georgie embodies the essence of public service and leadership like her father before her. Georgie, your dedication to your constituents and community reflects the noble values instilled by your dad Digby. Your background, which your father highlighted would stand you in good stead – as a nurse – he was quite correct about, and I have deep respect for you and the heart you bring to the role.

I never worked with Georgie, but I know many women who I did work with in western Victoria who did. And I remember Judy Stewart – you will recall Judy – who told me probably a year ago about her experiences working with Georgie Crozier as a nurse and what a great nurse she is – was; we never, ever stop being one.

It is an honour for me to represent today the same region that Digby served so well for all those years and pay homage to this great man on behalf of so many. So many people across western Victoria have contacted me since Digby's passing to share their stories of their own experiences of a man of dignity and morals and pay tribute to the compassion, courage and commitment Digby displayed serving them so proudly.

Digby was a fellow with a broad background, serving with the Royal Australian Navy straight out of school from 1945 to 1946 during the tumultuous period of World War II. It was an indication of the drive in Digby to proudly serve his country and his community. That was something he would realise to its full capacity over the years to come in this place. Digby understood the western region of Victoria and had a grazing property at Wando Vale near Casterton. Digby's love of the land and agriculture were evident throughout his life. He understood farming and was a capable farmer himself, with locals today still recalling the skill and expertise Digby showed around livestock. His understanding and love of agriculture made him a quality representative for the rural community.

On 20 April 1957 Digby married Jill Salter, and they had four children together: John, Will, Georgie and Annabel. Jill too was known for her strong devotion to the communities of western Victoria alongside her commitment and dedication to the Liberal Party. There was never any doubt that Digby was driven by rural issues, nor of his passion for agriculture. Digby's time as a councillor at the Glenelg shire from 1965 to 1973 was evidence of this. As a councillor Digby was a strong spokesperson for rural and regional development, agriculture and country roads, serving as shire president from 1967 to 1968, and he remains fondly remembered.

Hailing from beautiful red gum country in our state's vast west, Digby was passionate about the role of the Country Fire Authority, particularly CFA volunteers, and was himself active for decades as a CFA volunteer in our region. It gave him great pride to see his son John remain an active CFA volunteer despite the challenges they have faced in recent years under this state Labor government. I know Digby personally was terribly disappointed by how the CFA have been treated and the lack of gratitude that hardworking volunteers have received for all they do protecting and serving our country communities.

Digby's passion to advocate for and serve his community only grew, and Digby was elected to the Victorian Legislative Council in 1973 as the Liberal member for Western. When speaking with the Honourable David Hawker AO, who himself served as the member for Wannon for many years, David told me that Digby and Jill worked hard for the community, doorknocking, speaking with the constituency and gaining always a deeper and deeper understanding of what the region needed.

Digby was a committed worker and not afraid to pound the pavement, roll up his sleeves and get things done. In 1976 his hard work and dedication was further recognised when he was elected as a minister in the Hamer cabinet just three years after joining Parliament. According to Digby, 'I think I was the most astonished person in the room.' But what a terrific job he did. Digby's successor, the Honourable Denis Naphthine, recounted to me that this surprise was a good indication of the humble man that Digby was and how respected he was by his colleagues. At his core, Digby was a man driven by old-school principles, principles such as doing for the community and for others and caring for those who are disadvantaged. Digby did this humbly. Digby never put himself on a pedestal; he never big-noted himself. When he saw something that needed doing, he just got on with it – a true man of the country.

As a sheep and cattle farmer from the Western District, Digby saw his passage to the Hamer cabinet as a win for our great state's rural regions, and it certainly was, with Digby using this position to be a strong voice and advocate for rural and regional communities. Digby was keenly aware that agriculture

CONDOLENCES

Tuesday 19 March 2024

Legislative Assembly

905

was the backbone of the state and was a champion of this sector. He also understood the importance of investing in our roads. Digby, like all of us in my electorate, was dismayed by what has become of the Victorian roads in recent times after decades of neglect from Bracks, Brumby, Andrews and now Allan. It was this lack of investment in regional areas that Digby addressed as part of a Liberal government because he understood that Victoria's prosperity lies in its regional communities.

During this time in the Legislative Council Digby served as Minister of State Development, Decentralisation and Tourism, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Minerals and Energy. He was also deputy Liberal leader in the upper house from 1978 to 1979. In 1985 Digby transferred to the Legislative Assembly, winning the seat of Portland. He was Shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services from 1985 to 1988. Throughout his time in Parliament Digby remained committed to regional development. When taking on the role of Minister for Minerals and Energy, he was quoted as saying:

I look to the energy portfolio as one of the most challenging for the 80s.

It is a statement that continues to hold true today. Digby was a visionary and fought hard for a transmission line to be incorporated into the western region of Victoria. He recognised the benefits for industry and businesses large and small of having access to this resource. Digby was right of course, and his vision for Victoria would have made our state a far more prosperous place had successive governments continued the pathway set by Digby.

Digby, it can be honestly said, left a proud legacy for our state like few others. Digby was the minister who had the vision to turn Victoria into a state of cities, not a city-state. I will repeat that: he had a vision to turn Victoria into a state of cities, not a city-state. He realised that the Victorian future was bigger than Melbourne and that, for Victoria to truly succeed, its regions must be supported not exploited and the government must govern from border to border. As minister for decentralisation, Digby lived and breathed this mission, and the livelihoods of so many today are better because of his politics.

It is a tremendous shame that modern governments have abandoned Digby's vision to govern outside the tram tracks and invest in building up Victoria's rural and regional communities. Digby wanted, as part of a proud Hamer Liberal government, to develop and support manufacturing right across the state. He backed in blue-collar workers and was committed to the success of industry development, especially in what is now my electorate of South-West Coast. As a senior member of the Hamer government Digby was instrumental in bringing the aluminium smelter to Portland and was in fact referred to by many as 'the father of the smelter'. What a tremendous legacy the smelter has been for Portland and the south-west, creating thousands of local jobs, investment and industry opportunity for our whole entire region. The smelter has provided thousands of locals with high-paying jobs along with many more jobs in related industries, and so many I speak with today are grateful for Digby's accomplishments, which truly put Portland and South-West Coast on the map. Again, this vision of Digby's has been shamefully ignored by recent Labor governments. I know that Digby could have been proud of his legacy and his contribution to public life and to the community, and this feeling is shared right across the region Digby served.

In 1998 Digby retired from politics, but he did not retire from serving the community he loved. He went on to be the western local government commissioner, again demonstrating he lived a life of service and supporting his community. Digby Crozier will be remembered and cherished as a man devoted to his community.

Digby Crozier, yours was a life well lived and with a profound dedication to your community, leaving a lasting impact on the lives of Victorians but in particular on your beloved western region. Your legacy embodies the epitome of public service, and for that you will always be remembered with much respect. Vale, the Honourable Digby Crozier.

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (12:46): Digby Crozier – born 1927, passed away last month, a member of the Legislative Council and a member of the Legislative Assembly. I will only make a few comments because everything has already been stated, but I will pick up on the article that was referred to by the Leader of the National Party. It is a different Digby to the one I knew, because the article talks about how he was maligned and he was the Victorian equivalent of Russ Hinze, and there are a number of other things in that article. Either the article was wrong or he had mellowed over the years, because whenever I was at a function with Georgie, Georgie seemed to be always on the phone to her dad, and the admiration between Digby and Georgie and vice versa was incredible; it was just true admiration. We all say that we come from very close families, but I think the Crozier family set that high jump bar very, very high with the closeness of the whole family. To be a real Crozier you needed to have a nickname. Digby was ‘Digger’. My favourite was John, who drove tanks in the army, and of course what do you call someone who drives tanks in the army? You call him ‘the Colonel’. Georgie was ‘the Nurse’ because she was a nurse, Will was ‘Willie’ and Annabel was ‘Miss Bell’ of course.

Can I just say that they all worked hard on that farm. It was a beautiful, beautiful property. When they had an event, it was the talking point of the whole district, and everyone was included in those events. All the workers, all the families and all of the neighbours were invited, and it was a significant event. To give you an idea of the man, when Digby retired he stated that he was not going to be a burden on the taxpayer – a very, very noble man indeed.

To John, Georgie, Annabel and their friends and families, my sincere condolences – but especially to you, Georgie. I know there are not many things on your bucket list that I could possibly afford to do, but I know there is one very special item on your bucket list, and that is to go to Cambridge University to see Digger’s name up on the board where he was captain of the boats. I really hope that you can tick off that bucket list item.

Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:50): I move:

That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Honourable Digby Crozier, the house now adjourns until 2 pm today.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 12:50 pm.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 2:01 pm.

Rulings from the Chair

Unparliamentary language

The SPEAKER (14:01): On 7 March the Manager of Opposition Business took a point of order in relation to a phrase used by the member for South Barwon. In the course of debate the member had used an idiomatic expression, which I do not intend to repeat here. The point of order asked me to consider whether the phrase is unparliamentary language for the purposes of standing order 118. While I accept that the phrase was used as a figure of speech rather than a direct comment on an individual, I rule that the use of the phrase is unparliamentary. I am not seeking a withdrawal or apology in this instance, but I advise all members that remarks of this kind are not appropriate and the chamber is a workplace, albeit one for robust debate.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Hospital funding

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for Health. In the first six months of this financial year Victoria’s public hospitals have amassed a record \$1.5 billion deficit. Will reining in this deficit mean cuts to staff and services?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:03): I welcome the question from the Leader of the Opposition. Let me be clear: the once-in-a-generation global pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on our health system here in Victoria – not just here in Victoria but in every other state and indeed around the world. And if you do not ask me, you can ask the member for Malvern, because the other night he and I had the good fortune to have dinner with the Irish Minister for Health, who also explained the very many challenges that their health system is facing and indeed how impressed he was with so much of what we are doing here in Victoria.

Let me outline some of the challenges that our health system is facing at the moment. We have seen record demand on our health service system from a growing population. People are presenting with more complex health issues. We are living longer, but we are living with a greater burden of disease.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we are a minute into the answer and the minister has not yet addressed the question. I would ask you to bring the minister to the question.

The SPEAKER: The minister was referring to the public hospital system. She is being relevant to the question that was asked.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: We can sit back and admire these problems, or we can get on and do something about it. Let me say this: our government has invested this year \$25.8 billion into our health service system. This is a huge amount of investment, and year on year our government has contributed and invested more in health than ever before. Let me also make the point –

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Gippsland South withdrew from chamber.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Let me make this point: we know that health care is more expensive to deliver now than it was prior to the pandemic, so there are a range of challenges. Indeed the member for Gippsland East raised with me just the other day the concern in his region that Bairnsdale hospital is being held to ransom by a private provider of radiology services. So there are a range of complex challenges. I might say the member for South-West Coast routinely talks to me about the challenges getting the healthcare workers –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, as previous Speakers have ruled, the minister does have to actually address the question in responding. The minister has not actually addressed the question.

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

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I was saying, the member for South-West Coast has talked to me about the challenges of recruiting the healthcare workers that we need. Let me say again: the price of delivering that health care has continued to increase, so our government is working with the community on the ways in which we can develop a health system that is fit for purpose and that puts people at the centre of our healthcare system, not politics, which is all those on the other side are interested in.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): Will the minister categorically rule out hospital amalgamations to reduce this deficit?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:07): I welcome the opportunity to answer this supplementary question. Just the other day the Premier and I were at Latrobe Regional Hospital. What a fantastic hospital it is – a hospital, I might remind you, that was sold off by those on the other side

and that the Bracks Labor government had to buy back. So we will not take lectures from those on the other side about cuts to health care.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, can you please draw the minister back to the question?

The SPEAKER: The minister had strayed from the question that was asked. The minister to come back to the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I said earlier in my answer, our government knows that the health system is under pressure as a consequence of the impacts of the pandemic. We will do everything in our power, and it is my resolute commitment as health minister, to put people at the centre, patients at the centre, of the care that we deliver, not politics. That is all they are interested in: politics and profit.

Ministers statements: energy policy

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): I am very pleased to update the house on the government's commitment to cutting red tape and getting on with building the renewable energy projects our state needs. We have seen that since 2015 one in five renewable energy projects has ended up getting stuck in VCAT. That is one in five projects that ends up sitting on the shelf instead of being out there in the ground, having solar panels installed and wind towers built and generating important renewable energy. This red tape has real-world consequences. Today there is around \$90 billion worth of investment value sitting in the pipeline, and in addition to being able to power our state these projects would support something like 15,000 jobs across Victoria. That is an enormous amount of potential energy that we are wasting.

We know that to meet those strong renewable energy targets that we have as a state we need to bring on new generation, and that is why last week with the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Energy and Resources we announced that we are taking a practical step to power up our clean energy processes. From 1 April all shovel-ready projects will be eligible for a new accelerated planning pathway. It will have a dedicated team supporting the application process, and importantly too it will unlock tens of thousands of jobs, helping Victorian families and businesses realise the benefits of cleaner, cheaper, secure renewable energy.

There are different views on how we power this state. There are some who want to cling on to power – cling on to the little bit of power they have. There are others, like the member for Nepean, who want to generate power, who want to grab more power for themselves. We are going to push on and focus on what is important to Victorians, and that is getting more renewable energy in this state.

Ambulance services

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:10): My question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services. Last week the CEO of Ambulance Victoria hurriedly announced a restructure of the organisation, claiming there were duplicate executive roles. What roles are being cut?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:10): I welcome the question from the member for Lowan. Let me say that since our government was elected back in 2014 we have invested more than \$2 billion into ambulance services here in Victoria. We have increased the number of on-road staff by more than 50 per cent. Indeed despite the challenges that our ambulance services have faced as a consequence of the global pandemic, we are seeing steady improvement in ambulance response times. Again, I am really proud of the work of our hardworking paramedics every single day and the life-saving work that they do. Of course our government has supported them in a whole range of ways, be that the establishment of the paramedic centre for excellence at Victoria University, be it the increase in the number of MICA paramedics that are on the road –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant. She was talking about roles within Ambulance Victoria.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Again, the Allan Labor government is committed to ensuring that our hardworking paramedics have the resources that they need. In terms of how Ambulance Victoria organises itself in terms of its internal corporate roles, they are questions that are best directed to the CEO.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:12): Yesterday ambulance union boss Danny Hill said that paramedics across Victoria are working 800 hours of forced overtime every single day. After 10 years of Labor's mismanagement of Ambulance Victoria, why are our paramedics being forced to sacrifice time with family?

The SPEAKER: There is a very tenuous link between the first question and the supplementary. I will allow it this time.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:13): I welcome this question. Seriously, the member for Lowan wants to talk to me about what Danny Hill has had to say? Let me tell you what Danny Hill has had to say about the Liberal–National parties. You might recall, at a time when Ambulance Victoria were under extreme pressure as a consequence of the pandemic, Danny Hill said it was those on the other side that were the virus – that they were the virus attacking our ambulance workers. This is from the same mob that called them militant thugs – seriously. Our government has always stood by our hardworking paramedics and will continue to do so.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is an important question about an important issue, and the minister should be taking it seriously and be relevant.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to come back to the question that was asked. The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: energy policy

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (14:14): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is delivering lower power prices for small business. Today the Essential Services Commission delivered great news for all Victorians: energy prices for small businesses are coming down by 7 per cent. When it comes to energy, the Allan Labor government's record investments are delivering cheaper and cleaner power. We are leading the charge, and small businesses' Victorian default offer is lower than the national default market offer. For the average business the default offer represents a saving of \$266 a year, or for a business that uses a bit more power they will save over \$500 a year.

For those willing to shop around, there are better deals out there. I have been out across the state hearing directly from businesses with the member for Lara, the member for Monbulk and of course the member for Kalkallo recently. Small businesses are always looking for ways to save costs, and today the Allan Labor government has delivered. Prices are coming down. We are driving down energy costs with our investments in renewables, which is good for small businesses.

Those opposite are power tripping over themselves again over energy policy. What will their next meltdown be? Renewable leaders, maybe. On this side of the house we are getting on –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed from the chamber without warning.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, is the minister able to table the notes that she is reading from?

The SPEAKER: Has the minister concluded her ministers statement? Do you wish to continue? Minister, were you reading from notes?

Natalie SULEYMAN: Referring.

The SPEAKER: The minister was referring to notes.

Members interjecting.

Natalie SULEYMAN: It has really got you today, hasn't it? I love it.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bulleen, you can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Natalie SULEYMAN: On this side of the house we are getting on with delivering and making sure that the job of energy transition is what the Allan Labor government is all about. We are committed to delivering cheaper power prices, and most importantly we are delivering for hardworking Victorians and of course our small business community.

Ambulance services

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services. Last November a Ballarat mother was forced to have her leg amputated after she waited more than 4 hours for an ambulance. Ambulance Victoria conducted a review. When will the minister release the review?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:18): I thank the member for the question. I well remember that incident and at the time committed to Ambulance Victoria undertaking that review. I am very happy to follow up and find out where that review is at and how the review has been communicated to the affected patient.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:18): The patient's partner had to call for an ambulance five times. How many Victorians suffered a tragic sentinel event in 2023 because the Allan Labor government cannot manage our ambulance services?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:19): Our ambulance services and our paramedics do a great job every single day. What we have seen is unprecedented demand. In fact we have just come off one of the busiest quarters on record, with record numbers of lights and sirens being required to address the health concerns of Victorians. What our government has done has been to work with Ambulance Victoria to make sure they have got the resources they need to deliver the health care –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, may I seek your guidance? Multiple Speakers have ruled that a minister must address the question that was asked, and the question asked for a simple data point of how many events occurred in 2023. We have seen a number of ministers who will choose a word in the question and refuse to answer the question. We have seen it across multiple weeks, and I put to you, Speaker, that is exactly what is happening now.

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Speaker, it is not clear to me that the supplementary question in any way related to the substantive question. I think the Minister for Health is being very generous in answering the question from the member. The member asked a question in relation to Ambulance Victoria and funding and support, and the minister was entirely relevant.

The SPEAKER: I will rule on the points of order. Manager of Opposition Business, I have ruled on these matters previously. I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question. The minister was being relevant to the question. On the second point of order from the Assistant Treasurer, both the

questions – question 2 and question 3 – and the following supplementaries were very tenuous in their connectivity. However, I have allowed them, and the minister will resume her answer.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Not only have we given Ambulance Victoria the resources that they need, we have also established 29 priority primary care clinics and the Victorian virtual ED, which I had the opportunity to visit with the Premier and local members on the weekend. And can I say that together these initiatives are making sure that we have got ambulances ready, able to respond to code 1 events where and when they are needed.

Ministers statements: schools funding

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:21): It is my honour to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is building the Education State right around Victoria and indeed making schools more sustainable than ever before. Our record speaks for itself: \$30 billion invested over nine years, and we have built more schools than any other state. We are growing the teacher workforce at twice the national average, and our own students are top of the NAPLAN class.

It has been very busy, and I have been back to the Lincraft store with many of my colleagues lately to get on with building more schools and opening them. I joined the Premier, the member for Tarneit more recently, the member for Kororoit, the member for Laverton, the member for Melton and the member for Pakenham. I also was out in Clyde North in the member for Berwick's patch. I did not invite him, because he was too busy on his calculator and his Excel spreadsheet and he could not come to the school.

We are getting on with making sure our schools are more modern and sustainable than ever before. Joining the Minister for Climate Action, we are making sure that our schools have solar, that they are green. We are even going around making sure that all of our schools, no matter where they are – the member for Ripon is not here –

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Berwick withdrew from the chamber.

Ben CARROLL: The member for Ripon is not here, but I know the Leader of the Opposition's chief of staff will be very proud of what we have been able to do, putting solar panels on the local school there. Whether it is Beaufort Secondary College, Point Cook secondary college or Lara Secondary College, we are making sure that all of our schools are invested in and also that all of the students are working and studying in the most important environment there can be.

We are also making sure that we are providing more construction jobs through our school build but also some 350 ongoing jobs, whether it is principals, teachers or business managers. We are getting on with it. We are very focused on making sure our schools are greener than ever before, while those opposite are focused on greener pastures.

Teacher misconduct

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:23): My question is to the Minister for Education. There are hundreds of registered staff facing serious allegations of misconduct who the Victorian Institute of Teaching has failed to place on interim suspension. How can students be safe with these teachers still in the classroom?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:24): I thank the shadow minister for her question. This is a very serious matter. I want to make it very clear to all members that we take the safety and wellbeing of our students incredibly seriously. Indeed I met with the head of the Victorian Institute of Teaching this morning as soon as I saw that article that

appeared, and I want to reassure all our families that safety of children across our education system is our priority. I also sought assurances from the Victorian Institute of Teaching. There is no teacher currently out there that we have any concern about.

Specifically in relation to the question asked, in 2017 there was a review by the Victorian Institute of Teaching headed by a well-known public servant Penny Armytage. Our government acquitted every single recommendation of that review. Indeed it was our government that introduced the reportable conduct scheme, which has seen a big increase in teachers being reported. That is why I sought assurances today that the Victorian Institute of Teaching is adequately resourced. It has a bigger budget and more staff than ever before, making sure that our education system is the finest in the nation. But can I say there is also a case prioritisation list, where most of the serious cases are prioritised and dealt with over six months.

The opposition should know better too. We know when you are dealing with legal proceedings it takes time; it takes time to get the evidence. That is what has occurred in a handful of cases where there have been judicial proceedings underway, and the Victorian Institute of Teaching has worked alongside that, and we are getting on with making sure that it is competitive and making sure that our Victorian Institute of Teaching continues to be well resourced and well funded. That is what I sought today from the head, and it is what I believe. We are getting on with the job of making sure –

Members interjecting.

Ben CARROLL: The only risks are to your leadership. We are getting on with the job of making sure that we invest in the Education State and that the Victorian Institute of Teaching, which our government has funded and resourced, continues to be the overseer and the regulator of teachers and making sure that every student in particular and everyone can be very, very safe and that every teacher is fully registered. We also put conditions on our teacher registrations when they come up for renewal, and we will continue to do that to make sure.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:26): Will the minister commit to an immediate independent audit of the backlog of misconduct allegations concerning Victorian teachers?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:26): As I said in my primary answer, the Victorian Institute of Teaching, which I met with today, is getting through all of the case management. The most serious cases –

Members interjecting.

Ben CARROLL: Just listen for one tick, if you can. In the most serious cases where there might be an allegation of misconduct, whether it be an assault or a sexual assault, they are dealt with very quickly. The majority of cases, which often concern when a teacher has had contact with a student outside of school hours, have taken a bit more time because they need evidence and they need different resources.

We are getting on with making sure that we have an adequately resourced Victorian Institute of Teaching and, yes, that our schools are safe and there are no teachers where they should not be. We are getting on with ensuring that those teachers in question have been suspended and that while they are not in the workforce, as they should not be, we are getting on and making sure there is due process. I would have thought that is something the opposition leader would also want: due process.

Ministers statements: energy policy

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (14:28): I rise to update the house on Victoria's renewable energy and the targets that are creating thousands of jobs and increasing opportunities for industry across Victoria. Last week I had the pleasure of launching the renewable jobs taskforce with the Minister for Energy and Resources. This has been able to bring together experts from across industry, unions and the

community to give us expert advice and insights on how we can grow the renewable energy industry and also create sustainable jobs for the future.

Victoria is positioned to be Australia's offshore wind powerhouse, and the renewable jobs taskforce is ensuring we maximise opportunities for local businesses and industry through our local content requirements. This government has already created over 5000 jobs by building large-scale renewable energy projects across every corner of this state, and we will continue to do so. From the Solar Homes program through to the SEC, we know that there are thousands of jobs that we have created – 5000 in fact – that are on target to be delivered by 2028. Victoria's renewable energy targets will create overall 59,000 jobs, including 6000 apprentices and trainees.

We are backing local industry to develop the skills and capability needed to capitalise on these opportunities, and we are supporting them through our Made in Victoria grants, both the energy technologies manufacturing program and the manufacturing growth program. As Victoria moves towards renewable energies and we continue to create jobs, we have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation at 3.9 per cent, in stark contrast to when those opposite were tossed out, with the unemployment rate at a dismal 6.7.

Melbourne Airport rail link

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:30): My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Instead of wasting \$67 million to pause Melbourne Airport rail, why didn't the Labor government use this money to reverse its cuts to 24-hour community pharmacies?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:30): I am genuinely pleased by the question from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The government indicated that we were going to build an airport rail link, and the government has spent three years trying to negotiate with APAM, the owners of that airport rail link. What we wanted to do while that work was ongoing was to do the work in relation to the route allocation and making sure the service relocations were done, and that is work that has been done. You would expect us to make sure that we kept that corridor free and that we could remove those services so that in the event the green light was agreed to we could then commence that work. Clearly as a consequence, despite the fact that we spent three years trying to get an agreement with APAM, we have not been successful in that. The Commonwealth commissioned a review, which was finalised late last year. The Commonwealth has indicated that it will be appointing an independent arbiter or mediator to do that work. We are awaiting the appointment of that person. We will deal with that individual in good faith. So it is only fair and reasonable that while we are waiting we demobilise those workers and not waste taxpayers funding. We await the outcome of the appointment of the mediator.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:32): Have any contracts linked to Melbourne Airport rail been cancelled?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:32): We have gone on and done the work, unlike those opposite, who printed fake tickets when they were last in power, saying that an airport rail link was coming. It was just a party of confusion.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister was asked a very, very simple question that even he, I am sure, can answer.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Transport Infrastructure will come back to the question.

Danny PEARSON: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition asked me about the airport rail link. What I have said in the answer to the substantive question is the fact that we have tried to negotiate in good faith to build an airport rail link to an airport. We have not been able to reach agreement with APAM, and those negotiations have been paused while we await the appointment of a mediator that the Commonwealth is going to appoint.

Ministers statements: energy policy

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:33): I am absolutely pleased to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is delivering real cost-of-living relief through lower power bills. Today's draft Victorian default offer will see 536,000 Victorian households save on average \$112 off their annual power bill after 1 July. Bills for small businesses will also go down by \$266. For the 176,000 Victorians living in caravan parks, retirement homes and apartments with embedded networks, the VDO is the maximum they can be charged, and we are the only state delivering for embedded networks. All this is money back in the pockets of more than half a million Victorian families and 58,000 small businesses.

We introduced the VDO to make sure Victorians get the best electricity offers in the country and cheaper bills, and it is working. Today's draft VDO is \$317 cheaper than the national default market offer that was released today for households and \$1328 less for small businesses. For example, a Victorian small business will pay \$1861 less than the same business in South Australia. I ask: why wouldn't you want to live or do business in Victoria? Absolutely every good reason.

Victorians can save even more by shopping around, with the average residential market offer \$225 less than the VDO and \$195 less for businesses. Ultimately, the prices are coming down because of Victoria's massive investment in renewable energy consistently giving us the lowest wholesale prices in the nation. We are now at 39.3 per cent renewable energy, and that is why this is delivering a real dollar benefit to Victorians today, tomorrow and into the future.

Bridget Vallance: On a point of order, Speaker, I have a number of matters that I would like to raise that are overdue for being answered. Question on notice 943 to the Minister for Jobs and Industry regarding the Manufacturing and Industry Development Fund is overdue, as are question on notice 944 to the Minister for Jobs and Industry about state budget funding for the minerals and extractive industry, question on notice 945, again to the Minister for Jobs and Industry, question on notice 946 to the Minister for Jobs and Industry on the native timber industry and question on notice 957 to the Minister for Public and Active Transport regarding bus services on Clegg Road. Also overdue is adjournment matter 509 to the Minister for Water regarding flood mitigation in my community, and constituency question 476 to the Minister for Public and Active Transport is also overdue. If those matters could please be followed up for my community and the state of Victoria, that would be great.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:37): I have reviewed the constituency questions from Thursday 7 March. The member for Kororoit asked the minister to provide an update on an issue in her electorate. On 31 October 2023 I ruled that constituency questions that ask ministers to provide advice or updates are out of order as they are asking for an action rather than asking questions seeking information, and I rule the member for Kororoit's constituency question out of order.

Constituency questions

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:38): (560) My question is to the Minister for Health, and my question is: when will the Torquay community hospital begin to be built? The Torquay community hospital was promised by the now Allan Labor government back in 2018, and in fact a consultation

committee was set up. On the website as of right now it says that this hospital will be ready and available for the people of Torquay in 2024. I would like to let the minister know that despite the fact that she has made the promise to my community that they will have a hospital, it is now an overgrown paddock of self-sown trees that have grown in the time since this commitment has been made, and it is disappointing to think that there will not be a hospital there this year. The communities of Torquay and the Surf Coast will greatly appreciate the answer to the question: when will the Torquay community hospital begin? When will it be available for the people of Torquay and the great Surf Coast?

Glen Waverley electorate

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:39): (561) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Education. Minister, can you outline how the recently completed \$10.1 million transformation of Vermont South Special School will ensure students have the learning environment they need to achieve their full potential? It was terrific to be joined by the Premier at Vermont South Special School just a few weeks ago, where we met with principal Jane Henderson, school council president Tarsh Brusco and school captains Aidan and Eloise. There was plenty to celebrate with the completion of the major \$10.1 million upgrade. The new facilities are game changing and will give students the very best start in life. I am proud to be part of an Allan Labor government that is backing Vermont South Special School and also delivering a major upgrade at every single special school across Victoria. The future is bright. This weekend Vermont South Special School is celebrating its 50th anniversary, an accomplishment made possible by the wonderful school community, teachers, support staff and families. A big congratulations to them all. I wish the school the very best for the next 50 years with these beautiful new facilities.

Morwell electorate

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:40): (562) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport, and I ask: will the state government announce another round of the Get Active Kids voucher program for this year? The winter sports season is upon us, and clubs in my electorate would normally already be processing these vouchers for the children who rely on them to participate in community sport. Three weeks out from season 2024, despite numerous inquiries there is no information about whether the vouchers will be available this year. Children should be able to participate in community sport regardless of their personal circumstances, and they should not be excluded just because their families cannot afford to pay the associated costs. If the program is not running in 2024, then it is incumbent on this government that other financial support is available to ensure children can still play their chosen sport. Minister, will you release another round of the Get Active Kids voucher program?

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:41): (563) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police. How is the Allan Labor government's record investment in Victorian police and community safety supporting my electorate of Wendouree? The last few weeks have been incredibly difficult for the Ballarat community with the disappearance of Samantha Murphy, the weeks-long extensive search, the arrest of the alleged killer and the ongoing investigation. We have also had the worry of significant fires to our west, and just last week we had the tragic Ballarat Gold Mine collapse that killed Kurt Hourigan and seriously injured a 21-year-old Ballarat man. Throughout these challenging times Victoria Police have stood with our community. I offer my heartfelt thanks to the police for their service to the people of Ballarat. I also offer my deepest sympathies to Samantha's and Kurt's families and friends and send my best wishes to the hospitalised injured worker. Thank you also to the mine rescue crew, paramedics and other emergency services who were there firsthand at the mine disaster.

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:42): (564) The stretch of Warburton Highway in Seville East between Douthie and Sunnyside roads and Peters Road is dangerous, yet despite years of advocacy and a community campaign, the Labor government has not invested in vital structural upgrades to make this part of Warburton Highway safer for local motorists, pedestrians and tourist traffic. My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety on behalf of residents in Seville, Seville East, Gruyere and Woori Yallock: how much funding will the government commit in the upcoming state budget to fix the dangerous stretch of Warburton Highway between Peters and Douthie roads, Seville East? In 2019 the government had VicRoads undertake a review, and in 2022 the government again said it would have the Department of Transport and Planning, and I quote, ‘see what further improvements could be done’. Yet apart from some reflector poles that are covered by overgrown shrubs, nothing has changed and the road remains dangerous. First responders from Seville and Wandin fire brigades and Yarra Ranges police do an amazing job but are sick of attending accidents here, and quite frankly, the residents deserve a safer road.

Northcote electorate

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (14:43): (565) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and I ask: when can my community expect to see further drop-off locations for the Victorian container deposit scheme? Since the CDS was launched last November, more than 220 million containers have been recycled at locations across the state. Already it is a hugely successful scheme, building on our Labor government’s commitment to a circular economy and our ambitious target of diverting 80 per cent of waste from landfill by 2030. In Northcote there has been a lot of anticipation for the CDS and its many benefits to the environment, jobs and the hip pocket and as a way for local clubs and charities to fundraise. The inner north community would greatly benefit from more drop-off locations and reverse vending machines to make the scheme more accessible, and I know this is something Visy has been pursuing with local councils Darebin and Yarra. With drink containers making up almost half of Victoria’s litter, the CDS is a key part of our collective environmental efforts, and I look forward to the minister’s update.

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:44): (566) My constituency question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer provide funding in this year’s state budget for the urgently needed arterial road study in Drouin and Warragul? I met with the Treasurer last year to convey the importance of this funding. This study is one of the highest priorities for Regional Roads Victoria and is desperately needed in my communities. Every day we have more homes being built and more families moving to Warragul and Drouin, and traffic is only getting worse. It is not just the main streets in Drouin and Warragul; it is the associated intersections, such as Lardners Track, Gallaghers Crossing, Queen Street, Burke Street, Landsborough Street and Howitt Street, just to name a few. This study is urgently needed, and we cannot wait any longer.

Melton electorate

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (14:45): (567) My constituency question is to the Minister for Children in the other place. Following the Premier’s apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care, I was approached by a constituent in my electorate, Wayne. Wayne, like many other victims of abuse and neglect as children in institutional care, having heard this Parliament’s apology, wishes to know more about restitution. Minister, what updates can you provide my constituent, Wayne, and other victims in my electorate following the Premier’s apology? I was inspired and humbled by Wayne’s story. He has encouraged me to visit the Australian Orphanage Museum in Geelong, and he would also like to see all members of this house attend. I have committed to join him there, and I encourage my colleagues to make the effort and commitment to also visit this important museum. As a Parliament we unreservedly apologised to those children who

were abused and neglected during their time in care. It is important that we take time to hear from victims and let them tell us their stories.

Warrandyte electorate

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (14:46): (568) My question is to the Minister for Housing. When can my constituent Melisa expect to receive a housing offer for her and her family? Last week I had the pleasure of meeting Melisa and her mother with the Shadow Minister for Housing, the member for Polwarth. Melisa is a champion. While she has cerebral palsy and epilepsy and is non-verbal, she always has a smile on her face and has a warm, infectious spirit. Melisa requires a lot of equipment to manage her cerebral palsy, including a wheelchair, portable hoist and walking frame, and needs an accessible home to accommodate this. Despite this, Melisa has had to wait more than 10 years on the public housing register – 10 years – and is still yet to receive a housing offer. It is shocking and outrageous that a family who should be the government's first priority to help has had to wait more than a decade and is still waiting for an answer.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:46): (569) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Can the minister inform me how many Get Active Kids vouchers have been approved in the Lara electorate over the seven rounds of this program? In an effort to alleviate the financial burden associated with participating in sport, this program was started back in November 2020. The program aims to provide eligible children with vouchers of up to \$200, which can be used to cover expenses like equipment, uniforms and registrations. When I am out and about in the community I hear from many families who tell me that they would not have been able to afford the costs of their children playing sports were it not for this program. So again, my question to the minister is: how many vouchers have been approved in the electorate of Lara through the Allan Labor government's Get Active Kids voucher program?

Bills

Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024

Introduction and first reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:48): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Confiscation Act 1997 in relation to unexplained wealth and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:48): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:48): Thanks very much, Member for Brighton. The brief explanation is as follows: the Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024 amends the Confiscation Act 1997 to introduce another unexplained wealth pathway, which will enable the department of prosecutions to apply for an unexplained wealth order if there are reasonable grounds to suspect a person's wealth exceeds their lawfully acquired wealth by at least \$200,000. It also broadens the definition of 'wealth' to include wealth that has been consumed or expended.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2024*Introduction and first reading*

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:49):
I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Social Services Regulation Act 2021, the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:49): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:49):
Thank you, Manager of Opposition Business. The bill will amend the Social Services Regulation Act 2021 and the Disability Act 2006 to merge the functions of the disability services commissioner into the social services regulator. The bill will also delay commencement of the worker and carer exclusions scheme under the Social Services Regulation Act 2021 for up to two years and amend the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to provide for the continued operation of the Victorian Carer Register and the suitability panel while the WorkCover and care exclusion scheme is delayed, as well as making necessary amendments to other acts as required.

Read first time.**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.***Business of the house***Notices of motion**

The SPEAKER (14:50): General business, notice of motion 17, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

*Petitions***Campbells Bridge wind farm**

Emma KEALY (Lowan) presented a petition bearing 196 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly to the Campbells Bridge Wind Facility, proposed for the Southern Wimmera region, which consists of approximately 145 turbines that will be between 230–280m high, across an area of approximately 250 square kilometres. Communities affected include Rupanyup, Marnoo, Wal Wal, Lubeck, Glenorchy, Callawadda, Campbells Bridge and Stawell. The project is inappropriate for the area, due to the landscape's hydrology, scenic values, biodiversity values and fertile soils. There is no social license for this project. The project threatens the health and wellbeing of residents living in the proposed wind facility zone due to the acoustic and aesthetic impacts of wind turbines. The proponent's (RWE) conduct with affected residents has been disingenuous and they have not been forthcoming with information and not met mandated consultation requirements.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to request that the Campbells Bridge project be abandoned due to the reasons explained above.

*Documents***Homes Victoria**

Project Summary: Ground Lease Model – South Yarra, Prahran, Hampton East and Port Melbourne

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:51): I table, by leave, the Homes Victoria ground lease model project summary.

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

Alert Digest No. 4

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:51): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 4 of 2024, on the following bills:

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024

Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024

National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024

National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment (No New Oil or Gas Activities) Bill 2022

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

*Documents***Documents****Incorporated list as follows:****DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Financial Management Act 1994 – 2023–24 Mid-Year Financial Report incorporating the Quarterly Financial Report No 2 – released on 8 March 2024

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 5 (*Gazette S122, 14 March 2024*)

Murray-Darling Basin Authority – Report 2022–23

Parliamentary Budget Officer – Operational Plan 2024–25

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

Bass Coast – C164

Kingston – C206

Latrobe – C147

Queenscliffe – C39

Stonnington – C332, C337

Victorian Planning Provisions – VC256

Wyndham – C268

Yarra – C323

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 16B in relation to – *Water Act 1989* – Model Waterways Protection By-law 2024

PROCLAMATIONS – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamation fixing an operative date:

Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Act 2023 – Subdivision 3 of Division 2 of Part 2 and ss 265 and 266 – 27 March 2024 (*Gazette S118, 13 March 2024*).

Bills

Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (14:53): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023 with an amendment.

Ordered that amendment be taken into consideration later this day.

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024

Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023

Royal assent

The SPEAKER (14:53): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024 and the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023.

National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (14:53): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024.

Announcements

Ombudsman

The SPEAKER (14:54): I advise the house that on 14 March 2024 I administered to Marlo Jane Baragwanath, the Ombudsman, the affirmation required by section 10 of the Ombudsman Act 1973.

Motions

Ballarat Gold Mine

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:54): I move, by leave:

That this house expresses its condolences:

- (1) to the family and loved ones of Kurt Hourigan, who died at the Ballarat Gold Mine incident on Wednesday 13 March 2024;
- (2) to those that were injured and the dozens of miners who were trapped underground.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, if I may, this is not really the form for the presentation of a condolence in this way, and while the government is very sympathetic to the condolence motion that the Manager of Opposition Business has raised in the house I would seek your guidance as to whether this is the appropriate format.

The SPEAKER: Leave is not conditional. It is either approved or not approved.

Mary-Anne Thomas: It is approved.

James NEWBURY: I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the state Labor government for their ongoing centralisation of planning power, ripping away community rights near environmental renewable projects, future Suburban Rail Loop stations near designated growth and economic zones –

The SPEAKER: Order! Is this a further motion by leave?

James NEWBURY: Yes.

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, leave was granted for your first motion. Therefore you need to speak to that motion.

James NEWBURY: I will make some brief comments and thank the government for the opportunity to make these comments. I know that one of the members on the government side did speak to the matter earlier, and I am sure that the member will take the opportunity to speak to this matter.

In relation to the motion that the opposition has moved, we have moved this motion because of this very, very tragic incident that occurred only a few days ago. It was a tragic incident that the whole of Victoria I am sure looked on and felt concerned about – concerned about the workers that were trapped in the mine, concerned about their families and loved ones and concerned about the entire community and the effect that that incident had in that entire community. I think the incident brought to the fore not only the tragedy in that community but also the dangers for people in the workplace and the difficulty people have in their workplace.

This incident has touched so many people. I know in my community of Brighton, Brighton East, Elwood, Hampton and Hampton East how many people were affected by the incident, were watching on and were deeply upset and moved by of course the terrible and tragic loss of Kurt Hourigan in the incident that Wednesday but also by those that were injured in the incident. To those that were injured in the incident, to the miners that were trapped in that incident of course, there was a great outpouring from the community, and again I thought it was an opportunity for the coalition to record that sense of concern over such a terrible tragedy and put on record our heartfelt condolence to those affected, to the families affected and of course to the Hourigan family. With that I will conclude my remarks.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (14:58): I rise to speak to this condolence motion, something that I feel very passionately about. Of course the mine is within my electorate, and it was a fairly heartbreaking night for many people across Ballarat as we waited for news of the people that were trapped in the mine at that time. I really would like to also acknowledge the Australian Workers' Union. They were onsite immediately, and they spent a long night supporting the workers that were there at the time and the families of the two miners who were trapped – and then, very sadly, one died.

It is an ongoing investigation, and something we hold very dear to our hearts on this side of the house is ensuring workers' safety at work. On this side of the house we have worked tirelessly, and again I would say it was a terrible tragedy in Ballarat that saw two families fight so hard for industrial manslaughter laws. This government has stood by workers, stood by their health and safety at all times. This is an ongoing investigation and I will not anticipate the outcomes of that, but of course I extend my very deepest condolences to Kurt's family but also the young man. I do hear that he is out of critical care at the moment, though obviously he has a long road to recovery. We give our deepest support and condolences to his family. But of course there is the entire workforce; there are another 29 miners who were with him at the time. They were in a safety pod, but nonetheless there is a great impact on them and their families.

I was delighted that the very next day Minister D'Ambrosio came and met with union delegates and discussed with us that tragedy. I know that Ronnie Hayden from the Australian Workers' Union was pleased to meet with the minister to talk through this terrible tragedy. The minister gave her firmest, firmest commitment that this government would stand by the workers and the families that have been

involved, and I support that commitment completely. It was an awful tragedy, and it did have an impact across many, many people in Ballarat, but I was pleased that the union was there so quickly to support people. I was very proud that the minister was there the following morning to meet with unions to discuss how they could help those families as well.

As I say, this government has proved again and again our commitment to working people and really our utter and deep commitment to safety in the workplace, and we are proud to stand with our union comrades to make sure that workplaces across Victoria are safe. We will continue to do that, but in the spirit of the condolence motion I mostly want to convey certainly my, and I know all members of this side of the house's, deepest, deepest condolences to the family of Kurt, who very, very tragically lost his life, and of course to all of the families that have been impacted by this tragedy.

We await the outcome of the investigation. It has been handed to WorkSafe, and they are investigating that. I have no doubt that we will act swiftly in whatever way we need to do once that investigation has been completed. But in the meantime, as the local member for that area, my door is always open for anyone in the community that feels the need to discuss what has happened. It was an awful, awful night for many of us as we waited for more news, and I will continue to be there to support my community.

I am proud of this government's support of working people and safety in the workplace, and we will continue to fight for working people. My deepest condolences to all involved. We on this side of the house will continue to have you in our hearts as we work every day to protect working people.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:04): I rise to add my expression of sympathy to the families who have been affected by the mine tragedy that occurred last week on 13 March in Ballarat. Nobody should wake up to the news that there has been a tragedy in a workplace, and that is what many of us last week heard early in the morning when we were told about the mine collapse on the news. Unfortunately, a man lost his life, Kurt Hourigan. My sympathies and thoughts remain with that family and their friends, who will be taking a very long time, if ever, to get over this tragic event that took place in a mine in Ballarat.

To the gentleman who has incurred injuries, our thoughts go out to you and your family and friends. From our understanding you have got very significant injuries, and whether they are physical and/or emotional, I am sure it is a life-changing event for many people. Our hearts go out to you, and our thoughts are with you whilst you recover. The support of the Parliament is with you. That is why we express today, in the condolence motion, our sympathies to the people that have been affected so drastically by this event. Nobody should ever be harmed at work, and nobody should ever lose their life.

I want to also express my thanks and ongoing support for the emergency services, who continually step up and assist our communities in times like this, as they did on the day of 13 March last week. The challenge for them is not forgotten either in our minds; the work they do does leave an impact on them for the future and what they have witnessed and seen. To the nurses looking after the gentleman who is in hospital still from the injuries that he received: we thank you for the work you do. The 29 miners who were trapped – I have been in a workplace when something tragic happened and it is always a whole-of-work area that is affected, so I know that the 29 miners who were involved in that event and all the other workers and people involved in that mine are all very affected by this event and will have ongoing issues for many, many years, because these are always such tragic events.

I want to say that we will continue to support in any way we can and that we stand with the government on their offer of support, and we expect to see this not being short-term support but very long term ongoing support. So once again my sympathy to Kurt's family, his friends and his fellow workers. To the injured worker who remains in hospital, may your recovery be successful and may you be back up on and on your feet, because these are challenging times and times of uncertainty. But I know that the emotional challenge for everyone concerned will continue for a very, very long time. Once again,

thanks to all the emergency services workers, nurses and emergency services providers who turned up to help and support. Counsellors – the list goes on. These are always really difficult times. I will conclude by again extending my sympathy. Our support and our thoughts are with all those who are affected.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (15:07): I too am very saddened to rise to express and share my condolences to the family of Kurt Hourigan, who was fatally killed – he did not die at work, he was killed – at work. He was killed at work because his workplace was not safe. That is why this government stood up and made our workplace manslaughter laws, because workers die far too often at work – but they do not die at work, they are killed at work. It is not passive. They die at work because they are killed on the job. That is why this government has stood up and said this is not okay. We have said that it is not okay for workers to not go home. We have said that it is not okay for workers' families to have their lives devastated and ruined, and that is why we voted for workplace manslaughter. The opposition did not vote for workplace manslaughter. You did not support the legislation that means that more workers will not be killed on the job.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a condolence motion, and I would say respectfully: could we, on relevance, come back to the condolence motion, please?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, there is no point of order. This motion has been brought on by the Manager of Opposition Business to make a political point. I think the member, who actually represents the community that has been impacted, should be free to condole in her own way.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, the motion is of condolence. Let us –

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The minister at the table knows better. The member to continue on the motion.

Juliana ADDISON: I welcome the opportunity to continue. I was an organiser with the Australian Workers' Union for four years, and I am very proud to have been an elected official of the Australian Workers' Union and to have represented Australian Workers' Union members for four years. This is the union that I worked for, which had one of their members killed in the workplace in my community. This is raw, and I will call out the absolute disappointment I have in the opposition trying to politicise a workplace death in my community. Do you know what happened on Thursday morning? The minister came up. I did not see the opposition coming up to the community. The Minister for Energy and Resources was there at 8 o'clock to meet with the union, to meet with Ronnie Hayden from the AWU, to meet with Ross Kenna from the AWU – the organiser that represents those workers, those workers who are hurting, those workers who are wondering why they are still alive, those workers who are struggling to work out why this has happened – because every worker deserves to come home safe.

As the member for Eureka said, this week is the anniversary of the Delacombe trench collapse – six years since two people died in my electorate because of unsafe work. They did not die, they were killed, because a company did not provide a safe workplace for two people, for Charlie Howkins and for Jack Brownlee. Jack Brownlee's dad worked the Ballarat Gold Mine. Jack's dad, who buried his 21-year-old son because there was a trench collapse because there was not workplace safety, worked at that mine. And, guess what, he stopped working at that mine because he could not go underground anymore. The psychological damage that Dave has shared with me – and I know he is okay with me telling this story – was such that he said, 'I can't go back underground after my son was killed in a collapse.'

That is why we voted for workplace manslaughter laws. That is why we stand up for workers every day – not to grandstand, not to try and get political points, but because we are the Australian Labor

Party and we are the voice of labour and we are the cause of labour. We get up and we fight every day with our union brothers and sisters. And I want to acknowledge the work that the Victorian Trades Hall does. We will be, on 28 April, stopping to pause on International Workers Memorial Day to remember every single worker who has been killed at work.

I invite the opposition to perhaps come along on 28 April and stand there and tell the people of Trades Hall, tell the unionists of Victoria, that you did not support workplace manslaughter laws. I invite you to do that. Come to Ballarat. Come and meet the Brownlees. Come and meet Charlie Howkins's wife. Meet his kids, who do not have a dad because he was killed at work in Delacombe. This is what we stand for, and we condole with the family of Kurt Hourigan. We condole with his friends, with his workmates. But do you know what? We do not only send our deepest sympathies, we fight for the living. We fight for the living every single day, because workers must come home.

I will leave my remarks there. I will thank the Australian Workers' Union. I will thank every unionist, every worker, every health and safety rep and everyone who says, 'It's not okay.' And I really do hope that as we move forward I can expect better from the opposition – better for workers rights, better for wage theft, better for workplace manslaughter and not grandstanding.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (15:14): I wish to rise to pay my condolences on this motion. Reading the motion here, it reads to me simply as this house expressing its condolences to Kurt and those who are impacted by that tragic incident that occurred recently. I will be confining my comments not to anything political at all but to just talking about a gentleman from my electorate who tragically lost his life.

I knew of Kurt through sporting circles in my electorate, but I did not know him personally. But I have been contacted by a number of members of his family and close friends over the period since that terrible incident did occur, and what is doubly tragic about this issue is that Kurt was the father of a young family from that very, very little, tight-knit community of Bruthen. Less than 1000 people live at Bruthen. I am sure members in this place would have been through that little township on their trip east. It is a very small, tight-knit community, and all the feedback I have had on Kurt from those who knew him certainly better than I did is that he was just a good fellow – a good father and a good fellow. The township of Bruthen plays in a football league called the Omeo district league, and it is fair to say that most sides at various times of the year struggle for players. Kurt was one of those players, as I am told, who would be asked to help out and would just quickly do so – one of those guys who maybe was not in love with the game as much as others but would be prepared to help out his local football side in their time of need.

I have had people contact me in probably the last week saying how proud of the Bruthen community they were. Apparently, when news came out of this terrible incident – there was word of a person passing away and that they were from Bruthen – I am told, there were a number of media that descended on the town and were entering some of the businesses in the main street of Bruthen, even going as far as knocking on some of the Bruthen residents' doors to ask local residents if they knew who had passed away. The people who have contacted me have made comment about how proud they were that they did not cooperate with those requests, in the full knowledge that perhaps some of the extended family may not have been advised of Kurt's passing, and held tight on that. More than one person has expressed to me their gratitude to the wider Bruthen community for holding tight, if you like, due to respect for the family. It is very typical of the very small, close-knit, tight community of that township.

As other members who have spoken before me have said, there are investigations underway, and every person who goes to work has the right to return home. What will be difficult are the extenuating circumstances here of Kurt being a young father who, from all reports, was admired greatly by his children, not only as their father but also as a role model and someone who was having a huge influence in their upbringing.

I will conclude my comments there. I put on the record that my thoughts are with those who were impacted and in particular the family, the extended family and the friendship group of Kurt, who was simply taken far too early.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (15:18): I rise to offer my deep condolences to the family of Kurt Hourigan, who lost his life in a workplace incident last week. I do so and join others in noting that the terrible tragedy that occurred last Wednesday evening, on 13 March, should never have happened. The cause of the incident that led to the tragic death of Kurt Hourigan and the very critical injuries sustained by a 20-year-old mineworker who remains in hospital are under investigation, and we need to ensure that the specialised expert investigations are allowed to continue. I do want to note that WorkSafe will be leading that of course, and the Earth Resources Regulator will be assisting where appropriate.

One thing that I do want to say is that I am somewhat disappointed. Perhaps a conversation would have been more in order – right across the chamber – to have organised a far more respectful and considered condolence motion out of respect for the families, friends and loved ones. It is not about us – it is not about me; it is not about anyone on this side or that side. We all want to express our condolences and our sympathies and reflect on what happened last week. It would have been far better to have done that through some conversations that would have been accommodated, absolutely, and that would have given greater opportunity for a fully respectful condolence motion to be undertaken in this place.

As it happens, we are where we are. I do want to reflect on the fact that there are some people who go to work and never come home, and that is what happened last week. There are others who are injured or critically injured and will remain scarred either physically or psychologically forevermore. And then there are those who work in the mines or who have friends or family that continue to go down into the mines in Victoria, remembering and always having on their mind the very real risk that is taken every day when people go and do these jobs.

On the Thursday morning, I was joined by the members for Eureka and Wendouree, and we went and paid our respects to the representatives of the workforce at the Ballarat Gold Mine. What was really driven home to me was the real pain that communities were already experiencing in that area, because we were just a week away from another commemoration: the incident at Delacombe, the trench collapse that happened there. If anyone knows tragedy and loss, they know that the weeks leading up to the commemoration of a loss or a tragedy are very, very disturbing and very triggering for communities and families, and so is the coming down after that point. That is where we were at that time last week. What was really important of course was simply being there. It is really important for communities to feel that they are supported, and I really do want to shout out to the members for Eureka and Wendouree because they are there every day; they are community. They are part of that community, and they live and breathe the peaks and troughs of emotion – raw emotion – and tragedy that they themselves have experienced, and we have heard them reflect on that during this condolence motion.

I want to also reflect on the fact that the Delacombe trench collapse led to the very, very strong reforms in terms of the industrial manslaughter legislation that this government initiated and passed, sadly not with the support of those opposite. Again, that is a statement of great disappointment. I think it is important that we reflect on that. Whilst we make big gains – and we have over many years – in terms of occupational health and safety and workers compensation, I would like to think that the next big reform that we make in this space will actually have bipartisan support, because I have not seen it yet. Going back to the early days in the 1980s when we had the first WorkCover legislation and the first occupational health and safety laws, sadly since then there has been no bipartisanship. Frankly, I would rather be here celebrating people's safe return home every night than condoling the loss of a life because of an industrial incident. That is what I would rather be doing.

I know we do not live in a perfect world, of course not, but we have to be forever diligent in striving for improvements to ensure that those who are responsible for incidents – and I make no presuppositions, because these are matters that have to be investigated thoroughly. That is what we strive to do each and every day. Sadly, we know that the family of Kurt Hourigan will have one less person in the family. He was someone who, from all accounts, was a very much-loved person not just within the family but amongst friendship groups.

I do want to also acknowledge the 29 miners who did make it to safety – to the refuge chamber where they remained for quite a number of hours until it was safe for them to be extracted from the mine. Can I say, the thought of going down 500 metres below the surface and 3 kilometres into a mine – it really takes a certain type of person to be able to do that day in, day out. I do want to pay tribute to those people who do that each and every day despite the fact that they have lost loved ones and friends. I do want to acknowledge Ronnie Hayden, the secretary of the AWU; Ross Kenna, the organiser; Brett Edgington, the Ballarat trades hall secretary; and the three people that we met with on that Thursday morning. They were absolutely still in shock, but I can tell you they wasted no time thinking about themselves. It was all about how they were going to support their members, their workers, through this incident. And they pulled all the stops out.

I was there that morning, but each and every day that community is suffering and feeling the hurt and the pain. That does not disappear; it will be there for a long, long time to come. I do want to also thank the police, I do want to thank the other emergency services, including volunteers with the CFA, and I do want to thank the Oscar 1 mine rescue specialists of the CFA. They did a wonderful job in keeping others safe, being able to safely extract the 21-year-old miner who is recovering in hospital and also keeping safe the 29 that were able to take shelter in the refuge chamber. They all exited safely.

Can I say this is the beginning of a lot of investigation, a lot of work that needs to happen to get to the bottom of why this happened, because it is incumbent on all of us with every incident that we learn and make the possibility of a future incident happening even more remote. If we can get rid of them altogether, that is what we ought to always aim for. We want, on this side of the house, every single person who goes to work, no matter what their work is, to be able to return home safely. That is not asking a lot. That is why we have industrial manslaughter laws in Victoria. Let us reflect on that. Let us reflect not just on this one incident, which is an absolute tragedy and should never have happened; let us also reflect on our role in this chamber when it comes to supporting legislation that is about enabling people to go to work and return home safely, that is about holding people who do have responsibilities to account for the way that workplaces are managed so that people can go to work and get home safely, because ultimately, we do not live to work, we work to live. We all take our dedication to our work seriously; we all do that. But for goodness sake, the days of people not getting home from work should be over. This should not be allowed to happen.

So I say to everyone in this chamber and those who may be listening: step up and really think about how you vote on issues. Step up and think about how in real, tangible terms you make a difference in the laws that we pass, in holding people to account and in allowing people to get home in one piece.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Standing and sessional orders

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (15:28): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 15, relating to the reintroduction of non-government business time, to be moved immediately.

Leave refused.

*Motions***Middle East conflict**

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (15:28): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that, since this house resolved on 17 October 2023 to stand with Israel, the following have occurred:
 - (a) over 100,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed or injured; and
 - (b) a growing humanitarian catastrophe is occurring in Palestine;
- (2) does not support the state of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza.

Leave refused.

*Business of the house***Program**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:29): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following items be considered and completed by 5 pm on 21 March 2024:

Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024

Support for Victorian families – motion

Big Housing Build – motion

Level crossing removals – motion

Education State – motion

Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024

National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024.

It is good to be back in the Parliament again with a very full government business program. I want to note that we started the day with an appropriate condolence for the Honourable Digby Crozier, a person who served the state with distinction as a Liberal member of Parliament in both the upper and lower house. We followed that with what was a very embarrassing move by the member for Brighton in failing to show the necessary respect to the family of a man who has recently lost his life –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, firstly on relevance – imputations are also, as per standing order 118, unparliamentary – I am sure the Leader of the House would not want to be reflecting on members of both this side and her own side of the chamber who spoke to the matter today even before the condolence motion was moved.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Was offence taken, member for Brighton?

James Newbury: Yes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister to withdraw.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I withdraw. Our government sees this place as a place where we do the real business of government and we deliver for the people of Victoria. We do not use it as an opportunity for political stunts. We have a significant legislative program and one that we wish to get on with.

I am pleased to be able to outline three of the bills that will be debated in this house this week. The Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024 is all about our government's commitment to securing safe and affordable housing for all Victorians. It goes to our government's commitment, with the release of our housing statement and our 10-year plan, to grow

the housing that is available for all Victorians at a range of different pricepoints but also with different models of ownership and tenancy, ensuring at all times that we are responsive to the needs of the Victorian community. This bill in particular works to assist renters and ensure that they have a dispute resolution procedure in place that will work for them.

The second and third bills are both related to our government's transformative work in energy policy here in this state. I take the opportunity to applaud the Minister for Energy and Resources for being the most consequential energy minister our nation has ever seen for the way in which she has transformed the generation and indeed will transform the distribution and the retailing of electricity in this state to make sure that we have renewable energy, that we have affordable energy and that we have reliable energy. This is hard work. These two bills that are before the house will enable at least members on this side of this place to talk about that journey of transformation that our government has been on, because unlike those on the other side, we are not wasting time. We know that the transformation to renewables is absolutely necessary. It is absolutely necessary and essential that we get on with it. God knows where we would be if those on the other side were sitting on this side of the chamber. What an absolute mess we would be in.

We are very proud of the work that we are doing. The enabling offshore wind energy bill of course seeks to ensure that we can look to a future powered by wind energy – cheap, efficient and reliable. The VicGrid bill makes sure that we do have a fit-for-purpose grid to distribute that energy once it is generated. Again I might reflect on the comments of Digby Crozier, who talked about the importance of transmission lines throughout rural and regional Victoria to make sure that the power gets to where it needs to be. Indeed those will be conversations that we will be continuing to have with the Victorian community. Again, we have a number of motions in the house that we propose to adjourn off at the end of this sitting week as we prepare for the weeks ahead and the hard work that lies ahead of us.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:35): I note before continuing that of the seven items on the government business program proposed for this week four are motions, and this is an issue that we have spoken about in this chamber a number of times. The government has listed four motions for this week for consideration. The concern the coalition has is the use of the Parliament's time to deal with motions, however meritorious. The government provides no opportunity for non-government members in this place – the Liberal Party, the National Party or the Greens – to consider any matter that they put forward, so there are a number of very, very important issues on the notice paper that have not been included in the government business program. Four items – the majority of the government business program for this week – are motions that the government has moved. They are motions that the government has scheduled time for debate on, but none of the important motions in a very full notice paper have been afforded an opportunity to be debated in this place. It is for that reason and consistent with our previous decisions on government business programs that we will not be supporting the government in their business program this week.

If the government intends to use the Parliament to deal with motions, it is not unreasonable to provide the opposition or non-government members with an opportunity to consider other matters. It is not unreasonable for those to be considered. Of course, as has been pointed out, there are instances where condolences are dealt with, but in terms of motions more generally there are four motions on the government business program. It is the majority of the week's work. There are four motions on the government business program. There has never been a non-government item on the government business program – never. Not one time has there ever been a non-government motion on the government business program. And in the overwhelming instances of these motions being dealt with over the last year in this place – we have had weeks – the majority of the week, two out of three days, was spent debating motions which made no meaningful change in law and impacted in no way in terms of finance or providing new funding for projects, programs –

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: They, as my colleague has just said to me, in no way reduced the cost of living. Motions unfortunately are just that. They just speak to a matter and have no fuller effect in terms of creating change. So when we see a government business program that is overwhelmingly and by majority motions, rather than substance of bills or proposed laws, the coalition cannot support that.

There have been multiple instances throughout the last year where the coalition has moved very important motions and sought to adjourn debate for very important motions. Across the best part of 10 times, from memory, that the coalition has sought to have an opportunity in this house to adjourn debate after oftentimes a day of debate on a bill and allow an important matter to be dealt with, the government has opposed every single time the right of the coalition or non-government members any time for debate, so the coalition absolutely will be opposing the government business program, opposing a program which in the majority includes more motions than bills.

As I said earlier, there are four motions on the program for this week, more than bills, but more broadly than this week it is very important to note that there are no opportunities for non-government members in this chamber to speak to general motions on policy matters, and that should be a concern. I think I speak for all non-government members when I say that is a concern. It is not something replicated in the other chamber or in other parliaments, and so for that reason the coalition will be opposing the government business program that has been put forward by the Leader of the House this week.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (15:40): I am very much looking forward to debating the government business program and of course supporting the extensive and deep policy work that has gone into the legislation that we will be debating, which affects the people that we all serve, because I do not think there is a person in this chamber that does not have a renter and a group of people who want to make sure that the Estate Agents Act 1980, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and other acts are amended in a way that ensures fairness and equity as they live their lives, raise families and live in our communities. The idea that those opposite do not have the opportunity to debate or put forward motions seems fanciful, and I am very much looking forward to those opposite adding their voices and making contributions on not just important legislation but legislation which has extraordinary detail and is very much forward looking.

The Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024 is fundamental to the future energy security of our state. I spend a lot of time talking to teenagers and the young people in my community as well as in my own family, and they certainly see the future in renewables. I do not know if my offspring will be watching the debate on offshore wind energy, but I can be certain that they are imploring our government and in fact our Parliament to make sure that there is action on a renewable energy future that does include sustainability to be able to continue to use the natural resources that we have.

The National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024 of course gives me the opportunity to thank those linespeople who have worked incredibly hard. I am conscious that there are some parts of Victoria where our linespeople have to work particularly hard during natural disasters and bushfires. The Electrical Trades Union are always doing the work that they need to do to make sure that the members they represent and serve are safe, and this legislation is fundamental to those important elements of looking to the future and what is needed.

We do have still on the notice paper the take-note motion of the parliamentary apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care. I have the opportunity now to commend the way that people have looked at this motion, including colleagues like the member for Geelong, and ensured that the voices of the community that the members serve are recorded in this place. This idea from those opposite that motions are somehow unworthy of consideration in this chamber actually leaves me a little bit discombobulated, to be frank – absolutely discombobulated – because we just debated a motion that was brought forward under an extraordinary circumstance. Some of the previous motions that have been debated in this place include support for Victorian families that have considered IVF, and I call out the extraordinary contribution from the Minister for

Public and Active Transport and the amazing contributions we have had on level crossing removals and the Education State. I am very aware that those on this side recognise that there are opportunities in motions to be able to record the important work that goes on in our state, where we are representing our community.

This is a terrific program of government business. We are united on this side of the chamber in looking to the future of what needs to be done and the work that needs to be done to make sure that our community has the energy resources and has the fairness that allow people to raise their families and to look to each other and know that the Victorian government is on their side. I am looking forward to other members of the Parliament also – *(Time expired)*

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:45): I am pleased to also say a few words on the government business program. I acknowledge the work of the member for Cranbourne in getting the word 'discombobulated' in there twice. I am sure she is likely to win something. She has obviously had a bet with someone to use that. We are all going to have to go and look it up, because I am pretty sure she did not actually use it in the right context. But I also noticed that the member for Cranbourne was wanting to look to the future when it comes to energy policy. We all know in Victoria why the Labor government wants to look to the future – because the last 10 years have not been very good. If you are paying electricity bills in this state, you have only seen them go up. You have only seen reliability reduce. So I can understand that.

I note that the member for Cranbourne wants to talk about offshore wind and what a wonderful thing it is – that her children think it is great and everything – but the issue is: it is not going to affect in any way, shape or form the electorate of Cranbourne or indeed most of the electorates of members of the government. It will be the electorate of Gippsland South and the electorate of South-West Coast that will be subject to this. We look forward to debating that legislation, because, yes, there are potential benefits in offshore wind if it actually ever gets off the ground.

I note that the member also talked about deep policy work. I suspect when it comes to the offshore wind sector they did not do too much deep policy work after their mate in Canberra said, 'Actually, where you want to create a port at the Port of Hastings, no, you're not going to be able to do that,' setting back the industry potentially years. I look forward to hearing members debating that issue in the legislation and explaining exactly where this is going to be built. I would invite all members opposite when they come to contributing on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024 to give a guarantee to the house that the offshore wind sector in Victoria will in fact be built from Victoria, because at the moment we do not have a port to build it from. The government's whole and sole plan was Hastings, and that has gone out the window thanks to Tanya Plibersek. It would be, I am sure, very embarrassing for those opposite were the offshore wind sector for Victoria to go ahead and be built in Bell Bay in Tasmania. I am not sure the government would be very happy about that.

I also pick up the point about deep policy work. I do not dispute that there may well have been deep policy work on that side on things like the Big Housing Build, which is a motion that is to be debated. The issue is that deep policy work does not necessarily mean you get it right. We have seen that not only with respect to rental affordability but to housing affordability and to rental and housing availability in this state, because that is going backwards at a rate of knots. I call out the member for Polwarth for some of the great work he has been doing in highlighting the failures of that. But in my electorate of Gippsland South since 2015 there are three less public and social houses in the Wellington shire and one less in the South Gippsland shire. So much for building up and increasing the social and public housing stock in our state! We have had a \$5 billion spend, and in my electorate not a single new house; in fact we have gone backwards. I think the member for Polwarth has also highlighted that across the region.

I want to just get out a bit of my grumpiness. Not to give the government any ideas, but I note that both the offshore wind bill and the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024 are

very similar. Last week we had a couple of bills that were also very similar, and I am surprised to some degree that the government has not decided to debate these bills in cognate this week. Last week most of us on this side and indeed most of the members of the government did not actually get the opportunity to debate the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 because the government decided they would whack it together and ram it through. As I said at the time, the government was so embarrassed about its SEC policy it decided to debate it in 2½ hours.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, if the members opposite were not embarrassed, why did they ram it through in 2 hours? Obviously they were concerned, and I suspect they might still be concerned in the other place as to whether they have actually got the numbers over there. No doubt they will do another deal with the Greens and something else will come through.

I am surprised also that we are pushing through the Education State motion when you look at what is on the front page of the *Herald Sun* today. Again, I commend the good work of the member for Kew as the Shadow Minister for Early Childhood and Education for highlighting the failures of the Victorian Institute of Teaching in that respect. I would hope that maybe some members opposite, when they are debating that motion this week, might explain themselves in that respect. For those reasons, as the member for Brighton has indicated, we will not be supporting the government business program.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (15:50): I do not know about discombobulating, but that was certainly a dyspeptic effort from the member for Gippsland South, who himself admitted to being rather grumpy in his delivery. This is a really important government business program that we have before the Parliament this week. It is full of substantive legislation that will make a real difference to Victorians' lives. Nothing could be more important to the work we do as a state government and as a state Parliament than impacting the cost of living for Victorians, and housing and energy are crucial to that. The Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024 recognises, I think, that we are in an environment now where we have a record number of renters in Victoria. The changing nature of tenure in housing means that there is an obligation on government to ensure that renters have secure, dignified and safe housing, and that has been central to this government's legislative agenda now over 10 years, as the member for Gippsland South generously pointed out. Over those 10 years we have brought through landmark reforms to improve the condition of renters and renting in Victoria. As a renter myself I am grateful for the way in which the security of tenure and the rights that renters have have been strengthened very significantly as a consequence of previous legislation.

This legislation will I think make another significant difference to renters by ensuring access to fair, safe and secure housing for all Victorians. It builds on the housing statement, which was obviously launched by the Premier and other ministers last year, and outlines a 10-year program of work to expand the supply of housing in Victoria. It is pieces of legislation like this that will strengthen the regulatory and legislative framework around that supply of housing and the conditions that renters are able to enjoy in Victoria. It is something I know we are all proud of on this side of the house. It is disappointing to hear that the opposition will be voting against the government business program, but I look forward to hearing their contributions on that piece of legislation when it comes on for debate later in the week.

The other big dimension of the government business program this week relates to energy. The National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024 and the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024 are really substantive pieces of legislation that reflect a very significant amount of work undertaken by the Minister for Energy and Resources and her team in bringing them to this place. They reflect the fact that an immense energy transition is currently underway in Victoria.

I was reminded during the condolence motion that we participated in earlier, through a reference to Digby Crozier having been the minister for state development with a focus on sharing economic opportunity across Victoria, of the wind farms and solar farms we have in place in the Henty region and in Bald Hills and Waubra and in places like Winton. They are in a sense the modern iteration of that dispersed economic activity – places around Victoria which are generating the renewable energy that is such an important part of the energy mix already. 38.6 per cent of Victoria's energy is generated from renewable sources already, with much more to come.

Renewables are not a coming phenomenon; they are here and they are growing. But Victoria needs a legislative framework around that creation and distribution of renewable energy that ensures that it is fit for purpose into the future. The National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill will enable the grid and the distribution network to be fit for purpose into the future, recognising that Victoria is bound into a national distribution system with the Marinus Link to Tasmania and its vast hydro-electric renewable resources likely to play a very significant role in Victoria in the future, enabling that distribution network to operate as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Of course the enabling offshore wind energy bill makes sure that there is great capacity for offshore generation. We are, as those who have ever visited Victoria's wonderful coast would know, a rather windy state. But it is one thing having the capacity to generate renewable energy in offshore regions; we have to make sure that it is able to get onshore and to the areas of Victoria where it is needed most.

This is an important and substantive government business program. There are motions on the program, including, as the member for Cranbourne said, the take-note motion following the Premier's apology to care leavers, and I look forward to the contributions that members will make. There have been some extremely moving and considered contributions already. I think it is a really worthy program, and I commend it to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:55): I rise to support my colleagues and oppose the government business program today. I do so because there are seven items on the government business program and four of them are motions. They are motions that will result in no change in the law and result in no decrease in the cost of living for families. Whilst we are here in the Parliament and Victorians are struggling to find a house, to pay their power bills and to manage the increased cost of living, it seems a waste of time that we are focusing on four motions that will not actually change the way Victorians are managing their activities, their daily living and their bills.

When I look at the four motions and see one on support for Victorian families, I expect to see in the May budget that there will be an increase in funding for the Warrnambool Base Hospital, because that hospital needs to be built to scope. It does not need to have services cut or have less or the same amount of theatres or less space in accident and emergency rather than the more that we were promised and which it needs. So we want to see an increase in funding. I would like to see that in the budget, and I expect to do so.

Another thing: if we are really talking about supporting Victorian families, we should also be looking at funding in the budget for the Lookout, the very important drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre that the Warrnambool region has been desperately asking the government to consider, because we are the only place without one in the state and we absolutely need this service of paramount importance for our community.

I also see on the government business program that one of the motions is to boast about the level crossing removals that the government has been investing in in Melbourne. One of those level crossings alone would have funded the Murray Basin rail program and seen more freight off roads and onto rail. Yet under this government, whilst they boast about being committed to rail, we see freight has gone from 14 per cent on rail down to just over 5 per cent on rail. The pressure that is putting on our roads is causing and adding to the crumbling of our regional roads. What we need to see in the budget, rather than sitting here and debating motions, is commitment to the rail project and

commitment to the roads of south-west Victoria, which are crumbling and need a massive injection from the budget in May for their repair.

I also see on the government business program the government wants to discuss the Education State. I heard just in the Parliament this morning the Minister for Education say that the safety of our children is a priority. Well, the reality, from what teachers are telling me, is they are unable to keep children safe and children are unable to get safely between one safe space and the next safe space within the campuses of their schools. The amount of bullying and assaults that are taking place and the need to have intervention orders in our schools are putting teachers under enormous pressure. They tell me they do not have the tools to be able to keep order in the classroom and they do not feel backed in by the government to do their role. When I had the Shadow Minister for Early Childhood and Education in the region, she heard the plight of the teachers begging for support from the government. What they told us was there is not a teacher shortage, there is a teacher exodus.

This government business program is really bereft of the details that the community need to drop the cost of living and address the issues that are really making people struggle and unable to meet their weekly bills for groceries, power, the fuel that has got to go in their car, nappies and formula and things that young families need. I heard the Leader of the House say that the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024 will actually go towards securing affordable housing for all Victorians. Well, tell that to Doug, Nova and Archie, who are now in temporary housing through the charitable goodness of a local family, who have no security of tenure of their home and who are homeless, with a little girl in a wheelchair. Tell that to Doug, who cannot even find out where he is on the waiting list for a home. He has been waiting for four years and was told by the department – I was told locally he has been told – that there is no house for him and his son and daughter, who is in a wheelchair, but that he can go onto the rental market and try to rent one. The average rents are about \$500, with very little support to be got from rent assistance. So this government business program leaves a lot to be desired in terms of being able to meet the needs of our community.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (53): 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, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Firewood collection

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:06): I want to raise the farcical situation for the people of my electorate if they rely on wood for heating this winter. For the people of Swan Hill it is a 340-kilometre round trip to the nearest coupe that has been set aside for firewood. For the people of Echuca it is a 260-kilometre round trip to the nearest coupe that has been set aside for firewood. The crazy part is if

I lived in Bourke Street just down the road from Parliament, it would be only 60 kilometres to the nearest coupe for firewood. The people of Swan Hill, the people of Echuca and those in between have to travel hundreds of kilometres to get their firewood. There is plenty of wood in northern Victoria – if the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and Parks Victoria would just make it available for the people that live in that particular area. There always has been and there always will be plenty of wood there, except for the government departments and the rules that the Allan government have put on the collection of firewood.

So I would urge the minister and the government to actually change the rules and make those coupes available for the people of Swan Hill, for the people of Echuca and for all those in between so that they do not have to drive 340 kilometres for a round trip and they do not have to drive 260 kilometres for a round trip on roads that are full of potholes and are dangerous and littered. To get 2 cubic metres of wood a round trip like that is just not viable, and people cannot afford the cost of energy under the Allan government.

Pauline Toner prize

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (16:07): It was my pleasure to again host my annual Pauline Toner prize, celebrating International Women's Day and our young female leaders. In its 10th year, with this prize, named after an impressive woman with many firsts – the first female minister in the Parliament of Victoria, the first female MP, mayor and councillor for my area – we celebrate the achievements of local young women active in the areas of social justice, the environment and gender equality, areas important to Pauline Toner. Congratulations to nominees Alexandra Laidlaw, Rachel Aden, Chloe Shaw, Sophie Wang and Gianna Andreoli for their exceptional contributions to our community. I especially congratulate Kris Van Der Kamp on being the recipient of this year's award. I thank Yuki Williams for her lovely keyboard performance, Sue Dyet, Madeline Toner and Sandra Macneil OAM for their ongoing role on the selection panel, and give heartfelt thanks to Rebecca Thistleton, executive director of the McKell Institute, for her insights as our guest speaker.

Country Fire Authority Wattle Glen brigade

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (16:08): Congratulations to Wattle Glen CFA on their 80th anniversary. Formed in 1944 following the Wattle Glen station fire, which burnt through to Research, Wattle Glen CFA was originally a branch of the Diamond Creek brigade, becoming its own independent brigade in 1965. While there have been many changes over time, it has never waned in its service to our community. I thank the countless volunteers who have devoted so much of their time to helping protect communities locally and across the state; we are grateful. You help protect our communities as well as help connect our communities. I thank those who support our CFA volunteers, the Wattle Glen ladies auxiliary, now the Wattle Glen support group, established in 1962. While their main aim in the beginning was to support – (*Time expired*)

Lowan electorate projects

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (16:09): In the lead-up to the state budget I invite the Premier to join me in the electorate of Lowan to meet with locals and experience firsthand the fabulous local projects we have got that are ripe for investment and shovel ready. First of all, the Premier will head down the Western Highway to see the great need for that highway to be duplicated and for all those potholes to be fixed. First stop is the Willaura hospital, desperately needing some investment and an upgrade through there. Then we are going to stop off to see Pete Sporton at the Willaura Bakery and enjoy a vanilla slice. We will head through to Pomonal to see where the tunnel track should be built. We are also going to speak to locals and particularly small businesses to understand why funding has still not been delivered for small businesses and primary industries after the bushfires.

We are going to drop into Stawell and look at the secondary college and also the athletics track, which needs a new scoreboard. We are going to go through Rupanyup, have a look at the potholes in the main street and get those fixed as soon as we can. We will see where the Dunmunkle early years centre is going to be built. We are going to go to Warracknabeal, to Anzac park, where Mick Morcom's funeral was held last week. May he rest in peace – my deepest condolences to his family. Then we are going to go to Dimboola to look at the bowls club, out on the Western Highway to look at Nhill's Davis Park clubrooms, which definitely need to be upgraded, then to Kaniva College and back around then to Natimuk and look at the weir that has been funded but is not being built at the moment.

We are going to go to Horsham, look at Coughlin Park and the netball and tennis courts and then go to the hospital and see where the MRI is sitting in a container outside the building. We are then going to head down the road and go to Balmoral bowls club. The Glenelg Highway is in terrible condition. We are going to Hamilton to look at the hospital and look at the lighting, and then Mortlake community health. We are going to get all of this done, and we are going to see funding in this year's budget.

Natalie Rabey

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (16:10): I rise to recognise the passing and significant contribution made to the Ashwood district by Natalie Rabey. For many years Natalie was a central pillar of our community. She volunteered in and led many grassroots organisations with a focus on social justice and community building. I am glad to be of the many people who had the opportunity to work with Natalie in her constant efforts to the betterment of our community.

Natalie started volunteering for Power Neighbourhood House in 2005 and was an active member of its governance committee. She was keenly aware of the importance of neighbourhood houses in providing social infrastructure to assist those in need and tie the community together. Natalie was also a prominent member and chairperson of the Ashburton, Ashwood and Chadstone Public Tenants Group. As the chairperson of this group she was a strong advocate for the development and maintenance of public housing. Her tireless volunteer work and advocacy included her involvement in the Ashwood Chadstone family violence group, the Ashwood Chadstone committee for Ashwood–Chadstone Family Fun Day, the ACT Network, the ACT leadership group, the Ashwood Chadstone partnership group, the Victorian Public Tenants Association, the committee for party on power events and blue light disco events.

For her community work Natalie was awarded the Frances Penington Award, amongst many others, and Natalie's funeral last week was standing room only, not only in the church but also in the foyer. It was a testament to the sheer breadth of her achievements through her hard work and compassion.

Natalie's many thoughtful contributions will forever be remembered. The funny thing about Natalie was whenever she came up to you to talk about local things, it was always about someone else. She will be sorely missed by the community. Vale, Natalie Rabey.

Housing

David HODGETT (Croydon) (16:12): I rise today to speak on the alarming amount of calls my office has received in the last six months from public housing tenants who have been waiting an excessive amount of time for repairs or maintenance to be carried out on their properties. One tenant has experienced several maintenance issues after the many years she has lived there, with the most recent matter involving a shower that has tiles falling off the walls, making it no longer waterproof. Water has leaked into the joining walls. Mould is now growing in her wardrobe. She has contacted the department on many occasions, as has my office, and these repairs are no closer to being addressed. My constituent has many health issues which are only being exacerbated by the mould.

Another constituent had her bath removed due to a fault with the plumbing, leaving her with a shower which she cannot use due to the same plumbing issues and which floods the bathroom. It has now been three weeks since this elderly constituent has been able to shower herself.

We have heard from tenants that have kitchen and cupboard doors falling off, carpets separating from underlay, lino peeling off kitchen floors, mould in bedrooms and bathrooms due to poor ventilation and heaters that have been disconnected and not replaced – the list goes on and on. These are a minuscule example of the issues that have been raised, and they are completely unacceptable.

The government has a responsibility out of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to carry out urgent repairs within 24 hours of being notified and non-urgent repairs within 14 days. Some tenants are waiting years and being treated as second-class citizens. The government has a responsibility as the landlord to fix these issues. I would be happy to provide names if necessary.

Sandie Braun

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (16:14): I pay tribute to Sandie Braun, a beloved and wonderful member of the Sunbury community who sadly passed away last week. Sandie was indeed an incredible person. She was a member of the Sunbury Agricultural Society since 1984, including 10 years as both the president and secretary. She was a much-loved and incredible member of our local community and did an extraordinary amount of work in bringing not just the Sunbury agricultural show together but right across the community. She was a person that was incredibly warm-spirited and kind, and I extend my thoughts to her family and her loved ones. Of course she leaves a significant legacy and will be sadly missed.

SunFest

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (16:14): On another matter, this past weekend we of course marked the milestone again of the SunFest community festival. It was spectacular to see so many people out and about enjoying the sunshine and enjoying all of the things that our local community offers – schools, community groups, businesses and a whole range of different organisations coming together in what is a terrific local event. I thank each and every volunteer that made SunFest possible and of course thank everybody within our local community who had conversations with me throughout the day about important projects and initiatives in our community.

Aiden Gorozdis

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (16:15): Today I rise to thank the Beaconsfield Junior Football Club and the Berwick Junior Football Club, who have had an amazing fundraising day. They have proven what community sport and support are all about. They raised money for the Gorozdis family. Aidan, who is just 17 years old, has been diagnosed with cancer again. It is just 454 days after going into remission. Aidan does not want to be the centre of attention, but the community and his mates all had their eyes on him as he went out and played football this weekend to show his strength and his commitment to getting through these challenges. It was an honour to be involved in this and to see the Berwick football club, who are the arch enemies of Beaconsfield, be involved in a guard of honour as Aidan came out onto the ground and join with the club to raise \$8000 for that family. I also say to people: if you would like to donate, I will put the link in social media so you can make sure you can support Di. And to Di and your family: I and the community will always remain with you as you face these challenges.

Holi Festival of Colours

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (16:16): Holi Festival at Akoonah Park – I want to thank the organisers Nitin Pullat and Uday Chandran and their amazing committee for the wonderful event they had this weekend – it is really hard, when you are choking, to say this, isn't it? It was an amazing event of colour this weekend. We also had Mark Santomartino come down. I have to say to Mark: I am very sorry about your suit, but it actually highlighted what an amazing multicultural community we have down in Berwick with the Holi festival, the festival of colours, with an amazing group in the Berwick community.

Ramadan

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (16:17): Ramadan Mubarak to all Victorians who observe the holy month of Ramadan. Whilst I am not fasting, I am privileged to join many Muslim friends at iftar dinners to collectively break the fast. On Saturday I attended the Iftar for Impact, hosted by a small charity that has a very big impact, Heart to Hati, raising funds for refugees from Palestine who have arrived in Melbourne with literally only the clothes on their backs, carrying the most terrible memories of the horrors they have experienced and the grief for loved ones and ancestral homes and identity left behind or lost. Thank you Ms Birgul Kahraman, treasurer; founder Guzin Inanir; president Emine Inanir; and all the volunteers who worked so hard to bring us together for iftar.

I also look forward to joining with the Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Muslim Welfare Trust of Victoria and Sajid Toori's very generous iftar for international students during the course of this week – organisations and services that practise and demonstrate the very essence of what I understand Ramadan to represent – kindness, generosity, reflection and solidarity with others as well as spirituality, piety and devotion.

Country Fire Authority Epping brigade

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (16:18): Members of the Epping CFA, friends and supporters celebrated 80 years of service on Saturday. It was an honour to be there. We heard a very interesting account of the history of the Epping CFA. I congratulate members on the work they continue to do following on this great commitment to professionalism and service and acknowledge the great leadership of Robert Saitta.

Gippsland East electorate mental health services

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (16:18): There are a number of people in the Bairnsdale and Orbost communities that want to know where their promised mental health hubs are. This has a very interesting history, because it was initially announced when these hubs were to be established that Bairnsdale and Orbost would be established in the middle of the year 2023 – by June–July 2023. Obviously that did not occur. Then in September we had a media release come out from the government office saying that the Bairnsdale facility was open. This was published in the *Bairnsdale Advertiser*. This was on 3TR radio – that the service was open. I got a copy of the media release.

In the coming days we soon realised there was no service open in Bairnsdale whatsoever. A statement came out from the minister's office saying an error had been made, but it said that these facilities would be open by Christmas – they would be opening by December. Well, December has come and gone; we have no mental health hubs. We are now approaching April; we have no mental health hubs. I have asked repeatedly when these will be delivered. I specifically asked that these services have outreach capacity to reach those communities around Bairnsdale and Orbost. I have been advised that will be provided. But I would like to know, and the community would like to know, when these hubs will be delivered with their essential outreach services.

Soul+Food

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (16:20): I want to acknowledge the great work of Soul+Food in my electorate of Wendouree, a service which offers non-judgemental support to those who need it by supplying food items and personal care products. Our Labor government provided \$76,000 to the Soul+Food community hub, and the organisation continues to thrive and go from strength to strength.

I want to congratulate Veronica Tirchett, Peter Debreki, Pastor John, Pastor Jaiden and David for their leadership and compassion, as well as the 45 volunteers for the contribution they make. Importantly, Soul+Food provides not only emergency food relief but connection, support and community for individuals and families doing it tough, whether they are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, fleeing family violence or feeling isolated and alone. The hub provides nutrition for the body and the

soul and is open every Thursday from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm at the corner of Grevillea and Learmonth roads, Wendouree.

There are many reasons for Soul+Food's success, including the support of Ballarat's newly established Foodbank as well as the generosity of many companies, including StarTrack Express, Bunnings, McCain's, Aesop, Share the Dignity, Domino's Pizza, Good360, FareShare and Big W, as well as local businesses Sunnybank eggs, 1816 Bakehouse, Natures Cargo and Golden Nugget Bakery. I would really like to shout out to the Sebastopol Lions Club for their support as well.

Soul+Food is also supporting people to access services, with Centrelink every fortnight providing advice and answers.

Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre

Jess WILSON (Kew) (16:21): Last week I joined Jordan and Sophie from Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre to lead a discussion with grade 4 students at Carey grammar school about what it means to live with a disability. Jordan and Sophie are invaluable members of the Kew community. Last year both Jordan and Sophie won medals at the Special Olympics world summer games in Berlin, which is a testament to their discipline, determination and resilience. Jordan and Sophie led a thought-provoking conversation with Carey students. The topic of the discussion was 'In someone else's shoes', encouraging students to understand and consider the challenges which people with a disability face every day. Thank you to Jordan and Sophie and the year 4s at Carey grammar for bringing such interest and enthusiasm to this important conversation. I have received the most lovely letters from the Carey students since. Thank you to Alexis, Claudia, Aiden, Scarlett, Isabelle, Eddie, Gracy, Weilisi, Bella, Amelie, Leila, Isaac and Ben for your very kind words.

Balwyn High School

Jess WILSON (Kew) (16:22): It was an honour to attend the 70th platinum anniversary celebrations of Balwyn High School. Balwyn High School sets the benchmark for educational excellence in Victoria, consistently achieving exceptional results for tens of thousands of students. As well as offering educational excellence, Balwyn High is also a pillar of our community with the way in which it brings together many multicultural and migrant backgrounds throughout children's time at Balwyn High and beyond. I would like to thank all the staff at Balwyn High, both past and present, for their contribution to this great school. Because of their hard work and dedication every student who has attended Balwyn High has been given the very best opportunity to follow their dreams and achieve their ambitions. And a big shout-out to principal Deborah Harman.

Women in Rescue

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (16:23): In the spirit of last week's International Women's Day I would like to give a big shout-out to those women involved in our rescue services, and particularly those women in the regions. Last weekend I went to the Women in Rescue event in Myrniong, which was hosted by the VICSES and organised by the wonderful Jane Patton, who is the community resilience coordinator. It was a fantastic opportunity to meet the women from VICSES Ballarat and Bacchus Marsh, Victoria Police, St John Ambulance and even the Bacchus Marsh Girl Guides, who were all taking part in a full-day training exercise. It takes so many hours of intense training to be able to save lives and respond to crises as quickly and as well they do, and I saw those hours of training up close. I had some fantastic conversations with some of the women during their lunch break, and I was taken aback by just how much passion they have for their communities and what they do. It is important that we as parliamentarians continue to uplift the voices and the work of women every single day and in everything that we do, especially those women who do such vital and life-saving work – and those who do so voluntarily and on top of their careers, families and lives. Thank you very much to the women in our voluntary services.

Tibetan New Year

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (16:24): I was honoured to help organise an event for the Tibetan Community of Australia Victoria last month in Queen's Hall to help celebrate Tibetan New Year. Tibetan New Year, known as Losar, is a vibrant celebration deeply rooted in rich traditions, cultural significance and spiritual reflection. It marks the beginning of the Tibetan lunar calendar and is a time of renewal, family gatherings and community bonding. This event served as a platform to honour and preserve the rich heritage of the Tibetan community through exhibitions of traditional art, handicrafts and culinary delights, and attendees had the opportunity to delve deeper into the fascinating tapestry of Tibetan culture. May this celebration serve as a beacon of hope, joy and cultural harmony for years to come. Tashi delek.

Melbourne Youth Orchestras

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (16:25): I would like to congratulate the 15 young musicians from the Pahran electorate who have been accepted into the Melbourne Youth Orchestras ensemble program in 2024. I hope that the state government funding will be reinstated for this important program, which fosters growth in young students. Melbourne Youth Orchestras provides students with an avenue to explore musical potential, instils invaluable life skills such as discipline, teamwork and perseverance and promotes inclusivity and diversity by welcoming aspiring musicians from all backgrounds and all walks of life.

Hastings electorate schools

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (16:26): I would like to thank the Minister for Education for taking the time last week to come down and visit my electorate, specifically Western Port Secondary College. During his visit the minister formally opened the new education centre, made possible by a grant of \$11.5 million by the Allan Labor government. The new education centre is absolutely amazing and was created with a lot of artistic input from students. After opening the centre the minister met with 20 principals from various schools within my electorate for a principals morning tea. We shared an hour of questions, thoughts, discussions and ideas – and cakes – and I know the minister took away some really important points.

Hastings electorate community events

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (16:26): On another matter, the Labour Day long weekend was not only hot but extremely busy. On the Saturday we had the Red Hill Show, attended by around 11,000 people. I was the head judge of the golden sausage competition for the third year in a row and tasted some fantastic snags. The winner was a local lad who made a beef, pork, jalapeno and cheese sausage.

On Sunday we had the Tyabb air show, which was absolutely awesome. I would like to thank the Assistant Treasurer for coming down and opening the show with me. Nine thousand people came to watch an incredible variety of planes do some truly amazing formation flying and acrobatics.

On Monday, as if that was not enough, we had the fabulous Somerville Family Day. It was the ninth year of the show, and it was certainly bigger and better than ever, with over 10,000 people coming through to enjoy everything it had to offer.

None of these events would have been possible at all without the generosity of volunteers. To all of them, I say thank you.

Nepean electorate schools

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (16:27): Ahead of the upcoming state budget I just want to flag some funding requirements for schools in my local electorate. Rye Primary School has asked for funding for an external staircase to provide access for students to the second level of classrooms, student bathroom refurbishments and repairs to their roofing and drainage.

St Joseph's primary down in Sorrento continues to face a major setback with the government's school bus program not being extended. That has left the school now out of pocket \$65,000, and these are resources that could otherwise be used for educational purposes.

Tootgarook Primary remains the only school in my electorate without a fully covered outdoor space or basketball court. The current facilities – and I have been down there – are cracked. The rough asphalt is causing injuries to students at the school. This desperately needs to be replaced.

Each of these schools, as well as others, has major funding needs that are not currently being addressed, and I hope they will be in this year's budget. My community, the parents, kids and our local schools need to be treated equally by the government, just as the rest of metropolitan Melbourne is, and provided with the funding they desperately need and deserve.

Sorrento Cricket Club

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (16:29): I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the Sorrento Cricket Club on being awarded Junior Cricket Initiative of the Year for 2023–24 by Cricket Victoria for their Sharks cricket program. I want to thank all those involved at the Sorrento Cricket Club for the great job that they do in their community, and I want to wish their second and third XIs the best of luck for their grand finals this week.

Pakenham early learning centres

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (16:29): This has been the month for visiting our early learning centres. Hollins Children's Centre and Greenwood early learning were both successful with \$6000 grants for bush kinder, and I enjoyed morning tea with the wonderful staff and children from Pakenham Aspire early education. All three visits made clear to me the dedication of these passionate educators for our young Victorians.

Pakenham electorate housing

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (16:29): Minister Brooks and I viewed the Olio housing development in Officer and met with Development Victoria to hear about this significant and exciting project, providing 228 sustainable and affordable townhouses together with a lovely park area. Stage 1 includes nine social housing homes and stage 2 includes 13.

Sammy's Community Pantry

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (16:30): I met with Major Road Projects Victoria to get an update on the work taking place on our roads and to hear about the fundraising efforts of McConnell Dowell, one of our contractors, which made a significant donation to Sammy's Community Pantry. We went to visit Marg at Sammy's, who does so much to help disadvantaged families doing it tough. It was great to see that their fundraising efforts managed to purchase a big fridge and freezer, which has already come in handy.

St Brigid's Catholic Primary School, Officer

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (16:30): I was pleased to officially open new learning spaces at St Brigid's school in Officer. Our government contributed \$2 million for new and upgraded facilities for their future growth.

Pakenham and District Agricultural and Horticultural Show

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (16:30): Over the weekend I had the opportunity with my team of volunteers to be involved in the fantastic Pakenham show, a fabulous day where community came together. A big shout-out to my friend Janette Young and her team of volunteers. Pakenham locals had a great day, and I want to thank everybody who made the day possible.

Qaim Foundation iftar dinner

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (16:30): As we all know, many people in our communities are currently celebrating the holy month of Ramadan. Last night I joined Qaim Foundation Australia in co-hosting a community iftar dinner in Kororoit, which we hope will be an annual event. The Qaim Foundation graciously opened their doors to local multifaith groups and community leaders to share in their culture and bring our community together at this time. Iftar is a reflection of the core pillars of Islam. It shows the importance of community, generosity, gratitude and hospitality. The Qaim Foundation offer this in spades, and I am proud to call them a friend of not only me but the entire community. This event was also an opportunity for the youth of the Qaim Foundation to be involved in translating prayers, showcasing their talents, reading poetry and giving guests a great insight into the meaning of Ramadan.

Together the Qaim Foundation and I invited leaders from the Kororoit community. It was incredibly diverse, and there were leaders of many faiths present. Many of those who attended last night had not been to an iftar dinner before. I want to thank them all for joining us in this experience, and I hope that they took something from this. I want to thank Minister Stitt from the other place for also joining us. I want to thank the resident scholar Abul Qasim Rizvi, the president Rehan Ali, the secretary Ashiq Bangash, my good friend Sejad Asied Ali Takvi, organisers, the executive and volunteers of last night's event from the Qaim Foundation. As-salamu alaykum and to all, Ramadan Kareem.

ASEAN–Australia Special Summit

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (16:32): I was proud to join members of South-East Asian communities from the Burmese, Cambodian, Vietnamese and Lao communities of Australia on the steps of Parliament House on Saturday to protest the loss of human rights and democracy in our countries of origin. The leaders of the repressive regimes in our countries of origin were here in Melbourne, joining the ASEAN–Australia Special Summit. The respective diaspora communities cannot accept this, and we joined together to send a message to ASEAN leaders to protest repression in South-East Asia and to call for the restoration of human rights and democracy in our countries of origin. With friends the member for Mordialloc, the member for Cranbourne and the federal member for Bruce Julian Hill, we joined the calls on the Australian government to advocate strongly for democracy and human rights in ASEAN countries and to end the intimidation and harassment by these regimes in our countries of origin and of the communities here in Australia. Thank you to all community representatives, community members and volunteers for coming together in solidarity across countries and communities with those fighting for freedom and democracy to call on all our people to live peacefully. The Australian government values human rights and democracy, and we will continue to call on the federal government to work more actively for these rights in ASEAN countries.

Ramadan

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:34): Ramadan Mubarak. Muslims across Greenvale and around the world are observing the holy month of Ramadan. This sacred month represents a journey of spiritual reflection, self-discipline and compassion. I am deeply grateful to represent a community where faith is so important and where tens of thousands of residents are marking Ramadan, which this year aligns with the Christian Lenten period. I want to thank each mosque community, Islamic school and charitable organisation serving Greenvale for their immense contributions to our community. Organisations like Islamic Community Milli Gorus exemplify this through their good works and welcoming community celebrations, like the forthcoming 15th annual street iftar at Meadow Heights mosque, a great example of the harmony and hospitality that defines both Ramadan and my community of Greenvale. Indeed I am so fortunate to be spending so many evenings throughout Ramadan with my constituents to share the breaking of the fast at iftar dinners. I wish all Muslim communities in Greenvale and around the world a peaceful and fulfilling holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan Mubarak.

Bakhdida fire

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:35): Next week marks six months since a devastating fire killed so many innocent victims at a wedding celebration in the Iraqi town of Bakhdida. Many of those killed and injured had loved ones living in Greenvale, and the grief associated with this tragedy has been felt acutely here in Victoria. I was grateful to join leaders from the Syriac community last weekend to commemorate the lives that were lost in Bakhdida. Having established new lives in Australia, I am in awe of the extraordinary contribution of Syriacs, Chaldeans and Assyrians to our local community. I thank those like Father Fadhel who are ensuring the memory of those lives lost at Bakhdida is never forgotten, and I share their commitment to seeking justice for the victims.

Boomerang Bags

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:35): I had the pleasure last week of visiting Marlene and the team at our local Boomerang Bags weekly sewing bee. I was so impressed with the range of reusable bags that had been lovingly made by volunteers that I just had to bring a selection back to the office. If you are after some bright, fun, well-made re-usable shopping bags, pop down to my office and browse the stand.

Village 21

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:35): Last week also there were more cranes than ever in Frankston – more cranes in Frankston than in Richmond, in fact – with the arrival of some very innovative housing for young people. Village 21 – Moorumbina Mongurnallin – is an exciting collaboration between Kids Under Cover; the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; Harris HMC; NH Architecture; Sensum; and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. The Village 21 project will comprise six units that will see six young people aged 18 to 21 years transition to independence with the help of onsite mentors and wraparound services in a supported housing model. I was so pleased to be able to visit that site and thank everyone involved.

Bills

Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendment considered:

Insert the following New Clause after clause 5 –

‘5A New section 7A inserted

After section 7 of the **Climate Change Act 2017** insert –

“7A Independent expert advice in relation to determination for net zero greenhouse gas emissions

- (1) In determining the amount of total greenhouse gas emissions attributable to the State, the Minister must obtain advice from one or more persons who are appropriately qualified, in the Minister's opinion, to act as an independent expert.
- (2) The advice obtained under subsection (1) must include an independent assessment of the amount of total greenhouse gas emissions attributable to the State.
- (3) In forming the advice, an independent expert must consider –
 - (a) the demonstrated effectiveness of any proposed activities for the removal of greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere; and
 - (b) the likely effectiveness of any eligible offsets.
- (4) The Minister must publish any independent expert advice obtained under this section on the Internet site of the Department as soon as practicable after the advice is received by the Minister.”.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (16:36): I move:

That this amendment be agreed to.

I am pleased to say that the government is accepting of the amendment that has been moved and supported in the other place to require independent expert advice to be obtained when we reach net zero emissions in Victoria in 2045. Under the current act and regulations reporting on greenhouse gas emissions is aligned with the Commonwealth, state and territory inventories, and this process will continue. When we reach net zero by 2045 it is crucial that we ensure the integrity of our net zero declaration, and while the states and territories inventory is a robust process, independent expert advice will provide additional assurances to Victorians that we have met our targets. I do want to thank the Greens for engaging in very productive discussions with the government on this amendment.

Broadly speaking, the Victorian government is very proud to be leading the nation on climate action, and this bill only strengthens our position at the forefront of this critical transition. Upon passage of this bill Victoria will become one of the very few state or federal governments anywhere in the world to legislate a net zero date of 2045 or earlier, and we know that we can achieve this ambitious aim because we have beaten every one of our emissions and renewable energy targets thus far. These are interim targets that we have set.

Our climate and energy agenda will continue to create jobs and grow the economy, and by legislating our suite of targets we are providing industry with the certainty it needs to continue investing in new clean technology. We know that by meeting our 2035 emissions reduction target – that is, one of the interim targets – we will unlock more than \$63 billion in value for the Victorian economy, while our 95 per cent renewable electricity target will create 59,000 jobs by 2035. This target of 95 per cent renewables by 2035 is critical to ensuring energy security and cheaper power for Victorians.

Our government is committed to building the cheapest new-build energy generation on the market that is renewables and only renewables. Putting downward pressure on prices is a critical part of this agenda, as is of course cutting our emissions. As the old and ever increasingly unreliable coal-fired power generators exit the market, bringing more renewable energy into the system is the only way to ensure our power grid works for all Victorians.

Our energy storage and offshore wind energy targets complete the picture by ensuring that we maintain confirmed renewable generation 24 hours a day. These targets are supporting the creation of whole new industries in this country, and Victoria is proudly getting on with delivering big batteries and the nation's first offshore wind generators.

We are also further integrating climate change into our planning system through a new objective in the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and creating a new head of consideration for planning authorities to consider climate change when preparing a planning scheme or planning scheme amendment. I do want to acknowledge and thank the Minister for Planning for this very important reform.

Climate change is a critical challenge for our state and our planet, and the Victorian government is tackling it head on. This bill further raises Victoria's ambition as a world leader on climate action and will further catalyse our renewable energy transformation. I commend this bill to the house.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (16:40): This bill is coming back to the lower house because of an amendment the Greens secured support for in the upper house. We will be supporting it. It is our amendment – I wrote it – so of course we will be supporting it. I just want to outline a little bit more about what the amendment does and why it is so important.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Minister for Climate Action, Minister D'Ambrosio, and her office in particular for engaging very constructively with the Greens on this and supporting this amendment, which allowed it to go through the upper house. I would also like to thank those in the

upper house who did support it – the rest of the Labor government, the Animal Justice Party and Legalise Cannabis – who all spoke in favour of it, and I believe it went through on the voices in the end.

This is an amendment to the Climate Change Act 2017 which closes essentially a loophole in our laws that could allow dodgy offsets and unproven carbon capture and storage to be counted towards Victoria's net zero emissions reduction targets. Let me explain what that means. This bill sets a target for Victoria becoming net zero with our emissions by 2045. That is a good aim, net zero by 2045. However, what 'net zero' actually means is the important thing here. Currently in the Climate Change Act there exists this loophole that essentially allows offsets or carbon capture and storage to be included as counting towards our net zero targets.

As it stands, the law in Victoria states that the minister alone firstly determines the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that are attributed to Victoria when it comes to meeting our net zero target by 2045. The minister also has sole power to say whether carbon offsets and carbon capture and storage can contribute in calculating what net zero means, so how much offsets and CCS contribute to our emissions reduction targets. What this means in practice is that a government could essentially say that we are at net zero, that we are meeting our net zero targets, but that could include a huge amount of dodgy offsets. It could include untested carbon capture and storage that in reality means we are not actually reducing emissions much at all. It is essentially a dodgy accounting trick allowed in the current law.

Under our amendment, our proposal – which if passed through this house will be accepted into law – before doing that the minister would actually have to seek independent expert advice about the veracity of their emissions calculations. This scientific, independent advice has to specifically include whether offsets or carbon capture and storage actually lower emissions or whether they are just dodgy accounting and do not do very much at all. It is a really sensible thing to require that independent advice to make sure that we are not just saying that we are at net zero, that we are not using accounting tricks but we are actually reducing emissions, because that is what we are all here for, right? That is what the bill is supposed to do.

In fact Victoria already does something like this when it sets our emissions reduction targets overall. The government already has to get independent expert advice on what the Victorian targets should be according to science. So it is not something that is unheard of; it is not a new thing. We are just saying, 'Let's get independent expert advice on net zero targets, offsets and CCS as well.'

I would like to especially thank Environmental Justice Australia and Environment Victoria for helping us with this amendment. It was a joint effort, and I am really pleased that the Greens were able to shepherd it through the Parliament and make it law.

I want to talk a little bit more about why the independent advice is really important, because time and time again we actually have seen dodgy offsets and carbon capture and storage used as Trojan horses for the fossil fuel industry, which have then been accepted by governments to make governments feel like they are doing something good in reducing emissions when in fact we are not actually reducing emissions at all. We are just allowing big fossil fuel corporations to keep polluting.

The climate continues to heat up. All we have done is spend taxpayer money to allow fossil fuel companies to keep polluting the atmosphere, and we actually have seen this happening for years now. If you look at the federal carbon offset scheme, it relies basically on fraudulent carbon credits. Last year ANU researchers found people were obtaining credits for not clearing forests that were never going to be cleared anyway, for growing trees that actually already existed, for growing forests in places that it was clear were never able to sustain forests and for operating generators at landfills that were already going to operate anyway. So these are dodgy offsets that we do not want to be any part of the net zero targets in Victoria. We do not want to use these dodgy offsets to say we are meeting

net zero but actually not get the outcome that we all want to achieve. That is why this amendment is so important; it is getting independent scientific expert advice on whether offsets are real or not.

On carbon capture and storage, look no further than the Gorgon project, Chevron's super massive LNG plant in the Pilbara. The WA government only approved this plant on the explicit condition that Chevron could capture and permanently store at least 4 million tonnes of CO₂ a year. But in fact what happened was that it failed to store a single tonne of CO₂ in its first three years of gas exports. In 2022 the Gorgon gas project emitted more greenhouse gas emissions than any other industrial facility in Australia. This was put up in lights as the golden child for carbon capture. This was going to be the project that demonstrated that carbon capture and storage could work, yet last year it only captured a third of the capacity that it promised it would. This is not working. Carbon capture and storage does not work at a commercial scale anywhere in the world. Even in these huge, big projects that have been given so much money and that are desperately trying to make this technology work, it is not working. So we do not want dodgy carbon capture and storage, something that is untested or dodgy offsets to be used to say that Victoria is reducing our emissions when we are actually not reducing our emissions.

Our hope is that through this amendment, by ensuring independent verification of net zero, Victorian governments and fossil fuel giants are put on notice that we actually have to hit our climate obligations. If we want to actually hit our climate obligations and our targets, offsets and CCS really should be systems of absolutely last resort. We should be reducing emissions at the source, not just emitting and then hoping that we are able to capture them later with technology that is not working. At a bare minimum, offsets must deliver effective, equivalent and permanent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and they need to be independently verified to make sure that is actually the case. That is what this amendment helps us do.

We also hope that with this amendment – and hopefully we will have the Liberal and National parties also support the amendment – then every other state and territory and even the federal government will also look at this and see that we cannot con our way to net zero emissions and we cannot do it by just paying a pittance over here to pretend that we are planting some trees and hope that that will allow us to keep polluting. Net zero actually needs to mean what it says on the tin: it actually needs to mean net zero emissions. It is a small change, but I will be very pleased if we are able to get this modest but very important change to the Climate Change Act through. On that, I would like to commend the amendment to the house.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:49): I would firstly like to acquit the amendment. On a positive note, I should say we are supporting the amendment, and I just want to make a couple of points with regard to that. Firstly, I would say that the inventory that we have in the state is a robust process; however, the independent expert advice will provide additional assurances to Victorians that we are meeting our targets. I would like to allay the concerns of the Greens political party that our tripling of investment in renewables is not about feelings, it is about making significant structural change and investment in cleaner energy for Victoria, and we certainly have good form in this space.

Upon passage of this bill Victoria will become one of the very few state or federal governments anywhere in the world to legislate a net zero date of 2045 or earlier. Let us unpack that a bit. I should also say that we always have a holistic approach when it comes to investment in the energy sector and investment broadly across all infrastructure across our state, because our climate and energy agenda will continue to create jobs and grow the economy by legislating our suite of targets – very strong targets, again, not feelings, but actual targets for emissions reduction and renewable investment – that we will deliver on and have already delivered on to date. We know that by meeting our 2035 emissions reduction target we will unlock – I am going to reassert this, because when you are looking at the holistic picture of investment in energy – more than \$63 billion in value for the Victorian economy. Our 95 per cent renewable energy target will create 59,000 jobs by 2035, and our 95 per cent renewable energy target by 2035 is critical for ensuring both energy security and cheaper power for Victorians. I know during the recent wild weather that we had there were some equally wild suggestions – 'Oh, let's jump to nuclear, because that will just fix everything' – when in fact we know that nuclear still

has to pass through poles and wires. It is not going to magically go from the nuclear power plant to houses. So when you have thousands and thousands of trees knocking over thousands and thousands of poles and wires, lo and behold, not even nuclear can help in that situation. I am just putting it out there. I was actually on the inquiry into nuclear prohibition, and I must say that –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is an extremely tight debate about an amendment. It is one amendment. It is one very, very tight amendment, and the debate that is currently occurring is not in any way related to that specific amendment, which is what this debate is about.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Jackson Taylor): The member had strayed from the debate. I ask the member to come back.

Nina TAYLOR: Absolutely. Yes, indeed. I accept your ruling there, learned Acting Speaker, noting that I was within the frame, or I seek to be within the frame, of energy and energy security. I hope that that was not understood otherwise in the chamber, but I respect your ruling also.

Of course we are committed to building the cheapest new-build energy generation on the market, renewables, putting downward pressure on power prices and cutting emissions. Consistent with the central tenet and purposes of the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023 we would say that how we invest in energy in this state is indeed relevant to the underlying purposes of the legislation, because we know as the old unreliable coal-fired power generators exit the market, bringing on more new renewable energy into the system is the only way to ensure our power grid works for all Victorians.

I just felt that there have been a lot of discussions about what that means for energy security into the future and how we best accommodate that for our state, both for commercial industry and also for residential consumers as well. That is why the discussion must pertain to, ‘Okay, what is the relevant source or sources of energy for our state?’ On that note, our energy storage and offshore wind energy targets complete the picture, because it is not only about the energy generated. It is also, of course – and I am not saying anything that the chamber is not aware of, just reasserting the relevance of energy storage and offshore energy wind targets to complete the picture by ensuring we maintain firmed renewable energy generation 24 hours a day. I just want to be very clear for the chamber that we do not wish to undermine in any way energy security, and in fact we are asserting that and we are reaffirming that through the significant investment in clean renewable energy and storage and by setting really strong energy targets. On that note, I will commend this amendment to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:55): I rise to speak on the amendment that has been agreed to by the Legislative Council. When this bill first came to the chamber in this place there were three matters that were spoken to that were specific to this amendment that the coalition raised, one being the matter of the Premier and minister determining the point at which the targets are reached – and the Greens have spoken to that matter in terms of this amendment. We raised our concerns because the legislation did simply allow the minister to decide – and the Greens have eloquently put the need to stop dodginess – when that point was reached, with no depth behind it.

We also raised the point at that time that the reporting of the ongoing level which the targets are at is not transparent. They are not available to the community. We moved an amendment that spoke specifically to that, and we talked about the need to be more transparent. I mean, we should have a situation where kids at school, students – whoever it is, whoever is interested – have the capacity to jump on a website at any time and look at where these targets are currently at, what the goal is and where the targets are currently at. We know you cannot do that, because of – the third point that was raised – the lack of reporting under the bill. Effectively, the minister comes into this place at a time of their choosing once a year and reports it. So there were three, I guess, transparency measures that were raised in that debate: the reporting and the lack of reporting, the online accessibility of where the targets are at at any time and also the minister’s capacity to make a determination.

Now, this amendment, which the coalition will not be supporting, though I understand the sentiment behind it, does include in the drafting that the minister can appoint a person who in the minister's opinion can act to provide advice. And it is a concern for the coalition that the existing legislation, which we are speaking about today, pretty much says that the minister in their opinion can determine when we reach targets. So the government has agreed to a Greens amendment which says that the minister can appoint someone who in their opinion is going to provide advice. What we know from this government is that ministers appoint people who often, you know – you do have to ask whether the people that are being appointed are providing fulsome advice. Because of that element to the amendment, we say that the government is not fully embracing the need to have an independent set of advice, because there is no protection from the minister now – in their opinion, in the words of the amendment – appointing someone who provides what they want. It does add one extra layer, but it certainly does not add the level of transparency that is required.

The other thing the government has not accepted, which we think would add to a full package of transparency measures, is ongoing reporting of targets – where they are at any time – and also the minister providing more details than simply providing that to the chamber at a date in the year. So in terms of transparency around this bill, this bill is entirely lacking. The coalition is not reflecting on some of the sentiment of the amendment, but the amendment does not fully provide the transparency required.

In terms of targets more generally, the coalition before the last election committed to introducing and legislating targets as part of our policy package, and I recall the Premier – I spoke about it in the debate on the second-reading speech – effectively saying to me across the chamber that it would be a cold day in hell before the government introduced them. So here we are. With a change of Premier there has obviously been a change of heart, but targets will only work if there is transparency around them – if they are reported to the community, if we can see where there are at. We know that when it comes to targets the government does not report where we are. I refer to electric vehicles and the commitment to 50 per cent by 2030. Currently it is 6 per cent when there is a national average of 8 per cent. You need to do more than have a target. You need to do more than hide where you are sitting against your own target. For that reason the coalition will not be supporting this amendment.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (17:01): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on this amendment to the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023. I have been listening with great intent to the debate which has been unfolding, and I have to say I am very excited about this. The reason I am excited about this is that once passed, this legislation will cement in black and white our net zero target for 2045. There have been amendments made here, and I know there has been really constructive work done on this.

I would just like to state that I think it is incredibly important that we acknowledge how much work has gone into doing this. As a state – and I have said this before in this place, and I will say it again no doubt – we are leading the nation when it comes to setting renewable energy and net zero targets. We should be incredibly proud of what we are doing, because not only are we leading the country, we are leaders in the world. Again I have said this before: there has been a power of work by the minister and her team to get us to this point. This is not blue-sky thinking on the government's part, because we have already exceeded the targets that we have previously set.

A member interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: We have indeed, and now we have actually said that we have made a commitment, a firm commitment, which is going to be enshrined in this legislation, to reach net zero by 2045. We have good form in this regard. The new technologies which are being developed to propel us forward to meet these targets are something to behold, and they are driving energy prices down as well. There are so many benefits for our state and for all of us across the state, be it small business owners or be it residential consumers.

Obviously, we have here an amendment which states that:

... the Minister must obtain advice from one or more persons who are appropriately qualified, in the Minister's opinion, to act as an independent expert.

I heard with interest the member for Brighton's concerns about this, but I think we do need to look at the fourth point, which says that:

The Minister must publish any independent expert advice obtained under this section on the Internet site of the Department as soon as practicable after the advice is received by the Minister.

So that advice will be out for all to see, and that is an important part of this amendment as well.

Without a doubt I support this. I support the bill in its totality, and I support it with the amendment that has come here too. I have to say the reduction of harmful CO₂ emissions is the entire aim of this bill. It is a critical issue for all of us. It is a critical issue for every single person around this planet, because the harm which is occurring as a result of CO₂ emissions, which have only been increasing up until recent years because of our use of fossil fuels since the industrial age, has resulted in climate change, which is causing destruction in places. As the member for Monbulk, I see it writ large every time there is a freak storm, which is no longer unprecedented.

It is so important that we do this from existential perspective, but the way we are doing it too will generate also 59,000 jobs. It will be healthy for our economy, and it will drive the price of electricity down. That is absolutely critical as well. We know that today there was wonderful news talking about the fall of electricity prices here in the state of Victoria, and that is attributable to our renewable energy progress because we have such a high percentage – I believe it is about 38 per cent – of our generated energy coming from renewable sources. Enshrining our net zero targets in this legislation is fundamental to ensuring that we keep our eye on the ball moving forward and do our absolute best to ensure that we are no longer a carbon-emitting state by 2045, and that is absolutely critical. It was mentioned before by the member for Melbourne that hopefully the rest of the country will follow suit. I sincerely hope that they do and at pace, because there is no time to waste in this regard.

There is nothing but wins here for us. It is a positive bill with positive outcomes that will be derived from it. I have to say every time I speak about energy, I am quite passionate about this because the environment and climate change have been things that I have been focused on for several years. I think I said I was 17 the first time I ever watched *An Inconvenient Truth*, and I do shudder when I hear some people deride climate change or try to attribute it to some kind of natural phenomena when the world's climate scientists know –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is an extremely tight debate around one specific amendment. There has been some latitude given from this side of the chamber, but with respect, this is not a debate at this point around this amendment.

Daniela DE MARTINO: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, this amendment considers several things. New subsection 3 states:

- (a) the demonstrated effectiveness of any proposed activities for the removal of greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere; and
- (b) the likely effectiveness of any eligible offsets.

With 3(a), one must discuss the varying types of renewable energy and their impact.

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Acting Speaker, it does not include what people watch on TV. This is a very, very tight debate around this amendment and only around this amendment.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): Member for Brighton, I will just rule on the point of order because you cannot speak consecutively on a point of order I have just been informed. On

that point of order, I will just remind the member for Monbulk to not stray from the bill at all. It has been a wideranging debate, but we will keep it nice and narrow from now on, thank you.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Thank you, Acting Speaker. Ultimately, I would like to commend this amendment to the house. I would like to thank the minister once again for all the work that has been done by her and her team, not just on this bill but on the previous legislation and all the work that surrounds this goal, which I hope we all share, in ensuring that we have a carbon emissions free future. I commend it to the house.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (56): 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, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, 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, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

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

Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:14): I am delighted to rise and make this contribution at long last at this hour of the day regarding the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. It really is an interesting bill, in that it does very little. It talks about a lot of things, but it does very little when you read the bill, and then when we got briefed by the government we got even less. So that is the concern we have with this bill, because there is not a lot in it apart from some ambitious ideas – some terrific ideas – and I think some of those ideas are fantastic. At the end of the day, though, there has been no evidence that they exist, in the bill or in the bill briefing. One of the key aspects of the legislation – of all legislation – is having a clear plan for how it will work, what the time frames will be and how long that might take, and with this bill we have asked for the rules to allow funding for the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund, and to set up and pay the ongoing costs of the new dispute resolution advocacy body that they are proposing in this bill, which all sounds well and good until you read through and you cannot find any of that detail in the body.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Tim McCURDY: And this is not the first time. The member for South-West Coast reminds me that for plenty of bills we get all this huff and puff. Even the second-reading speech, which I will go

into in a moment, reads very well, and the media that goes with it, but in the bill there is very little detail. What we also do not know is what the costs are going to be, and other bits and pieces that usually would be planned and thought out before the legislative wheels start turning. So the lack of detail is astounding, and in fact I would call it appalling. In order to get more information, we had that briefing, which threw up even more questions. We did our research, we checked with stakeholders, and yet there was still nothing.

To provide some context I want to discuss the background of the bill. In September 2023 the then Andrews government introduced and released Victoria's housing statement. Part of the grand plan to fix housing in Victoria was the establishment of a dedicated dispute resolution body to be called Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, RDRV for short. Amongst the claims at that point was that it would help to slash the VCAT backlog, of which there are some 64,000 cases, I understand, and that would give tenants a greater opportunity to access prompt dispute resolution. Of course we are all for making sure that this dispute resolution, or some sort of dispute resolution, gets fast-tracked, because it is important that we do get to the bottom of these 64,000 cases. But I would have thought in the months before and after releasing that statement, more work would have gone into deciding how the RDRV operates and functions, that Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria. It is a catchy name – sounds terrific.

In order to do this the bill amends the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund for the acceptable use of the funds and allows them to be used to establish and fund the ongoing costs of the new dispute resolution and advocacy service. But there is no mention of what the service is or will be. Further to the bill, it also abolishes the Estate Agents Act 1980 and the Public Records Advisory Council and replaces them with –

A member interjected.

Tim McCURDY: Well, again, we are not sure what it replaces them with. It is incredible that the government, who do not know what this new dispute resolution body will look like or what its powers will be, feel that they no longer need that consultation. With the housing crisis, there is more need for consultation than ever before. It is critical that a body of peak industry and tenant experts are advising on issues in the sector, and the government has not provided any time frames or when a replacement body will be established. They have not provided any detail on what that body will look like or whether it will be legislated or created through regulation, and again, too many bills come through this house with this broad legislative approach, and when we try to get into more detail of what we are being asked to either support or oppose, whatever the position might be, we have no detail, and this is another example. This is the old, 'Trust us, we know what we're doing and we'll let you know what it looks like at the end,' and we simply cannot trust this government. So we do not know the new advisory group members – who it will be made up of, how they will be appointed or any details or any of that substance.

The most fascinating thing to me was the second-reading speech, where it said this new resolution dispute centre organisation will be 'faster, fairer and cheaper'. I was very excited to hear that it is going to be faster, fairer and cheaper. Because of this backlog I said, 'Well, I'm thrilled. Could you tell me how it's going to be faster, fairer and cheaper?' And the response I got back was, 'Well, we haven't got there yet. We haven't got that level of detail.' That is misleading the house to say it is going to be faster, fairer and cheaper in the second-reading speech when you have absolutely no idea that that is how it is going to happen. I will give you the quote directly out of the second-reading speech:

The proposed establishment of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria is a significant reform. This service will be a faster, fairer and cheaper way to resolve a range of rental disputes and will enable the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to use its resources to address more complex matters such as disputes around termination of residential rental agreements or applications for an order for possession of rented premises.

Now, again, this is not aspirational, saying 'This is what it could do' or 'This is what we hope it will do.' In the second-reading speech it is saying, 'This is what it is going to do.' I think the minister really needs to consider withdrawing that piece out of the second-reading speech, because I think at the very

least we need an explanation as to how you can put that in there when there is absolutely no detail in the bill or anywhere else. If any of the other government members who may speak on this bill have got information about how it is going to work and how it will operate, I would be thrilled to hear it. I will be absolutely delighted if they could share that with us. If they do have it, I ask: why haven't we got it? If we have not got it, have you got it, and if not, well, what are we debating at the end of the day? We are debating a good idea. That is what we are really doing.

It also says the bill closes the Sex Work Regulation Fund in line with the decriminalisation of sex work in Victoria and makes minor other statutory revisions and amendments to update language. As touched on in my introduction, the lack of detail and foresight from the government is concerning. To have not done your homework and planned ahead is an appalling level of disrespect, I think, to this Parliament and to the broader Victorian public. As a result, I would like to move a reasoned amendment. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government provides:

- (1) proof that tenants and rental providers will not be disadvantaged by the bill;
- (2) more information about how the Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria (RDRV) will work;
- (3) a breakdown of costings and how the RDRV will be funded;
- (4) advice on the timeline of when each stage of establishing the RDRV will be reached and for full operations;
- (5) details on how the minister intends to seek advice in the absence of the Estate Agents Council (EAC) and Public Records Advisory Council (PRAC); and
- (6) details on what bodies will replace the EAC and PRAC, including plans for appointments, remuneration, and public information about those bodies.'

As I have said earlier on, we have got real concerns about the lack of details in the bill and about how the funds from the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund will be used. The bill does not explicitly mention RDRV; however, the minister has mentioned it in her second-reading speech, as I mentioned. The government announced RDRV with their housing statement last September, and they had this to say:

We'll establish *Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria*, providing a one-stop shop for renters, agents and landlords to resolve tenancy disputes over rent, damages, repairs and bonds. It'll have a clear pathway to settle issues in a faster, fairer and cheaper way – freeing up VCAT for more serious or complicated matters.

Let us break that down into several topics. In this housing statement there are renters, there are agents and there are rental providers resolving disputes over rent, damages, repairs and bonds. Now, renters, if I start with those: how are renters going to benefit from this? Unfortunately, there are unscrupulous operators – and we know that – who are not meeting the standards that tenants require, and they deserve to be called out and forced into action. This body will help renters resolve these disputes in a timely manner only if it is managed well. There is the key to it – managed well.

There are many things that this government take on that are certainly not managed well. We have seen VCAT go from faster, fairer and cheaper to be a judicial milestone of lawyers and bureaucracy, with 64,000 on the residential tenancies waitlist as of March 2023. So the government needs to provide details on how it will ensure that RDRV will remain cheap and not end up like VCAT, with people lawyering up; how it will be fairer than the current system – which is supposed to be fair; and how it will avoid the huge backlogs that we see at VCAT. How will it enforce its decisions: will they be binding on both parties? What is stopping parties from not recognising the authority of RDRV and either ignoring a ruling or going straight to VCAT for a different decision?

Now let us look at the agents. How are agents going to benefit from these changes? Will it make it easier for them to resolve disputes with tenants, further to this? The government claims it will resolve disputes over rent, damages, repairs and bonds, yet we do not know whether there will be a dollar limit to the jurisdiction of this body and what will define an extreme case of damage. For one home, \$150

might be nothing, whereas in many others that we see it is an extreme case of damage. So where are the details? That is what we are seeking – these details.

We have also got concerns about the advocacy nature of the body and where it will be abused by the powers that be to become public policy activists, forgetting that their role is as a fair and independent body. Let us say they begin lobbying the government for policy reforms that would significantly benefit one group to the detriment of others – this would be a grave form of misconduct and abuse of impartiality. There need to be strict and strong controls to ensure that any and all advocacy is only restricted to an individual level.

RDRV also is claimed to reduce the VCAT backlog, which as mentioned before, was 64,000 as of March last year. In our briefing it was mentioned that resources may be pulled from VCAT to help establish and operate this body, which is counterintuitive to VCAT, which needs to be fixing the backlog. The government needs to properly resource VCAT, not divert resources away to fix issues that will just end up being transferred over to RDRV, which is this new body that they are planning to set up. It is easy to claim that all of a sudden you have cleared the backlog from VCAT when all you have done is transfer 50,000, 60,000, maybe 100,000 cases by the time you get to when this actually starts, which I understand could be 18 months or two years away. All they have done is transfer those 60,000, 70,000 or 100,000 cases over to RDRV and they can sort of sing to the world. We have seen them do it before: ‘We’ve got rid of the backlog at VCAT. Aren’t we great?’ This body is also, on a conservative estimate, as I said, 18 to 24 months away from being in operation, which means the issues at VCAT are just going to keep getting worse and worse and worse – and who knows where that number could end up by the time this body actually starts. You might think I do not want to see dispute resolution go forward, but I absolutely do, because we need this in our housing crisis. We need to make sure these disputes get resolved very quickly. This backlog cannot stay like it is.

We have to move forward, I get all that, but give us some details and we can support what you are trying to achieve here. When we get absolute donuts and then we get a government briefing that tells us less, you have got to understand we cannot just write blank cheques for the government and say, ‘Okay, we trust you. Go and give it a go, and we’ll see where we end up,’ because we have no idea what it is going to cost in this situation for renters or for property owners – what it will cost, the time frames and all that. So if you could just give us some detail – that is what I am hoping to hear from contributions on the other side. As the consultation has not even started – and knowing the government’s track record of the bloated consultation period that takes place – it could still be three or four years before this RDRV is established. In the meantime the waitlist for residential tenancy cases could blow out to, as I say, six figures or more.

The government has also provided no details on the costing of RDRV, potential or hypothetical, which is alarming and concerning given the government’s track record with cost blowouts and an inability to manage a budget. There are serious concerns that the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund could be sucked dry by this new body. Since 2016 the Victorian Property Fund has lost \$237 million and has only seen a very slight recovery since COVID, and the Residential Tenancies Fund has only risen by \$8.5 million since 2016, which indicates that both funds do not have the revenue to be able to sustain any additional expenses, let alone on an ongoing basis.

Furthermore, the Real Estate Institute of Victoria, the REIV, have genuine concerns about this, similar to what we have: no detail and no understanding. They cannot endorse it. They do not oppose the bill; again, like us, they say they are concerned about how this will look without the detail. They would like more detail and they would like to see it postponed until we get that detail. Many of us know that the VPF, the Victorian Property Fund, was originally designed to fund compensation claims from the consumer and the industry as well as provide grants for specific housing initiatives. It is concerning to the REIV that the valid original purposes of the VPF could be overridden by the demands of funding a significant new dispute resolution service. As I say, we do not trust the government to give them a blank cheque and say, ‘We’ll leave you to it and we hope you come out with a great outcome.’ I have got to say, Victorians do not either.

What we also do not know is how this is going to be set up: will it be set up by introducing additional legislation, or will it be set up through regulation and instruments? If it is not in the legislation, why don't we wait until that legislation is ready to go and put both through at the same time in a similar bill or separately in complementary bills? And if it is regulation, why is the government so obsessed with avoiding Parliament and proper scrutiny and so reliant on using regulation to get around democracy? Again, the Premier preaches transparency but thrives on secrecy, and this is what we are finding in this bill. It is a simple question that deserves a simple answer from those opposite, and as I say, I am keen to hear their contributions and I hope they can shed some light on how this will actually all pan out.

I want to touch on the Estate Agents Council. There is a genuine concern in the industry about the abolishment of the Estate Agents Council and what it will mean for rental providers and estate agents. Given the trend of the government to focus on the needs of the tenant to the exclusion of all others, the industry is rightly concerned that their voices could be lost or at the very least left behind, so we need to get that detail. What is even more baffling is there is no proposed or planned replacement body for advising the minister. The government claims that this is designed to allow for more 'informal, flexible and ongoing' consultation. Well, I had a little bit of a chuckle when I heard that, that the government claims that this is designed to allow for more 'informal, flexible and ongoing' consultation. On this side of the house, we call that policy on the run; that is just making it up as you go. A lovely set of words, I have got to say – 'informal, flexible and ongoing' consultation – but it is definitely policy on the run. The issue with providing no details on what this new and modern advice group looks like is that it could be either a genuine representative body or an ad hoc echo chamber, and that is what we do not want to see. As I have said before, this is not the first time bills in this place have lacked detail, and it is far too regular – again, preaching transparency but delivering secrecy.

The Real Estate Institute of Victoria has expressed grave concerns. The fact that there is no legislative body to replace the Estate Agents Council at the end of June means the industry will then be less able to inform and participate in the legislation-making process and be less able to provide their advice and expertise to the minister and to the government. When seeking advice, all of the different views should be considered and reflected upon before an appropriate decision is made. The legacy of Labor in government seems to be less open and transparent decision-making and an over-reliance on grandstanding, consultants and union officials. That is why, in the reasoned amendment, we are seeking more information from the minister about how they intend to go about replacing the Estate Agents Council. The government also provided no detail on remuneration and the plans for appointments, which is critical to ensuring the minister is receiving the most unbiased and fair advice.

I also want to touch on the Public Records Advisory Council and the Sex Work Regulation Fund and other amendments. The Sex Work Regulation Fund is being closed down in line with the decriminalisation of sex work in Victoria, and given that there is no money coming in from fines and licensing and there is a negligible amount left in the fund, it makes sense to shut it down. It saves on administration costs and there is no need to have it there.

The abolition of the Public Records Advisory Council is disappointing. Again, we are losing another avenue of advice that is written into law. It seems to follow a theme of Labor ripping up the legal protections and oversights to instead be told what they want to hear instead of what they should hear. That being said, the Public Record Office Victoria does a stellar job of providing broader advice to public and community groups and will be able to ensure the correct procedures are being followed. Furthermore, the importance of maintaining and keeping good records in government is critical, and that cannot be understated. Good record keeping means more accountability to the people.

The government should never be afraid of being held accountable for their mistakes. We cannot afford this government to continue down this path of disregard for legislative protections and accountability. It was the Liberals and Nationals in government that gave the Public Records Advisory Council

additional advisory powers, which were meant to enhance the role of the council and assist the minister and the public record office. As the then Premier Dennis Napthine said in 2014:

The Public Records Advisory Council will be given a new advisory function in relation to public records management. This will enhance the role of the council and ensure it is better able to assist the minister and keeper of public records.

I am keen to know: does the minister no longer require that additional advice and assistance? Does the keeper of public records also not need further advice? We are always cautious when governments, particularly this government, undermine the transparent legislative protections that ensure that Victorians are able to see who the key bodies are and ensure that their advice is balanced and reasonable. Unfortunately we have seen a long record of jobs for the boys from the previous Premier and now this one, with countless Labor staffers, union officials and former Labor members being given plum jobs on government boards. Who will be on this administration advisory board? By shutting down the legislative public bodies, is the government going to continue these abuses of power and impartiality behind closed doors and in the shadows?

There is also a list of minor amendments to update gendered language in this bill to non-gendered language and correct some grammar and typographical errors.

As I conclude, all the stakeholders who we sought feedback from also expressed concerns about the bill's lack of information and detail. So its not just us, it is not just the REIV; it is other bodies, it is everyone who we spoke to. It shows that it is not just the opposition. We have genuine concerns but so do the community and the industry have concerns about this lack of oversight and proper processes being circumvented. It is another classic example of the government being all about the spin and not about the substance. There is an issue that they have created, and they have told us they are going to fix it. Instead of telling us how they are going to fix it, they are asking us to trust them while they fix it and hopefully do the right thing. Well, we cannot. They are fundamentally untrustworthy, and we never seem to be able to fix the issues that they have created. Time and time again Victorians are told by minister after minister that the issue of the day will be fixed and time and time again the government sit on their hands and do not do the work to introduce real substantive change. You only need look at the legislative program over the past few years to see they are running out of steam and struggling to get the basics right.

Where is the Premier's plan? Where is the detail for us to take to the community and say that this change is happening and that we can have confidence in this change? Rather than fund the initial costs of consultation and the establishment of the RDRV through consolidated revenue, or the often forgotten and chronically underperforming Consumer Affairs Victoria, the government is so bereft of money they need to start raiding even more funds and piggy banks to make ends meet. They are so irresponsible with money, as we know, that they cannot pay for this new body themselves or by expanding CAV's budget. Instead they need to dip their hands into the pockets of CAV and take more resources away from an already appallingly under-resourced agency.

We recognise the need for major reforms and the need for support for tenants in Victoria. However, we must not forget agents and rental providers in the process, because it takes all three to make this happen. You can get away with two, but ideally you need all three to make this a process that everybody has confidence in and that will work year in, year out for the majority of people involved in this sector. We need to consider all pieces of this puzzle – not just those who you believe might vote for you. You have got to consider all pieces of this puzzle.

We also ask the government to be more prepared when they introduce legislation like this. There seems to be a dearth of substantial legislation coming through the departments. It is rushed, and the bills are undercooked and underdone. You can tell they have not done their homework – they have not even done their class work with this one. To answer every question in the briefing with 'We don't know', 'We're not sure' or 'We can't say' shows that more thought needs to go into bills before they come to this place. Again, you are asking too much if you say, 'Trust us. We'll fix a problem that we haven't

been able to fix before. It's getting worse, but we've got a thought bubble and we think we can fix it in the future.'

That being said, we not going to oppose the bill, because we certainly want to see dispute resolution moving forward. We reserve our right in the Council to see how we can negotiate with the government to try and make sure that some opportunities might come to fruition to get more of that detail. But the lack of detail in the bill, as I said, really is appalling, and the secrecy is astounding. I hope that RDRV is successful because heaven knows Victoria needs that resolution body. We need to make sure that these disputes can get resolved quicker, because tenants are waiting, rental providers are waiting and agents get caught in the middle. It turns into a massive mess, and we all know that. The housing crisis we are in is all the more reason to move with this quickly. But this bill gives me no confidence that it is going to speed things up any quicker than they currently are without that detail. We need that detail. I simply do not have confidence in the government saying, 'Trust us. We're going to move forward'. That is why there is the reasoned amendment. I commend the bill to the house.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (17:42): With your indulgence, I would just like to begin by acknowledging the tragic hot air ballooning incident that occurred in Preston yesterday and express our sympathies to all those affected, including of course the family of the man whose life was lost, and express our gratitude to those who responded to that difficult and traumatic event.

Turning to the subject at hand, I rise today of course to support the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024 and indeed to oppose the reasoned amendment put forward by the member for Ovens Valley. I do appreciate the member's contribution. I know he had a long wait for it today, but in essence the member said he supported the bill – he supported all of it – but he would refuse to pass it until the minister provides every single detail of every single final policy initiative. I will just point out to the member that that is of course not how we do modern public policy development. We always start with a broad plan and work towards the details over time. This government consults all the way through that process, and that is what we will do with these particular reforms. I note the Minister for Climate Action is here at the table. That is how she has approached the important work she is doing in renewable energy. We do not know every detail of what that will look like in 2035, but we introduce the legislation as it is needed.

The member Ovens Valley also described this bill as having 'not a lot in it', and I do hope in my contribution to persuade him otherwise. The bill does primarily serve to implement the rental reforms that we announced in the housing statement. I will come back to them, but first I will just touch on some of the other aspects of the bill. As the member for Ovens Valley noted, some of the clauses update some language to non-gender-neutral language, which is very welcome. I point out to the member there is certainly no need to delay those clauses – we should get them done.

Clause 7 abolishes the Sex Work Regulation Fund, which continues this government's decriminalisation of sex work, which is an important reform. Then clauses 9 through to 23 effectively abolish the Estate Agents Council and the Public Records Advisory Council. I think the minister has been very clear that the end of those particular bodies is certainly not an end to consultation. In fact I think she is very genuine in wanting to do consultation in a better and more engaging way, and these amendments will allow her and empower her to do so.

I do, though, want to take a moment to acknowledge the contribution of a lot of people to those bodies over a long, long period of time. I know that Judy Maddigan, who we just recently unveiled a portrait of, was the chair of the Public Records Advisory Council. Also, locally in Preston we have Daniel Scoullar, who has been a member of the Estate Agents Council, and I would like to acknowledge his service and indeed acknowledge his belief in a continuing body that represents the whole community and gives renters a voice. I know that is something that the minister has taken on board.

Then, just to complete our description of the bill, we have those very substantial clauses 4 and 5. They deal with the hypothecation arrangements that will deliver our reforms. I have observed in previous

debates that treasurers do not always like hypothecation arrangements. Industry bodies with various degrees of justification try to ensure that fees and charges, interest and other things are then spent on initiatives in their industry areas, and that is certainly what we have with the Victorian Property Fund, which of course had a very long history as the Estate Agents Guarantee Fund, going back to the 1950s. Various things are paid into it, most notably the interest from house deposits, and then various industry initiatives are paid out of it, and of course today we are seeking with this bill to expand those things for which money can be paid out. Then clause 5 does a very similar thing with respect to the Residential Tenancies Fund. I think there is good reason for gathering those moneys together in those funds. As I said, there are probably questions about the administrative overheads of the hypothecation arrangements. But if we are going to have them, then today's bill is certainly very welcome because it allows those funds to be spent on some important reforms and very specifically allows those funds to be spent on the costs and expenses of establishing and funding the ongoing operation of the alternative dispute resolution services, which the previous speaker discussed, and indeed also the provision of consumer advocacy and assistance services under the housing and property related consumer acts.

To go very centrally to the argument made by the previous speaker, those things are of course very broad descriptions of what we want to do. Our housing statement is very clear about the end point we want to reach. The point of today's bill is simply to allow the funds to flow for that particular work, and as I have already stated, there will then be consultation on what those initiatives will look like. Nobody is trying to hide any of that. It is simply the case that we can get this bill out of the way and then get on with that work. There is no need to delay it, as the member seeks to do, before we have all that detail.

I do want to say there is a narrative in some circles that this government does not support renters rights and sometimes that we are allegedly in the pockets of billionaire landlords. That is very clearly not true. This government has a very strong record on renters rights. I almost must say I feel that critique leaves out the role of real estate agents in some of the challenges we face, and I think some of the poor behaviour we see originates not from landlords but from them. But it is very important today to place this bill in the context of the government's larger rental reform agenda, which is one that supports renters. We have introduced maximum bond amounts. We have tightened up the rules regarding eviction and, I think very importantly, we now give Victorians 90 days notice. I think all of us in our electorate offices will have heard the difficult circumstances that people sometimes face when they are evicted from their rental property for what are legitimate reasons but it comes as a complete shock to them. I know that 90-day period will be valuable to some of the people we represent.

We require now fee-free methods of payment; I think that is important. We have basically got rid of some very exploitative things that people previously used to extract extra money out of their tenants. We now require disclosure if the property is on the market, which is not common but again addresses a thing that did happen where renters were not told that out of an attempt to extract the very last rental income out of a property that the owner knew they were going to sell.

Of course, very importantly, we have now introduced strong minimum standards with respect to a whole range of matters – locks, mould, electrical safety, lighting, heating and minimum appliances. I know now if you get into your rental property and the oven does not work, you can say to your rental provider that they must fix that problem. I know there is an ongoing debate. I know the minister is very open to further things we can do in that area. I did have an exchange the other day with Purplepingers about this issue. I am not sure how *Hansard* will record 'Purplepingers', but he is an online personality. It is true that under the current laws we are very concerned with renters rights and as such it is not possible to rent out a property that does not meet the minimum standard, but it is strictly speaking possible to advertise that property, because at the point where you are advertising it, if it is empty, you do not have a renter and you do not have a lease. I am not sure that is a highly consequential loophole in the long run, because evidently you cannot sign the lease, but I know it is the kind of thing that the minister is still very attuned to. She is of course very attuned to the degree to

which those minimum standards should be retrospective, and I know she is attuned generally to the fact that in the community there are certainly areas in which we can further consider rental reform.

I know when I go doorknocking around Preston there are still people who are concerned about the amount of information that is collected when you apply for rental properties. You are now looking at a situation where some of us fill out 20 pages worth of referees and so forth. Compulsory direct debit arrangements are a concern to people, as is this practice of, in a tight market, forcing people to apply for a property before they are allowed to see it. Also I think there is some concern about the capacity for landlords to very sharply increase rents. I am just being honest; that is not the number one thing being raised with me, but I think for some people in the current environment it remains a worry.

I think most people understand that rent freezes would not be a good idea. People very much understand that the government cannot in this place just come in and set the prices for goods without a range of very obvious consequences with respect to supply and mobility. They know in fact that a rent freeze would dramatically hurt young people who are trying to get into the rental market, because of course the mobility would drop and supply would drop. Existing renters would of course benefit – that is fact – if we forced down rents, but new rental properties would simply not become available. There is a really good understanding in the community of that.

I think that there is certainly concern about dispute resolution and enforcement. That is towards the top of the list of things that come through. That is why I am so happy to be on my feet today supporting this bill, because ultimately this is a bill that will lead to better dispute resolution, and I think that is something that will be very positively received and will allow many of us in fact to sort out some often difficult circumstances that come to us in our role as representatives. I am very pleased to support this bill and commend it to the house and thank the minister and her team for really their ongoing work to make sure that renting is a safe and secure long-term option for Victorians.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:52): I have a contribution to make to the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024, and as I speak on this bill I put on record straightaway that I will be supporting wholeheartedly the reasoned amendment that has been put forward by the shadow minister, the member for Ovens Valley.

The purpose of the bill that we have before us today is to facilitate the establishment of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria. Now, it is only to facilitate the establishment; it is not actually going to do any more than that. It is going to do so because it is about the funding model that is going to get it in place in the first instance. We do not know a lot about Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria other than that it has been mentioned. This body will be accessed by residential renters, landlords and agents, and it is around alternative dispute resolution. Not only is it around that dispute resolution but it will also have an advocacy mechanism for tenants and renters. The government announced this body as part of their housing statement, which was announced towards the end of last year. We do not have a lot of information about RDRV – I think I will call it that just to keep it short and sweet – but it is probably not unusual for the government to put something forward to this chamber and let us try and fill in a lot of the gaps.

We know one thing for certain: in this area with tenancy there are disputes. There can be disputes over all sorts of things. It can be over a rent increase or maybe a rent decrease, depending on something that may or may not be happening at the property at the time – damages, repairs and bonds. As I think about these sorts of issues that come up, I look at people I know that have been on either end of the disputes, whether it is because of mould or because of a room that is not tenantable because there has been damp or water has come through via flooding and different things. But also there are disputes, for example, where landlords are trying to get back into their home which is being rented. For whatever reason – they may have moved back from overseas or interstate, sold another property or want to move into that house while they renovate – they cannot easily get back into their own home.

So you can see that there are lots of disputes. The RDRV is basically being set up as an alternative dispute resolution body. The underlying principle of alternative dispute resolution is that it is fairer, it is cheaper and it is quicker. Also central is that it will alleviate pressure on the legal system. The first alternative dispute resolution sector that I was involved in way back was the WorkCover conciliation service when Jeff Kennett was elected. There were a lot of legal costs associated with any disputes and payments and it was taking a big toll on the courts, so they introduced ADR as a different mechanism to try and speed it up and get that backlog out of courts and save some of the costs that other lawyers were taking, because they in fact were the real winners.

I think it is fair to say that everybody in this chamber would want safe, secure and fair housing for everybody. The government talk about it a lot, but they do not really do much to deliver. What we have seen in this particular area is VCAT is absolutely bogged down. There are backlogs, delays and some 64,000 cases as of March 2023, so 12 months ago, from the residential tenancies list – 64,000. We do not have a lot of information, as I said, about the establishment of this body, but if it is 18 months or two years away, that number is just going to grow more. What the alternative dispute resolution is aiming to do, as I understand it, is to take some of the simpler, easier stuff, the low-hanging fruit, out of VCAT so that they can deal with the things that tend to be a bit more complex and tricky, such as determination of residential rental agreements or an application for an order of possession of the rented premises.

What is happening out there in rental land at the moment? There is a cost-of-living crisis. This is hitting everybody. So we have a lot of pressure on the renters, as they have other bills and they have rents. This pressure certainly increases substantially. This could mean sometimes there are more disputes, and some of these may be minor matters. There are property owners subject to cost-of-living pressures as well, and they are hit with land tax bills. I just want to put on the record that the most recent figures about property ownership show 71.48 per cent of people have one property. You add another 18.86 per cent that have two rental properties – that is 90.34 per cent. Then those with three rental properties are another 5.81 per cent. So all up, 96.15 per cent of people have three properties or less, the vast majority having one. These are typically people who are investing in their future and investing in their retirement. For those that only have one, often that is what they are living on. These property owners are also subject to increasing costs with the cost of living and the land tax bills that people are being hit with – increased land tax bills left, right and centre. We do have a lot of matters ending up in VCAT, and as I said, there are delays. With 64,000 people at least waiting, there is no resolution in a hurry.

What we do not know here is about the costings. We know it is going to be costed through the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund, so this is going to provide for the establishment and ongoing costs for alternative dispute resolution services. They are going to deal with a number of property- or housing-related acts – company titles, Conveyancers Act 2006, owners corporation, residential tenancies, retirement villages, rooming house operators, sale of land and maybe a couple of others. So there is quite a lot. We know where the government is establishing the fund, which is what this bill is doing, but we do not know a lot of the detail. What bothers me particularly is that this is another case of, ‘We’re the government; trust us, we know what we’re doing. We know everything.’ But we do not, because the bill is silent on this. The second-reading speech says a little, but we do not know how it will operate, what jurisdiction and authority it will have, the annual revenues and expenses, the resources it will provide to the community and how it is going to operate around VCAT. The government is kind of asking us for a blank cheque to get this sorted out, saying, ‘And then we’ll tell you the solution at some other point,’ and it may be a couple of years away.

There are another couple of areas regarding what this bill does. It amends the Business Licensing Authority Act 1998 to facilitate the closure of the Sex Work Regulation Fund. That fund has been a trust account, and it supported the operation of the sex work licensing and registration scheme. Things have changed; sex work has been fully decriminalised, so this fund is obsolete. There is no revenue coming in from the licensing or the fines. I am told that there is not a lot of money in that account. I do not quite know how much and if that will end up in a general slush fund or not.

The bill also abolishes the Estate Agents Council and the Public Records Advisory Council and makes a number of revisions and amendments updating gendered language et cetera. I think this abolition of the Estate Agents Council is a cause for concern, because it is how government consults with the industry. How is that going to go on in the interim? They have proposed that the alternative body will replace them and they are to be dissolved at the end of June 2024, but the industry have a lot to offer the government. The government do not know it all. They might like to think they do. They can do some sham consultation, but when they have representatives from the industry who really know and understand that, I think it is important that they do have that mechanism in place. We want to make sure that the government does not have any bias towards advice that is going to affirm decisions in one direction only and not take in views of the whole body and the peak body. I think something that I am quite concerned about is how that is going to operate.

For us there are a lot of unanswered questions here. Again, the bill is pretty simple, pretty flimsy, because it only really sets up the funding operations, and we do not know anything. The stakeholders there would like to know a little bit more, which is basically why we have put the reasoned amendment in. We want to make sure that the renters and the rental providers will not be disadvantaged by this bill. I think that is really important. We need to know how Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria is going to work. We would like to see the costings. I am really not one for trusting the government to tell us about costings and expenses, because we know the budget is just going further and further down the gurgler every single day. These are important issues that we would like to have established prior to this going through.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:02): I will seek to acquit a couple of matters that have been circulated and discussed in the chamber, but first, fundamentally setting out the purpose of the bill, the bill introduces amendments to the Estate Agents Act 1980 – the EA act – and Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to expand the use of funds from the Victorian Property Fund and Residential Tenancies Fund, marking the first step in establishing the new alternative dispute resolution service as envisaged by the housing statement. It is an important incremental component in the development of more rapid and simpler dispute resolution.

I think this suggestion seeking to kill the bill is not actually resolving anything today. It is only delaying what is really a much-needed reform in terms of handling the amount of disputes that we are seeing in terms of renters and ensuring, basically, more fairness when it comes to renting – on both sides of the equation, I should say, whether it is the rental provider or the renter as well. Just because we are seeking a fairer and more expedient dispute resolution mechanism, that does not mean that we are seeking to facilitate a less inclusive process. On the contrary, one of the underlying purposive elements of these reforms is actually to contemporise the manner in which we consult and resolve disputes in this space, so to suggest that we are now going to exclude some of the most important stakeholders in this space is not well founded. I would also assert that you cannot on the one hand say, ‘Yes, we thoroughly support the bill, but we want to kill it,’ because that is exactly what the reasoned amendment would do if it were to succeed, and the series of elements that are within that reasoned amendment I will say respectfully suggest that there is a contrary intention, other than to support the bill, by the opposition.

I was also a little confused by different contentions about bloated consultation. I thought you wanted consultation, but now you are talking about bloated consultation; it is one or the other. Nobody is saying that there is not further work to be done in this space, absolutely. But last time I looked I thought we were in the chamber and we were discussing this up-front. So these assertions – and I have to say there is a rather negative and pejorative element to them – that there is secrecy surrounding this legislative reform are at best underhanded, because aren’t we in the chamber discussing the reform as we speak? No-one is resiling from the essential tenets of the bill, nor are we seeking to in any way embellish or otherwise add elements to the bill that are not there. I would suggest that in fact we are, as is right and proper, debating the bill as it is appropriate to do so.

We are mindful that having more expedient dispute resolution mechanisms is timely and appropriate when we look at the cost-of-living pressures, noting that more people perhaps than ever are seeking to

rent. So it makes sense – I should say the process is well underway, and I want to seek to acquit some further elements – that we are committed to ensuring renters, agents and rental providers can seek timely resolution for tenancy disputes through the establishment of the new alternative dispute resolution service, Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria. Work is underway – no-one has said that work is complete – to deliver on the alternative dispute resolution service, and further information will be provided on commencement dates in due course. The establishment of RDRV is subject to further legislation and regulations, just to be clear on that point.

Furthermore, establishing a funding pathway through amendments to the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund is a critical step towards getting the new alternate dispute resolution service up and running, and those amendments will commence the day after the bill achieves royal assent. There is no secrecy around that. We are being quite up-front and specific on what the bill actually delivers, but we are not extending beyond what it does not deliver at this point in the legislative reform, or I should say the overall reform process, in delivering more fairness for renters.

I want to reflect on some personal experiences across the spectrum, positive and negative. I did rent for many, many years of my life. By no means have I in any way experienced the worst of what some renters may have experienced, and I am not suggesting that in any way, shape or form. But I do recall, for instance, it was about 13 years ago, I turned up the first day, I had just moved into the property and I could smell gas. I rang the landlord and I said, 'I can smell gas', and the landlord said, 'Oh no, there won't be any gas there. No, you're imagining it.' I said, 'No, I can smell gas. This needs to be addressed.' We had this longwinded discussion about my having to attest to the fact that I could smell gas. Eventually the landlord called a plumber, and lo and behold the plumber turned up and said, 'Oh dear, there is a gas leak, it needs to be repaired immediately.' But I must say it was quite demeaning having to go through this process, because why would I make up the fact that there was a gas leak? Why would I make it up? I am just putting it out there that I have personally witnessed a situation where a landlord was, frankly, being rude and patronising and should have behaved differently.

Another example in a different property that I was living in, I remember it had an old window and it stopped being able to hold up. I said to the landlord, 'This window will no longer hold open,' and they said, 'Oh, it's old – maybe you can put a block of wood in there, that'll probably hold it up.' And I am thinking, 'Okay, so I've got to go out somewhere and find a block of wood to hold this window up because I don't deserve to have a proper, functioning window that will go up and down.' I do want to contrast that by saying that I did have other landlords who treated me well, who expediently repaired elements of the various properties that I was living in, but I am just putting it out there that I know how it feels when somebody is seeking to not deliver on minimum, basic requirements like being able to have an open window or make an urgent repair on gas.

I do want to balance this conversation. I have had a landlord who said – in a very kind and I should say supportive manner, so they were not being pejorative – that they had had a tenant that had caused somewhere in the vicinity of \$60,000 to \$70,000 worth of damage and had not paid rent for six months. That particular landlord was not seeking for me to actually resolve that matter. They were taking the matter to VCAT but just expressed the fact that the equation is not always fair and balanced on either side, to which point I will add that this is exactly why consultation incorporates all relevant stakeholders, whether it be the rental peak body representatives or industry and landlord representatives. That is only fair. No-one is suggesting that only one side, if I can put it in that way, or one version of events, so to speak, is satisfactory when we are looking at consultation on something as significant as making a fairer and more expedient dispute resolution process into the future.

On the other hand, as I have witnessed myself and have also had constituents reflect to me, there are situations where it is unfair and there are certain repairs that have not been undertaken in a timely manner and could actually be dangerous, and hence the impetus for the many reforms that we have already delivered as a government, including a requirement that external windows should be able to be opened and to be locked. These are some minimum basic standards, and I think everyone would be in agreement in the chamber that that is fair and reasonable – having a structurally sound building, a

vermin-proof rubbish bin, deadlocks on external doors. These are some of the minimum basic standards that our government has already addressed. So you can see that there is nothing outlandish or over the top or exaggerated or unreasonable in those reforms that I have suggested so far – and there are 130 all up – and hence this is an iterative process. It is incremental change, but why undermine it at this fundamental point? We need to pass these reforms today in order to be able to advance the process of reform for the betterment of all, the renters and the landlords alike.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (18:12): I rise to speak on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024 and first of all would like to say that I will support the amendment moved by the member for Ovens Valley. I note the last speaker said that it would effectively kill the bill. A reasoned amendment does not kill the bill. It just says, ‘Go back and do the work that you should have done before you brought the bill into the chamber.’ I have heard quite often during the debate from the other side, around this, that it is effectively bringing a good idea to Parliament and then we can have that debate in here about the good idea and then they can go and do the work. I actually thought that was what an election was: we go out to the community; we debate different ideas; we come up with what we think are the best options; one party will win. Obviously that is Labor on this occasion. They can then come in here with the work done.

A member interjected.

Brad BATTIN: The last three terms, and you still managed to bring in a bill with nothing in it. So it is actually quite interesting, isn’t it? For all these years, we have still got a government who can bring a document to this place with no real detail, and they try and sell this as fairness. They are trying to go out there and say, ‘We’re doing our bit when it comes to renters here in Victoria.’

We already know there are 64,000 cases on backlog with VCAT. So we know and the government knows something needs to change, because you cannot continue down the path you are doing at the moment with that level of people waiting in VCAT, because it does mean, unfortunately, that even urgent cases can take time to go through VCAT, people with legitimate claims. Whether it is from a landlord’s perspective or a tenant’s perspective, anything that is delayed can create issues on both sides of that, whether it is financial, physical or mental, on those people who are struggling with those challenges that they have to face.

But if they want to talk about fairness when they are talking about renting, if they want to talk about how we treat our renters fairly here in our state, the government should first and foremost look at the new rent tax that they have put on. Increasing land tax here in this state with a land tax bill that has effectively changed from the \$300,000 threshold down to \$50,000 and increased the amounts paid to land tax to cover the government’s failure of controlling the budget for such a long period of time – the impact of that is these costs go downhill. They do not stop halfway. The government is saying, ‘It’s all good. Those rich landlords out there, all those wealthy landlords, those police officers that own one home, the firefighters that own one home extra, the self-managed retirees who have got one property just to get by so they don’t actually take money off the government and are doing the right thing – what we’ll do is we’ll pass it on to them.’ But they then pass that on.

Yes, there are wealthy landlords out there. We cannot deny it. There are landlords out there with five or 10 – I have met one with a couple of hundred – properties, but it does not matter how big or small those landlords are, they are either in it for a business or they are in it to ensure that they can set themselves up to stay away from having to claim money off the government through Centrelink or any other support services later. That eventually ends up with an increase in the rent. Now, if you think about the last couple of years already, we have seen interest rate rises and we have seen new conditions come onto landlords and owners of properties where they do have to have minimum standards. We support the minimum standards. They have to have more inspections on properties now, including checking smoke detectors and checking for gas leaks – things that should be checked. We are not saying that should not happen. But each and every time this happens, the costs go up to run and maintain a property. On top of that there is insurance. The average insurance on an investment property

in metropolitan Melbourne has gone up from under \$1000 – most of them were around \$800 – to about \$1600, so that has nearly doubled. Those costs get passed on. Then you have got a government that wholeheartedly throws at them this new land tax, renters tax, that effectively get passed on to each and every renter here in Victoria.

When you look at some of the areas that I represent where we do have a lot of rental properties, that rent has gone up on average \$100 a week over the past 12 to 18 months, and these are families. A lot of them cannot afford it or they were trying to put that old hundred dollars a week aside so they can live their dream and buy their own property in the future and have what we all want in having and owning our own home, but that opportunity is getting taken away from them more and more by this government.

What we need to do to ensure that these people have the genuine chance to own a property, which most of us would like to do, is make sure that housing is affordable. We have to make sure there is a rental market that is affordable for them to live in while they do that saving if they do not want to live at home or they want to go out and be independent. That is why when you come to a bill like this the member for Ovens Valley moves a reasoned amendment. It is understandable, because you cannot trust this government to not put in place things in the future through this bill with regulations that are going to impact on the costs of tenants here in our state.

If tenants want to see the breakdown of where their money goes, I am sure the Housing Industry Association will have it out shortly. Renters rights groups will start to break down as well where that money goes when you pay rent. It is not that often that the money just goes straight into the pocket of a landlord. It goes into insurance. It goes into all those other things I listed earlier with ensuring the property is updated. It goes into maintenance to ensure the property is maintained. It goes to the emergency call-outs. It goes to the agents that you have to have. It goes to the taxes. It goes to the percentage that you have to pay on your loans. By the time you have finished with all that, it actually leaves a limited amount of money there.

I am not saying that those people are not going to make money when they sell their property later on. They might have bought it for \$500,000 and will sell it for \$700,000 or \$800,000, but they will pay their tax on that, which they rightfully should. The challenge is in between. If you are paying off a loan on that investment property, how are you then going to afford to try and keep the rent as cheap or as reasonable as possible, particularly during a cost-of-living crisis?

The other aspect of this is as the government continues to put these new taxes on more and more of these properties – and we saw it reported this week as 0.8 per cent, which is quite a small drop, but I can tell you it is going to be a lot bigger – a lot of investors are going to be getting out of the market, and they are going to put these houses back into the market for people to buy. It is not a position where it is flooding the market and now housing prices are dropping and therefore it will give people an opportunity to buy their own home. They are going to make their money still. They are going to sell at reasonably high prices in the current market, but it means there are less properties available for rent here in Victoria. If there are less properties, it is simple maths: how much you pay in rent is going to go up because it is done through supply and demand.

As the supply declines the demand is increasing, and we are already seeing videos of people where there are 60, 80 or 100 people lining up to rent a property in all different parts of Victoria. I even know in the growth suburbs, it used to be fairly recently that you would have 50 or 60 rental properties on the market – if you walked just around the four or five agents in Berwick, you could find 50 or 60 properties. Therefore you could go out there and have a look around, and landlords were trying to make sure that they had a reasonable price to make sure they got someone in that property so it was not costing them too much. It has now spun around so much so that you could go to four or five different agents in Berwick and you would be lucky to find two or three properties. What happens then in a growth area is so many people are putting in bids for those properties or going down and having a look at those properties that the prices increase over time. These are families that are already

struggling. These are families that have already had the pressure put on them because their energy prices have gone up 25 per cent, because their insurance costs have gone up for them, because the cost of running their own cars has increased – there is just nothing in life at the moment that is not increasing. You go shopping at Coles or Woolworths and the prices have all gone up. School costs have gone up.

What we are saying to this government now with this legislation is: we support the idea. We support the concept. We support how important it is to get something in place so we can ensure those 64,000 that are waiting to go through VCAT, that backlog, is cleared as quickly as possible, because it will save money. But what we are saying, and the reason we have moved the reasoned amendment, is we just do not trust this government to put in place the regulations to ensure that the cost is one of the things that is taken into consideration and the consultation process for this as well. At the end of the day this is about renters having the rights and the access they deserve, and they thoroughly deserve a safe environment where they can live, but most importantly at the moment it must be affordable. At the moment what we are seeing with the changes this government is making is every time they make a change, the costs go up. We want to make sure that it is on the record now that if they make these changes and costs go up, the impact will be detrimental to all of these families, and it will be on this government to hold the responsibility for what they have done to local renters in my community.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (18:22): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. I want to start by just acknowledging the housing issue that our communities face at the moment right across Victoria, but in particular in my electorate of Geelong. We know there are many issues, which is why this government has done so much work in recent years – the Big Housing Build, the recent housing statement. These are all things that we know as a government are really important and will help address some of these issues that our communities are facing.

Safe, affordable and secure housing is what we need, and part of that is the private rental market. We know there are cost-of-living challenges out there that many in the private rental market are facing, and unfortunately we hear stories from renters in my electorate in particular who have been subject to unreasonable rent increases, repairs not being done and of course bonds not being returned. For some this has resulted in having to endure the stress of trying to find a cheaper rental, or in the worst scenario, leading to homelessness or risk of homelessness or living in substandard conditions and being out of pocket when their bond is not returned. And this is not an attack on landlords or real estate agents, it is the reality in my electorate. Very rarely do I hear from a landlord or estate agent. The people I am hearing from are renters who are experiencing real difficulty in terms of trying to deal with their landlord or their estate agent, whether it be rent increases or whether it be repairs that have not been done, to the point where it is causing ill health to their family and to their children, or not being able to get the things done that they need doing in the property that they are renting. Landlords do these things at the expense of their tenants, and I think that this bill goes a long way to addressing some of the challenges that our community are facing.

Enduring that stress involved in having a dispute with your landlord or your real estate agent is really unnecessary. If landlords and estate agents are genuine about providing housing, then they need to do it properly and they need to do it within the confines of the laws that we currently have. We know that there are many disputes that go to VCAT unnecessarily that could have been resolved very quickly. You know, I am sure VCAT are sick and tired of hearing about landlords who have not done the repairs that they are required to under the law but have taken it all the way through to VCAT at some expense and often more so to the renters because they have had to endure that stress of being challenged by the landlord and not having their hot-water service fixed or their heating or their cooling or whatever it might be. So this bill goes a long way to addressing that.

I do understand that landlords do need to increase rents from time to time but, as I said, not at the expense of the tenants. But I also know that those that are doing that due to high demand are taking advantage and demanding unreasonable rents and failing to provide a good standard of housing for

those tenants. Rental disputes are stressful for all parties involved and particularly for tenants, who feel they have no power and end up in VCAT for straightforward disputes. My experience in talking to tenants has been that sometimes they are just so overwhelmed with the difficulties they are having in getting work done or the excessive rents being charged that they just give up and start looking for other options, or they are forced out or feel they are being forced out by the landlord and end up looking at whatever alternative accommodation they can get, which is not always appropriate.

Many of the renters that I have spoken to who have had challenges with real estate agents and landlords, as I said, often will give up. But they are also concerned about the fact that their children do not bring other kids home, because of the state of the condition of the house. There are all sorts of issues. So the establishment of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria creates a clear pathway to resolve matters faster, fairer and cheaper. In 2023 the former Andrews Labor government released a landmark package to boost housing supply and affordability in Victoria, representing the largest scale planning and housing reform in Victoria in generations. This is for all the reasons that I have already mentioned but also in terms of population growth. Really strong population growth in areas like the Geelong region is having an enormous impact on housing supply. *Victoria's Housing Statement: The Decade Ahead 2024–2034* was developed to account for the fact that Victoria is the fastest growing state in Australia, with our population set to hit 10.3 million by 2051.

This bill is the first step in our establishment of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria. These amendments will ensure that funds can be used to facilitate a fairer rental market for all renters, industry professionals and rental providers through a contemporary, responsive, faster and cheaper dispute resolution service. To further support government's work on implementation of housing statement reforms and our wider work to improve the ways in which we collaborate with stakeholders and the wider Victorian community, the proposed amendments will also discontinue the Estate Agents Council and the Public Records Advisory Council. The Victorian Property Fund is a trust fund established under the Estate Agents Act 1980 and administered by Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV). The fund receives income from several sources, including licence fees paid by estate agents and conveyancers, any fines and penalties payable under the Estate Agents Act 1980 and the Conveyancers Act 2006, interest on estate agents and conveyancers' trust accounts and investment income.

Currently CAV administers grants and compensation claims from the Victorian Property Fund, including compensation for individuals and corporations when an estate agent or a conveyancer or their representative has misused or misappropriated trust money or property. The Residential Tenancies Fund receives income from payment of penalties and fees under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997; transfers of surplus funds from the investment income earned by the Rental Tenancies Bond Authority; or any gifts, donations or bequests of money made to the fund. The RTF is currently used to fund the administration of the acts and costs related to residential tenancy matters at VCAT. Under the legislation, the funds were specifically established to fund the administration of the legislation, and these changes will modernise ways in which the government use these funds to allow us to continue to administer the legislation through alternative dispute resolution services.

Of course we know that demands and costs go up as we see more Victorians renting than ever before, with increasing costs and demands and a need for increased certainty about their leases, living standards and finances. Victoria has the strongest rental protections in the country, but we know that there is always more to do. In acknowledgement of this, the housing statement commits to a number of reforms to protect the rights of Victorian renters and build on our previous package of over 130 reforms to make renting fairer. These reforms included restricting rent increases between successive fixed-term rental agreements, cracking down on an emerging trend which has seen some rental providers evict tenants at the end of their fixed-term lease, incentivising rental providers and renters to negotiate their rent increases and banning all types of rental bidding and closing loopholes which have seen agents enable rental bidding. This is the work that we have done over the last couple of years to ensure that renters are protected as much as possible. This bill is really important to ensure that, and I commend the bill and to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:32): I rise today to speak on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. I want to start by thanking my colleague the member for Ovens Valley on his reasoned amendment, which raises some incredibly valid concerns about the lack of detail in this bill so far. The bill itself proposes making amendments to the Estate Agents Act 1980 and the Residential Tenancies Act 1997. These amendments will allow the use of the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund to establish and fund the ongoing costs of a new dispute resolution and advocacy service, known as Rental Disputes Resolution Victoria, or RDRV. The bill also proposes abolishing the Estate Agents Council and the Public Records Advisory Council and makes various statute law revisions and amendments in updating language. The reasoned amendment calls for confirmation that the establishment of the RDRV will not impact landlords more than they already have been, as well as information about the costs associated, the time it will take to set up and more details about how the RDRV will operate.

As things stand, VCAT has been home to a wide range of tenancy-related disputes involving all aspects of the rental process, including unpaid rent, maintenance issues and rent increases. This time last year VCAT recorded a backlog of 64,000 cases from the residential tenancy list alone. On top of this, issues with VCAT processes are having an enormous impact on all parties involved. Speaking with real estate agents from Living Here Benalla, a small local agent, it becomes clear that the current method of VCAT procedure is untenable. What used to be a straightforward system now is met with delays, a lack of consistency in decision-making and exorbitant amounts of paperwork. The directors of Living Here, Nicole Irwin and Mandy Reed, say that they are no longer sure how to proceed with this broken system. Since changes were made to the Residential Tenancies Act last year that introduced a five-strike policy for repeated unpaid rent, among other considerations, there has been a lack of consistency when it comes to how these cases are handled. Only after a fifth strike do these cases even reach VCAT, where they are met with the broken system. Each case now requires hundreds of annotated documents, which they say VCAT do not even read before the hearings commence. It requires multiple days and staff hours just to put documents together.

Since these changes were implemented the agents say they are yet to have a positive hearing in VCAT. One of their cases has now had five separate hearings. Another involves a 14-month delay for a bond claim for unpaid rent, while another case has reached 136 days without rental payments as VCAT proceedings continue to drag on. In one case a tenant was \$8000 behind on their rent, and a hearing was requested on 12 December. This was then delayed until January, before an urgent hearing was then requested after a lack of progress on 21 February. On 29 February VCAT informed the agents that they had received their application but failed to set a date for the hearing. On 16 March the agents followed up yet again but are yet to receive a response. During this period the owner has not received a cent of rent. These are not massive corporations owning several properties, these are regional home owners that rely on this income. The owner in this particular case is a primary caregiver for their sick husband and now has taken a second job to cover the costs lost from the lack of rental payments.

Many owners are also being frozen out of their homes. A stat dec is required just to move a family into a home someone owns, with a 60-day notice period that can still be rejected in a VCAT hearing. At the same time a tenant will have their case heard within three days. These agents understand the need to ensure tenants have their rights upheld, absolutely – and we do not want people out on the streets – but they say there is no balance. They are dealing with tenants who wilfully choose not to pay yet are still able to live in these homes for months on end. It is clear that this system has not been working, and a viable alternative is desperately needed. Unfortunately this bill does not provide enough detail as to whether the RDRV will be a better option, though.

The RDRV is designed to relieve residential tenancies list cases from VCAT as well as to provide advocacy for tenants and renters. The body itself will not be established through this bill; however, these clauses will enable the government to use funding from the Victorian Property Fund and Residential Tenancies Fund to help its establishment. This funding in theory will contribute to the start-up and ongoing costs of a body that has no details about how it will operate, what jurisdiction

and authority it will have, what its annual revenues and expenses will be and the resources it will provide to the community. At the moment the government has suggested that the rollout of RDRV would be at least 18 to 24 months away, if not longer, as consultation has not yet begun. Given the government's track record on delivering projects on time, I will not be holding my breath.

Additionally, we do not know how the body will complement VCAT or whether it will have sufficient enforcement and punishment powers to actually implement change to this system and reduce the VCAT backlog. Also of concern to me is the lack of information provided about the impact this will have on estate agents, landlords, strata management and property managers. There is a serious concern that the new system will be unfairly weighted towards the tenants and renters without taking into consideration the full picture on the opposing side, much like what we have already seen with VCAT. Given the government's tendency to be highly negative when it comes to landlords, property owners and home owners, it is unclear how this balance will be achieved.

We have already seen the impact this government's land tax changes are having in my community, so it reasons to be cautious about how this new body is established and operated. Victorians are already paying the highest property taxes in Australia, with an average of \$2120 in property taxes per person across this year, compared to about \$1600 in New South Wales and about \$1300 in Queensland. Labor have increased the tax base by lowering the tax-free threshold from \$300,000 to \$50,000 while also slapping on an additional flat tax of up to \$970 Victorian households. Individuals, families and businesses are rightly concerned that this tax will lead to increased pressure on households, increased costs to running a business and increased rents. My office has dealt with several concerned residents. Many of these cases, much like those being heard in VCAT, are stories of small regional property owners not being given a fair go.

Lindsay contacted me last week with his story. In 2012 Lindsay, his wife, his sister and her now deceased husband purchased a two-bedroom unit for his mother, who is now 92 years old. Over the past two years they have needed to increase their mother's rent to cover increases in interest rates, council rates, insurance and other expenses. The change to land tax has presented them with an annual liability of \$975. Lindsay says this is an expense they will struggle to meet. They do not own any other property aside from their family home, and it is very important to their mother that she maintain her independence as long as possible. \$18.75 per week may not appear significant to most of the people here in the chambers, but for these pensioners it is a significant amount. Lindsay says it appears that the government have not considered the significant impact this change will have on people in their situation and the impact on low-income renters who will most likely be facing rent increases from their landlords.

Lindsay and his family are not the only ones feeling this impact. Mark from Benalla has seen significant rises with his assessment notices for businesses he owns. Benalla and many other towns within my electorate are in desperate need of business investment, yet we continue to put barriers up. Mark said:

... we have made the difficult decision to close our business as a motor trader and automotive service centre which I have been operating for 46 years. This was a business my father started 66 years ago.

As a small business we find the ... state and federal government red tape and increasing fees and potential penalties ... preventative in making a reasonable profit for the effort and investment.

The latest land tax ... increase was the final straw.

...

Because of my feelings towards our State government at present, we may even retire interstate.

Eighty-year-old Alan McGillivray from Knowsley has seen his land tax bill jump from \$16,000 to \$82,000. He is now being asked to pay \$300 a day to run a business on his own land. He says this is unsustainable and impossible to budget for as the changes keep happening. Another mother and her son came in after they had both been given the same land tax bill for the same property, even though the son does not own any of it. She too says she cannot budget for it as it changes without any warning.

On top of situations like this, I have had several constituents reach out to my office concerned with errors on their land tax bill. The most frequent reason is due to mistakes in recognising that a property is someone's primary place of residence, like 81-year-old Faye Bliss in Benalla, who received a land tax bill. As things stand, something needs to change. Whether it be through this legislation being debated today remains to be seen, but I remain hopeful that positive change will be implemented soon.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (18:42): I rise in support of this bill chiefly because it represents another critical step in the Allan Labor government's work to ensure every Victorian has access to fair and secure housing.

Last year our government did release a landmark package of reforms to boost housing supply and affordability in our state to plan ahead for the inevitable growth Victoria will experience – growth that will see our population reach over 10 million by 2051. Planning for that kind of growth cannot be haphazard. It needs to be thoughtful, balanced and deliberate, and that is why we are doing the work now to ensure that as we grow, we are building livability, sustainability, accessibility and, importantly, equity into the very fabric and structure and interconnectivity of our suburbs.

The inner north, which I represent, will be one of the areas which will undoubtedly see densification in years to come. Close to public transport, great schools, thriving precincts and beautiful waterways, Northcote is sought after as a place to live, and that is why at every opportunity in this Parliament and in my role as the member for Northcote I speak about how critical it is that we deliver both the homes that we need but also the amenities and services we need and how that equity is central to all of these efforts.

Almost 40 per cent of households in my electorate are renters, and while home ownership remains an important aspiration for many, tenancy is the immediate reality for thousands, whether by circumstance or by choice. For that reason our Labor government has made it a priority to progress an enormous amount of reforms in the time that we have had to give renters the support, security and safety that they need and deserve, because whether rented or owned, we want every house to feel like a home. As a result Victoria currently does have the strongest rental protections in the country, and building on this, our housing statement outlines protections that will go even further.

Rent increases will no longer be allowed between successive fixed-term contracts, meaning a landlord cannot evict a tenant and then list the property at a higher price. We are extending the notice to vacate and rental increase notice periods to 90 days, because renters should not be left to stress and scramble when facing these difficult circumstances. We are introducing a portable rental bond scheme. We are closing the loopholes on rental bidding and insisting on mandatory training and licensing for real estate agents, property managers, conveyancers and owners corporation managers. We are making rental applications easier and protecting renters' personal information, and we are delivering a \$2 million rental distress support package so legal, financial and advocacy services are there for renters when they need them most.

But the reform that is the subject of this bill, which is a very welcome reform in Northcote, is the establishment of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria. This marks a pivotal shift in the way tenancy disputes are looked at and resolved in our state, because goodness knows it is needed. Right now around 5 per cent of Victorian households are facing serious rental stress, meaning they are at risk of being evicted because they cannot afford to pay their rent, and countless more are dealing with homes that simply do not meet the minimum standards required under our legislation. Or there are others still who are at loggerheads with their landlords for a whole raft of reasons. Indeed over the years I have had contact from numerous residents living in the inner north about their living conditions and the frustration and disempowerment they feel in a system that, for the longest time, has not given renters the dignity and security that they deserve. One resident wrote to me about mould growing all throughout their home and severe structural damage that was making the bathroom floor begin to collapse inwards. Others have described homes that are becoming like a sauna on hot days or dropping to Arctic temperatures in winter months. In some circumstances I have heard of households relying

on portable fans and plug-in heaters and air conditioners, which as you can appreciate leads to skyrocketing bills. Still others have been sluggish with pretty shocking rental increases, with agents and landlords refusing to even communicate let alone negotiate.

Our homes should be a sanctuary in which to rest and recalibrate, a place to enjoy and take pride in, yet for too many they are a source of constant anxiety and trepidation. Establishing a dedicated body, Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, will assist both renters and landlords by providing that alternative to VCAT for disputes over things like rent, damages, repairs and bonds. And I think it is important to recognise that when these disputes arise, they are often not in isolation. Lives are complex and rental disputes could be compounding a whole lot of other pressures in a person's life. No system can prevent things going wrong all the time or prevent disputes arising, but the system must be robust enough and efficient enough to allow recourse when things do go awry. A quick resolution to a dispute as opposed to months upon months of waiting for a VCAT hearing can make a huge difference, not just to the material circumstances under which so many renters find themselves, but to their mental health and wellbeing too. VCAT should be a last resort for these sorts of things, and that is exactly what it will be under the new model that this bill takes forward.

As I said before, the correspondence I have received from my community underscores the urgent need for stronger enforcement of housing rights and fairer play in the property market. Renters have shared with me their sense of vulnerability, of precariousness, of apprehension for their futures and the stability and security of their families. Beyond this they have also shared with me their hopes and aspirations for a housing system in which the inalienable right of a secure home is honoured to its fullest. While home ownership will not be the path or the choice of every Victorian, it did give me heart to stand with the Minister for Consumer Affairs last weekend in Northcote alongside a dedicated taskforce from Consumer Affairs Victoria, a special taskforce proactively patrolling real estate auctions in my electorate and in the northern suburbs broadly to tackle underquoting. Underquoting is more than just an unfair practice, it is unlawful, and it undermines trust and integrity in our property market, so CAV have been monitoring auctions and have issued more than \$1.1 million in fines to estate agents breaching the rules. For buyers it means navigating the market with more confidence and not wasting so much time, and for agents it is about a level playing field so that the ones that are doing the right thing are on the same field as the ones that maybe are not.

The path to addressing housing pressures in Victoria cannot just be through words – it must be through action and real reform, and that is exactly what we have been doing as a Labor government. Sadly, it is not a trajectory that we share with many of those opposite, as the Greens and Liberals more often than not cosy up to oppose reform on housing policy. In terms of the Liberal Party, we cannot expect much else, but the real sinister element comes from their unlikely bedfellows in the Greens. Time and again we see the spectacle overshadowing the substance, because we know that they will get up in a debate like this to posture and to gaslight about how they alone are the champions of housing, and meanwhile they will actively block housing development. It is such a ruse. Across the inner north of Melbourne, in councils like Yarra, Darebin and Merri-bek, hundreds of homes have been blocked or delayed at the hands of Greens councillors, and in debate after debate we get these Greens MPs getting up and disingenuously claiming support for housing security in these bizarre performative spectacles utterly disassociated from the reality of their obstructive and destructive influence on real-life, tangible housing projects in our communities.

This includes delaying 99 homes in Preston that thankfully will soon be opened but could have been opened much earlier if the Minister for Planning had not needed to call the development in and take it off Darebin council's hands. When it comes to housing, the Greens are so clouded by their virtue signalling that they cannot even see their own hypocrisy – a hypocrisy that could not care less about the people needing homes and would block homes being built because they have ruthlessly calculated that they can get more political mileage out of that. In Northcote, as in the rest of Victoria, the need for housing options is acute and the cost of living is putting real pressure on households. Despite the obstructions and the fearmongering and the hypocrisy, the Allan Labor government will get on with

building the homes that Victorians need, and not just that, we will pass bills like this to embed equity into our housing system.

I would like to thank both the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Consumer Affairs for their work and their willingness to engage on the pressures in my community. There are still more steps on the road to reform, including better enforcement of minimum rental standards and progressing the review that we have underway into minimum energy efficiency standards for rentals, but as the MP for Northcote, I will always fight for fair and secure housing.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (18:52): I rise to speak on Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. I do so with concerns about the bill. Whilst it is probably a really important bill to try and achieve the outcomes, when we have got a VCAT backlog of 64,000 disputes that cannot get rental situations righted, this bill unfortunately lacks a lot of detail. This detail has been outlined by my colleague, the member for Ovens Valley, but basically the government are going to get rid of the Estate Agents Council without giving any detail of how that will be replaced and how the government will be able to have advice from the industry that knows the answers to problems rather than the government who thinks they know it all and do not need to have transparency and consultation.

It also claims that they will set up a dispute resolution body. They claim in the second-reading speech that this will result in ‘faster, cheaper and fairer’ dispute resolution. However, in the government’s bill briefing we could get no details on this. In fact the response we got from the government’s representatives was that they were unable to tell us how it was going to be delivered. They simply could not give us any detail. It was ridiculous. Therefore I support the reasoned amendment put forward by the member for Ovens Valley, which does a number of things, but it says:

... this house refuses to read this bill a second time until ...

(1) proof that tenants and rental providers will not be disadvantaged by the bill –

is provided, because there is no evidence of that, along with –

(2) more information about how the Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria (RDRV) will work ...

and a breakdown of costings and how it will be funded. It is all the important information that is not able to be given to our community to understand whether there are going to be a number of unintended consequences, which always happens when the government works out the details later and rushes through bills that have no detail.

This bill came about as a result of the Victorian government housing statement in late 2023, which the Leader of the House said this afternoon aims to secure affordable housing for all Victorians. Given the track record of this current government, having made over 147 amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, what we have actually got is the most disrupted market you could possibly see. We have no rents available in my part of the world, pretty much. There are no affordable rents, rents have escalated in price and landlords are selling. It is just an absolute shemozzle, and the market has got no equilibrium whatsoever. There is just no stock available.

So I sought feedback, as I do, on the bill from those who I feel have a lot of knowledge in this area, and I got some feedback from a real estate agent by the name of Dominic Bushell from Luke Williams Real Estate. He said in short that any adjustments by the state government in the rental space increase prices. I had a lot of other similar comments from other agents that I spoke to about the rental situation and what these changes will result in, but one of the really interesting ones – and I am going to read it out – was from Brian Hancock, who has been in the industry for 43 years. He said:

The state Labour Government stuffed the Residential Act over 2 years ago with ... some 147 amendments to the Tenancy act

...

And now clearly obvious Landlords have had enough, now exiting the market over the past 18 months and choosing to invest in other states

This has put extreme pressure on the rental availability shortage in the market hence coupling to the dramatic rent rises we are seeing any further changes will only create a larger void in the rental market I cannot remember for the past 43 years a situation like we are experiencing. Today when you quantify the landlord exits and predicted further tenant rent rises, cost of maintenance and construction cost for new housing stock the incentives and % rental returns are just not ...

there. I thought that was a very sage assessment, really, but when I look at the consequences of what has happened with the legislation changes, he is quite right. The equilibrium is completely smashed, and we are in a really troubled place with our availability – finding roofs for people to put over their heads.

That is coupled with the increase in land tax. I got a land tax notice from a person who brought it to my attention last week. Their land tax bill for a property that they rent out has gone from \$1600 per annum to \$5900 per annum. That is an increase of 269 per cent. What that equates to in practical terms is an increase per week of over \$100. Now he has a choice: he can sell the property, and then it goes out of the rental market because it is not their primary place of residence, or he can increase the rent by over \$100 per week. These are investments. This is a mum-and-dad couple. They are not wealthy. They are just investing the money they have for their retirement in property, but I am pretty confident that they will not stay in that environment. It would be smarter, as the agent said, to go interstate.

If you buy a house and land package in Victoria, you will find that almost 50 per cent of the cost of that land and the building of that home is taxes that go straight to the Labor government – taxes like stamp duty and the cost of permits and fees for studies that need to be completed. That is a lot of money when you are a young couple trying to get into the marketplace. I recently had a young man contact me because he has bought some land and he is trying to build the house, but it is hard to get builders, it is hard to get permits and it takes time. He has received a land tax bill for that. So here we are encouraging young people and then taking away at the same time the ability for them to continue to save to be able to build a house. The irony is just extraordinary.

Then we come to the fact that all these houses, whether they are owned or social housing or rental properties, are all part of the supply chain of houses available. I recently had an update from the Community Housing Industry Association, who told me the reason we are in this situation, on top of the reasons I have explained so far, is because the Labor state government have not been investing in social housing for the last 10 years. They say, ‘We’re only five months into our housing plan,’ which they announced, as I said, in 2023. The reality is they have been here for a decade in government in this state and they have had an obligation. They have absolutely not taken the responsibility responsibly and they have not done their due diligence and put the stock in place – so much so we have only had an increase of 1300 homes on top of the stock that we already had when they began this Big Build, which they claim to be putting \$5.3 billion into and have spent \$4 billion of.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now. The member may continue her speech when the matter is next before the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Glen Huntly level crossing removals

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (19:00): (581) My adjournment is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is that the minister direct the Level Crossing Removal Project to fix the old, unusable track between Caulfield and Glen Huntly stations. This track was part of the Glen

Huntly level crossing removal and was not replaced. It is noncompliant and is causing terrible screeching every time a train goes past the track for all of the residents that live around the area. Now, the Glen Huntly level crossing removals – the two removals – were really important projects, and despite the minister's alternate viewpoint, they were something that I advocated for for many years, on record here in *Hansard* and publicly with the residents, and I am glad that the government finally removed them. But when you do a project, you have got to do it properly. And unfortunately with the millions of dollars that was spent on removing the level crossing, they did not replace that vital track that would allow the trains to move smoothly between Glen Huntly and Caulfield stations. This is –

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: I can hear the interjections from the government. They are not living next to these railway tracks and having to experience the horrific noise that these residents do each and every day. This is not a funny matter; this is not a joke. This is quite serious, and I would ask the government to take this seriously. I met with 40 residents only last week in Derby Crescent that were absolutely beside themselves having to deal with this each and every day. I ask the minister to fix the problem, remove the track and put in upgraded track that is compliant – 400 metres worth, I believe – and also while they are at it, ensure that there is proper greenery restored where a lot of the trees were taken out as part of the removal project.

Finally, on top of all of that, as part of this upgrade there is talk about a bike lane which is going to cost lots of money and that there is still no home for – because Queens Avenue did not want the bike lane – and the latest talk is for Derby Crescent to get it. I think, simply put, let us just fix the problem of the unusable tracks. Let us fix the greenery and fix the open space, and I think everybody and the residents would be very, very happy with it. We do not need more bike facilities and to spend the money in a cost-of-living crisis. Let us do what we promised and ensure the level crossing is done properly and that residents can actually get on with their lives and sleep at night and not have to listen to the screeching trains each and every night outside their bedroom doors.

Tarneit electorate bus services

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (19:03): (582) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action that I seek is for the minister to meet with me in Tarneit to discuss local buses. Tarneit, as we all know, is a rapidly growing area with many new developments and infrastructure projects underway, including the upcoming Tarneit West station – and I assure the member for Caulfield that the tracks will not be squeaky. Buses are a core part of our public transport network. They link locals with their connecting trains, workplaces, shopping centres and of course health services. Along with the new Tarneit West station, buses will act as a vital connector to ensure residents have direct and efficient access to broader Melbourne, further enhancing the livability and accessibility of the Tarneit area.

Discussing the bus network in Tarneit is not just about maintaining connectivity, it is about fostering a sustainable, efficient and inclusive public transport system that keeps pace with the area's rapid growth. With the population in Tarneit projected to continue its rapid increase, a robust bus service becomes indispensable in ensuring residents can move freely and easily and access employment, education and recreational facilities. Buses serve as an essential option for those without private vehicles and help to reduce road congestion by providing a practical alternative to car travel, something that is essential in the outer, growing suburbs. By prioritising bus services we are not only enhancing mobility but also contributing to environmental sustainability and community wellbeing. I look forward to the minister's response.

Wild dog control

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (19:05): (583) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide to me the new research, strong advice and studies into the effectiveness of nonlethal dingo control methods that were referenced in the media

release entitled 'Striking the balance to save threatened dingo population', published on Thursday 14 March 2024.

Firstly, I would just like to question the title of this release, 'Striking the balance to save threatened dingo population', because my understanding is that there was no consultation with the farmers who have to suffer stock losses as a result of wild dogs attacking their stock. Removing those management zones in the north-west of Victoria, we can clearly see, is a first step towards removing and revoking all wild dog management zones across the state and, even more concerningly, reintroducing the dingo to the Grampians National Park.

There is an area of the north-west wild dog management zone, which has now ceased, in my electorate of Lowan. The other section of it runs into the member for Mildura's seat. Certainly people in my part of the world were not consulted. There was no advice even asked of them in terms of how they manage wild dogs going forward. This is very, very concerning, because as we know, genetic studies have recently identified what were otherwise known as wild dogs as dingoes, and we do not have any published research behind that. If you are going to put in a media release that this is the reason that we are going to allow wild dogs to roam free in western Victoria, then the government has an obligation to ensure all of that advice, all of that research and the studies into the effectiveness of nonlethal dingo control methods are published and put in the wider domain.

As I said, I do not think the balance has been struck with a single small-scale research study. When I was informed about this my understanding was that the Victorian Farmers Federation were only told after 4 o'clock on that day – the Thursday the media release was issued – and it was at midnight that that wild dog management zone was revoked. There was no talk and no discussion with the farmers who will lose stock. To bring some balance into this debate, I would like to offer to table this document, which shows mauled lambs and what it looks like when a wild dog or a dingo attacks your stock. They attack them, they maul them; they do it for fun, not for food.

The fact that the Labor government have organised for a dingo to set foot in this place tomorrow, I understand, without any balance about the damage that they do to stock is absolutely abhorrent, and it shows that this government has no focus on farmers in this state. I ask the minister to immediately provide this important research and, most importantly, to talk to farmers before the government bans the other management zones.

Lakeview Senior College

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (19:08): (584) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting Lakeview Senior College so that he can have a look firsthand at their elite AFL and soccer programs. Lakeview Senior College is a high school nestled in Caroline Springs which caters for years 10 to 12. The students at the school are provided with a unique opportunity to develop their skills both academically and athletically in their senior years within both the VCE and VCE vocational major education programs.

Both the AFL and football academy programs were established in 2007 and have enabled many students to reach their full athletic potential and experience professional competitions such as the AFL and A-League. The AFL program has been involved in harnessing the talents of Will Hoskin-Elliott from Collingwood, and I know we have got many Pies supporters in this room; James Sicily, current Hawthorn captain; Tristan Xerri from North Melbourne; and of course Western Bulldogs rookie Cody Raak. Likewise, the football academy program shows an impressive list of alumni, including former Melbourne Victory's Maja Markovski, Western United's Dalibor Markovic and many more who have made their mark in domestic and international competition.

This program not only focuses on skills development but also offers complete support in strength and conditioning, sports psychology, nutrition and of course academic development. Such holistic growth ensures that students not only shine on the field but also thrive in their life pursuits. I am very proud of Lakeview Senior College for both their athletic and academic achievements.

St Bede's College, Mentone

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (19:10): (585) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is that the minister extends the existing 40-kilometre school zone to Warrigal Road on Beach Road to ensure the safety of St Bede's College students crossing Beach Road. The reason why I have raised this adjournment matter this evening is because St Bede's College, my alma mater, is in my electorate and runs along Beach Road in Mentone. It is a very busy main road. The speed zone directly in front of the school has remained at 60 kilometres an hour. Even during the school drop-off and pick-up times, it still remains 60 kilometres an hour. Just 250 metres along Beach Road is Mentone Girls' Grammar. They have been able to ensure a 40-kilometre zone just 250 metres down Beach Road in front of Mentone Girls' Grammar, but that zone has not been extended further up Beach Road to include St Bede's College. That is why I am asking the government to do the sensible thing by St Bede's College and to extend the existing zone up to Warrigal Road to capture St Bede's as well.

Just last year a student at St Bede's was struck by a car on Beach Road outside of the school and was badly injured. This year another St Bede's student was forced off their bike by a car. The St Bede's College community and the community in and around that area want the 40-kilometre speed zone to include St Bede's College on Beach Road, and I am fully supportive of that.

I understand that one of the deputy principals at the college has reached out to the responsible department, the Department of Transport and Planning, and has been told, perhaps informally, that there is no dough to pay for this extension of the existing zone. That deputy principal has also reached out to the local council and the local traffic police as well, who I believe to be all supportive of this very sensible proposal. I encourage the minister to do the right thing by students at St Bede's College. The minister received a letter from me just a couple of weeks ago in relation to this issue. It is an issue that would improve safety in my community and improve the safety of those students crossing Beach Road at St Bede's College, and I would urge the government to take this absolutely seriously.

Point Cook electorate schools

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (19:12): (586) My adjournment matter is for the Deputy Premier within his capacity as the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek is for the Deputy Premier to announce the much-anticipated locations for the new P-9 and specialist schools coming to Point Cook. This is something that is very exciting for our community because it is part of the 100 schools program that is being rolled out across this state. Education in the community that I represent is very, very highly valued. I cannot speak to just how much it is valued across our community. We have great schools, great educators and great school leaders, and we will have more great facilities. So I look forward to the minister's announcement.

Timber industry

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (19:13): (587) My adjournment today is to the Victorian Labor Minister for Agriculture, and I rise today to talk about the Victorian government policies which are directly contributing to the ongoing destruction of precious ancient forests in Tasmania. The action I am calling for today is for Labor to stop accepting logs from Tasmania's precious native forests into our state. For months now logs have been taken from Tasmanian forests and sent over to be processed at sawmills here in Victoria. I think Victorians would be shocked to know that despite ending native forest logging in Victoria, the Victorian Labor government is now facilitating and in fact supercharging the destruction of precious ancient forests in Tasmania. These are huge logs which have been taken from ancient forests in Tasmania's southern forests or even rainforest near the irreplaceable takayna/Tarkine in Tasmania's north-west. They are being put on boats like the *Spirit of Tasmania* and the *Searoad Mersey* and then sent to Victoria to keep the Victorian industry alive, despite the fact it should have transitioned to plantations. Some logs have been taken from habitat of the critically endangered swift parrot of which there are less than 800 birds left in the world.

Victoria has said that it has finally ended native forest logging this year, and it provided nearly \$1 billion to the industry to transition to plantations. That is a huge amount of money that was supposed to be used to support workers to get out of native forest logging and move to plantations. This money was not supposed to be taken and then used to continue to destroy native forests in another state. Make no mistake, the Greens support transitioning workers to plantation timber, protecting and restoring forests and important work like bushfire prevention. But rather than taking that money and supporting the local Victorian workers and communities to develop new industries with jobs for the future, logging companies may have just taken the money and moved their business down south, double dipping in Tasmania.

Now that it is election season, Tasmania's two major parties find themselves in a race to the bottom to destroy what is left of the precious Tasmanian forest. The Liberal Premier has just issued a catastrophic election pledge to open up 40,000 hectares of precious native forest to logging, and the Labor Party has also been spineless, abandoning any commitment to protecting nature and promising to expand logging contracts out to 2040. Make no mistake, this is an ecological and climate disaster.

Here in Victoria this government actually has a golden opportunity to protect and restore our forests, not destroy them. Imagine forests that are protected and restored, with jobs in sustainable tourism, recreation and restoration, and forests that are protected for the clean air and water and where traditional owners can finally get a chance to care for country. Instead, Labor is just using Victoria to destroy more forests in Tasmania.

Sunshine police station

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:16): (588) My adjournment is for the Minister for Police and Minister for Crime Prevention, and the action I seek is that the minister come and join me for another visit to Sunshine police station. As the minister knows, this is not the first time I have had him out to visit our fantastic local police stations that service my community in Melbourne's west. The last visit we had was in fact extremely productive and engaging. It is always important for us to be able to sit down with local police, who are on the beat each and every single day keeping our community safe, to hear about the things that they need to do to do exactly that.

Over the last couple of months several locals have taken the time to sit down with me to talk a lot about community safety issues in and around the Sunshine area. It was absolutely fantastic to sit down and listen and participate in these discussions about how we can better keep the community safe. I am pleased to say that this is something that our government takes very seriously and responds to appropriately, whether it is through investing in 3600 new police officers – of which 129 have been allocated to the Brimbank division that services Sunshine – or even, just recently, by cracking down on knife and machete crime through the legislation that is being debated in the other place this week. It is why I welcome the opportunity for the minister and I to sit down once again with local police in Sunshine and discuss these issues and ideas in a productive way.

Regional health services

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:17): (589) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that regional health services and staff are not cut to make up for the record \$1.5 billion deficit that Victoria's public hospitals have amassed in the first six months of this financial year. Health services within my electorate of Euroa already continue to lag behind those found in the rest of the state, with significant delays to ambulance response times, out of control GP wait lists and a general lack of funding from this government. The last thing they need is further cuts.

When it comes to ambulance response times the figures in my region are alarming. For life-threatening cases the statewide median response time is just under 9 minutes. Meanwhile, Benalla's median time is 42 per cent longer at nearly 14 minutes. The Mitchell shire, which includes several towns in my electorate, also has a median time close to 14 minutes, while the Strathbogie shire is nearly 11. For the Strathbogie shire it gets even worse for high-priority, time-critical ambulance responses, with locals

waiting nearly twice as long as the rest of the state, with a 22-minute wait. These extra minutes of waiting for urgent support feel like an eternity during an emergency and they can be the difference between life and death.

It is not just ambulances that members of our local communities need to worry about. Troubles within the health sector continue to impact GPs and all those who need to use their services. After listening to the concerns of GPs in my region I know many believe they will have to close as a result of the Labor government's payroll tax. GP clinics in both Kilmore and Broadford have said that this health tax will force them to shut their doors. With these facilities offering free appointments to war veterans and the elderly, as well as servicing an ageing community, their value to our region is obvious to see, despite how this government treats them. Kilmore Medical Centre's practice manager Ram said:

We're struggling to keep our head above water and the only hand this government has given us is one that will drown us ...

Broadford Medical Clinic owner Dr Geetha has said:

If you're going to change things and make it difficult for us, we might have to one day close and I don't want to see that day.

GPs are already suffering with significant waitlists or are just flat out, unable to accept new patients. These changes will have an enormous impact on their ability to care for those in our communities who need it most. The lack of resources being provided to our regional health providers is making it increasingly difficult for people to access reliable health services in their own community.

In Benalla we are without a dialysis facility, despite frequent appeals; Nexus in Kilmore is dependent on community funding; maternity facilities in Heathcote are non-existent; urgent care beds in Seymour are under threat; and the closest PET scan machine is in the next electorate. But I want to finish by congratulating the Euroa community for their tireless campaigning and advocacy that has now ensured their health services can stay local.

Family violence

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (19:20): (590) My adjournment is to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is for her to join me in a visit to several very important organisations in my electorate. A mountain of work is being done by these organisations to reduce the incidence of family violence and to assist victims. There is nothing more important than a safe place to call home, and our government has led the way. Safe, accessible and culturally appropriate emergency accommodation is so important, and it was great to visit a new facility in the electorate with the former minister last year. I thank Safe Steps and the many organisations and dedicated workers for their tireless efforts to help people heal and rebuild their lives and for their compassion and commitment to empowering survivors.

Unfortunately we have high rates of family violence in Broadmeadows, and navigating where to get help and access services can be really tricky, especially if you have English as a second language or have a disability. Victoria's Orange Doors were established across the state to serve as one-stop shop hubs where people can arrive and get the different sorts of help they need in one place. You tell your story just once, and support services work together to see how you can be helped to rebuild your life. Information is safely shared and risk is managed, and it all takes place in a secure, welcoming, child-friendly facility where safety is paramount. I had the pleasure of attending the opening of the Orange Door in Broadmeadows in 2022, and I invite the minister to meet the hardworking and compassionate team of workers there. I also invite the minister to the Northern Community Legal Centre so I can introduce her to the amazing Jenni Smith and her incredible team of dedicated lawyers and advocates. Their unwavering commitment to justice and fairness has made them an invaluable resource for many facing family violence, elder abuse or other legal challenges.

Working at the other end of the spectrum, gender equality and prevention of family violence, I would love the minister to visit Banksia Gardens Community Services with me, another incredible local

organisation that does so much to uplift our community. Ten years ago Banksia set up the Good People Act Now program, and Georgia and the team do a fabulous job in their efforts to promote gender equity and prevent family violence. Their commitment to training young people as advocates for change and as active bystanders is commendable. It empowers individuals to make a positive difference in their communities. I was so proud to have Georgia as my guest at Parliament House last sitting week for International Women's Day. It was a great opportunity to introduce her to many ministers, who got to hear about the great work the GPAN team have done and their commitment to making a difference.

As she is the Minister for Employment I would also like to invite the minister to one of our numerous local social enterprises. These enterprises not only offer the dignity of work and opportunities for training but also serve excellent coffee.

Regional health services

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: In regard to the member for Euroa's question, I am mindful of Speaker Maddigan's ruling:

Asking a minister to continue to do something does not constitute asking them to take action.

Would the member like to rephrase the action being asked for?

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:23): My adjournment today is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that regional health services and staff are appropriately funded and not cut in the upcoming state budget to compensate for the \$1.5 billion deficit in Victoria's public hospitals.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will refer it to the Speaker. I thank the member for the clarification.

Responses

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:24): In the first instance the member for Caulfield, who has returned to join us, raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The action that he sought was that the minister direct the level crossing removal authority to fix the unusable track between Caulfield and Glenhuntly stations. I did check out the very impressive Glenhuntly station when I went to the Beth Weizmann centre with the member for Caulfield. On my way out there I went past the Glenhuntly station – from the outside, very impressive.

The member for Tarneit raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport seeking a visit and a meeting with him in Tarneit to discuss local buses and bus services that are critical to amenity and community in his electorate. The member for Lowan raised a matter for the Minister for Environment, and the action that she sought was that there be a provision for new information and research and the publishing of that information regarding the nonlethal dingo control measures that were stated in public around 14 March, and I will be sure to pass that on to the Minister for Environment. The member for Kororoit raised a matter for the Minister for Education seeking a visit from the Deputy Premier to join her at Lakeview Senior College to check out the elite AFL and soccer programs that are being run there.

The member for Sandringham raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety seeking an extension of the 40-kilometre-per-hour school zone on Warrigal Road, particularly where it meets Beach Road. This is very important of course to St Bede's, the member for Sandringham's alma mater. I should say that it is not often that members in this place get the opportunity to also represent the community and the electorate where they went to school, a privilege that both the member for Sandringham and I share. I am not sure whether the member for Sandringham secured \$11.5 million for his alma mater for a performing arts centre which is being delivered, but I am sure he will have his opportunity in good time; I will not be making that opportunity available anytime soon. But this is an important matter, of course, to extend the 40-kilometre-per-hour zone. All school zones are very

important for the safety of all students and families, and I will be sure to pass that on to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety.

The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the Deputy Premier and education minister. He is keen to have him visit, and the action he seeks is with regard to the location of P-9 and specialist schools in his electorate, a very significant and growing electorate where community services and education investment are critical. The member for Melbourne raised a matter for the Minister for Agriculture seeking a cessation of accepting logs from native forests in Tasmania, which, according to the member for Melbourne, are going to sawmills here in Victoria.

The member for Laverton raised a matter for me, and I do want to respond to that, about visiting Sunshine police station. Sunshine of course, as the member for Laverton would know from when we visited it last, is an absolute workhorse. If you want to roll your sleeves up and know what real policing is about, get allocated out there to Sunshine. I was at the police academy recently talking to graduates, just last week. I asked them where they were being stationed and some were heading to Sunshine, and I know that they will learn all about the significant role of community safety and policing at Sunshine's busy station and in particular about some of the services we are providing there through our youth crime prevention programs – some \$30 million, particularly around the Melton, Shepparton and Brimbank areas, where those programs are having a very significant effect in providing opportunities for young people who get caught up in the justice system. We have seen through our \$40 million investment in crime prevention programs a drop driving down a 29 per cent reduction in reoffending, a reduction in offending for participants in those programs and, certainly for those who reoffend, a big drop in the severity of their reoffending when it occurs. This forms part of \$100 million in our youth crime prevention program work: some 940 crime prevention projects that are having a significant impact on youth crime and also turning around the futures of our young people. Just lastly, there was our \$7 million investment last year to expand the embedded youth outreach program, EYOP, which of course is about ensuring that Victoria Police members are embedded with youth workers in communities to make sure that they are with children and young people and with our youth workers supporting them at the times they need it most. That program is working really successfully and well, and I look forward to catching up with the member for Laverton in Sunshine and again thanking the Sunshine police members for the very significant work that they do. It is a very significant and hardworking crew out there.

The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Health, and her action is to ensure that the health service continues to be appropriately funded in the upcoming state budget. She did make much mention of health services across Euroa and also in Euroa, and I give a shout-out to my great aunt Julie O'Brien in Euroa while I am at it. The hardworking member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and is keen to see a visit there. An action that she seeks is to visit some of the really significant services in her community that are trying to drive down family violence, and particularly I know that when we have caught up with police services a very significant driver of our work with local police out there in Broadmeadows is of course their engagement with family violence. In visiting Safe Steps and some of the really important services to help people heal and rebuild their lives, I know that the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, along with the member for Broadmeadows, will make sure that they understand the value and the contribution those services make and that it is appreciated by the house.

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

House adjourned 7:31 pm.