

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 4 February 2025

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

*Members***Member for Werribee***Resignation*

The SPEAKER (12:04): I wish to announce that on 6 January 2025 I received the resignation of the member for Werribee and that on 20 December 2024 I issued a writ for a by-election for the electoral district of Prahran to be held on 8 February 2025 and on 6 January 2025 I issued a writ for a by-election for the electoral district of Werribee to be held on 8 February 2025.

*Condolences***Robert Charles Sercombe**

The SPEAKER (12:05): I advise the house of the death of Robert Charles Sercombe, member of the Legislative Assembly for the district of Niddrie from 1988 to 1996. I ask members to rise in their places as a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased.

Members stood in their places.

The SPEAKER: I will convey a message of sympathy from the house to the relatives of the late Bob Sercombe.

Hon. John Delzoppo OAM

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:06): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable John Delzoppo 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 district of Narracan from 1982 to 1996 and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly from 1992 to 1996.

Our Parliament has existed for more than 170 years, and whilst a lot has changed over that period of time, a member's first speech still carries that same gravitas that it always has, because in a first speech a new member tells their story – their aspirations and ambitions for their community and for themselves. It also enables us, the audience, to understand a little bit more about the person behind the politician, who they are and what it is that drives them. That is certainly true for John Delzoppo. In his very first words in this place John spoke about service, about the privilege and the duty that comes with serving in this place, but John's sense of service was not just confined to the pages of *Hansard*; it is how he lived all of his 92 years.

For a country boy, John began with suburban roots, born in Flemington and educated in Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Melbourne. It was on Boxing Day 1954 when John and his wife Beth moved to Neerim South, and it was there that they found their true community. It was, as John would say later in his life, the most fortunate thing to ever happen. John began his service to his community first as their local pharmacist, and soon enough he put his hand up for another role and then another and then another. The list is long but barely scratches the surface. John served as inaugural president of the Neerim South High School council, life member and president of the Neerim District Soldiers Memorial Hospital, vice-president of the Victorian Bush Nursing Association, as Buln Buln shire president on three separate occasions and as a local councillor for close to 20 years from 1966 to 1986. Attentive members of this chamber may note that that last stint of service cut across John's election as the member for Narracan in 1982. For almost four years John juggled being a member of this place, a

local councillor and a shadow minister before choosing to focus on what I feel, and I am sure colleagues agree, to be the most impactful level of government.

For John, his service to his community was only bettered by his service to our state. As he himself described, responsibility to his party came third, responsibility to his constituents came second and responsibility to our democracy came first and always. He served Victoria and its Parliament in a number of capacities – in shadow portfolios across transport, local government, water and services, and then as Speaker between 1992 and 1996.

As we know, the role of Speaker is quite something. It is quite the role, isn't it? And it was on one day in the Speaker's chair – a particularly rowdy day, could you believe – that John was heard to mutter, he thought was to himself, 'I once had a dream. I was at the Pearly Gates of Heaven and St Peter said to me, "What did you do on earth?"' And I said, "I was the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly." St Peter replied, "Enter into your eternal rest, my friend. You've had your taste of hell."

Speaker, I am not sure if you would relate, but I am sure John passed that test of St Peter with flying colours.

It was also as Speaker that John revived the historic garb of the role, donning the formal gown and wig of the Westminster tradition. For John this was not about pomp or ceremony; rather, it was an expression – it was his expression – of how seriously he took his role and responsibility. It is a story that reminded me of my own grandfather Bill, who at every election – he was a working man – would put on a suit and tie to go and vote. Bill and John were different men with different politics living on different sides of the state, but both knew our democracy was worth celebrating, protecting and fighting for.

As I have mentioned, John held many titles over the course of his lifetime, none more precious than that of husband, dad and grandfather. To his wife Beth of 69 years – so committed I believe to John's cause that Beth once doorknocked the entire township of Yallourn – and to their four children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, we extend our heartfelt condolences. On behalf of our Parliament and our state, thank you for sharing him with us. Vale, John Delzoppo.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (12:11): I am pleased to join the Premier today in support of the condolence motion for John Delzoppo. The passing of the Honourable John Delzoppo marks the loss of a respected former member and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. John Delzoppo was a man who dedicated himself to the service of this Parliament, to his constituents, to our party and of course to the great state of Victoria. His passing is a loss not only to his beloved family but to all of those who had the privilege of working alongside him and to the many Victorians whose lives he touched.

John Delzoppo was a man of principle, wisdom and deep compassion. He lived a life of service, marked by dedication to public good, integrity in leadership and a steadfast commitment to the people he represented. His contributions to the Parliament, to his local community and to Victoria will endure for generations to come, and today we acknowledge his life and express gratitude for his unwavering service.

John Delzoppo was born on 3 December 1931, which I believe makes him a great Sagittarian. All great Sagittarians do very well. He was born in Flemington, in Victoria, and was raised in a hardworking family, the son of Ernest Edward, a butcher, and Marie Cosgriff, a dressmaker. From an early age he witnessed the values of responsibility and community service, principles that would go on to define his life. His early education was at Ascot Vale State School and Moonee Ponds Central School. He later attended university and then the Victorian College of Pharmacy, earning himself a diploma in pharmacy and becoming a member of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia.

It was at the pharmacy college that John met his wife-to-be, Elizabeth Panther – Beth – in 1954. John and Beth moved to Neerim South, where they would go on to spend much of their lives. In 1955 John

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married Beth, and together they built a loving family, raising two sons and two daughters. Their partnership, spanning nearly seven decades, is a testament to their mutual support, shared faith and unwavering love.

John was a member of the Church of England. He was active in the Gippsland Anglican synod. Before entering Parliament John Delzoppo, with his wife Beth, opened the first pharmacy in Neerim South in 1954, which they ran for nearly 30 years. Their pharmacy was more than a place of business; it was a cornerstone of the community, where he dispensed not only medicine but advice, care and comfort, and he was known for his generosity and dedication to his patients, qualities that would later define his approach to politics.

His sense of duty extended far beyond his profession. He was an active contributor to numerous community organisations, including, as many mentioned, the inaugural president of the Neerim South High School council, life member and president of the Neerim District Soldiers Memorial Hospital, president of the Central Gippsland Regional Planning Authority interim committee, commissioner of the Neerim South Waterworks Trust and Noojee Waterworks Trust, Gippsland representative of the Latrobe Valley Water and Sewerage Board, inaugural chairman of the Westernport Catchment Coordinating Group and senior vice-president of the Victorian Bush Nursing Association.

It is unsurprising, then, that John was recognised for his significance with several awards, including the Victorian Council Community Service Award in 1980, by being made an Honorary Freeman of Buln Buln shire in 1994 and by being awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2009. These were well-deserved acknowledgements for his tireless efforts to improve the lives of those in his community.

John Delzoppo's deep commitments to the community go hand in hand with his own political service. He was elected as the member for Narracan in the Victorian Legislative Assembly on 3 April 1982. He held a seat in the district with distinction until his retirement in 1996. As the saying goes, history repeats itself. Certainly our hope is to soon repeat the achievements of John. At the time, Narracan was always considered a Labor seat. Despite this, John's personal standing and strong local reputation allowed him to win the election by just 941 votes. However, following a redistribution and the loss of Drouin and the gain of Yallourn North – and according to his electorate chairman at the time, Ian Needham – John embraced the situation and managed to win the next election by 193 votes. That was a long week waiting for counting – we have been there before. It was a tough week for you as well, Beth. He said that this was the turning point of John holding Narracan and putting up the correct position for the next election, and John went on to win Narracan another two times before retiring.

John was just not just involved in the community through the pharmacy, through the church and through the organisation committees, he was also involved through the service of his membership of the Liberal Party. He was branch president, chairman of the McMillan electorate, chairman of the Narracan electorate, a member of the state executive, Shadow Minister for Transport in Parliament, Shadow Minister for Local Government, Shadow Minister for Water Resources and Shadow Minister for Property and Services.

In 1992 he was appointed the Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, a role he performed with honour and impartiality. As Speaker he upheld the dignity of this chamber, ensuring a fair debate and maintaining decorum and strengthening the integrity of our democratic institutions. Those who served alongside him recall a deep respect for his parliamentary tradition and even his hardness. This is something John strongly believed in and was based on words of advice he received from Alan Brown during his first days of Parliament – that a member's responsibilities were first to the institution of Parliament, second to their electors and then third to those of the party to which they belonged. John was an excellent Speaker. In fact, in a *Herald Sun* article in 1992 he was described as having an 'almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the parliamentary standing orders'.

We note he was also occasionally poetic in the chair. The Premier has highlighted the statement he made about sitting in the chair and the experience of that of being on earth and obviously the experience of effectively living in hell whilst being in that chair. We hope we do not put you through the same, Speaker. Beyond his role as Speaker, John served on parliamentary committees, including the Public Bodies Review Committee, the Standing Orders Committee and the Parliament of Victoria Committee.

John's legacy is one of service, humility and dedication. His advocacy for regional Victoria ensured better infrastructure and stronger community services. His work in Parliament nurtured our democratic institutions, and his leadership as Speaker set a standard of fairness and respect that we should aspire to uphold today. To his constituents in Narracan he was more than a politician; he was a champion for their concerns, a tireless advocate and a trusted representative. To his colleagues he was a mentor, a source of wisdom and a man who embodied the best of public service. Beyond politics, his family will remember him as a devoted husband to wife Beth, a loving father to his children Ian, Lindsay, Clare and Anne, a cherished grandfather to Emma, Amy, Sophie, Cathy, Nick, Elly, Evan, Alex and Sarah, and a loved old grandpa to Zara, Luca, Alba, Arthur, Winnie, Maverick and Charlie.

Today we mourn the passing of a great Victorian, but we also celebrate a life well lived. John Delzoppo dedicated himself to the service of others, leaving an indelible mark on this Parliament, on his community and Victoria and on his family, which loved him so deeply. On behalf of the opposition and all those who had the honour of knowing him, I extend my deepest condolences to his wife Elizabeth, his children and his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. May they find comfort in the knowledge that his contributions will never be forgotten, that his memory will continue to inspire others and that those who follow in his footsteps and have the knowledge of his service will always respect what he has done. John Delzoppo – may he rest in peace.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:20): I am pleased to rise to extend our condolences on behalf of the Nationals to John Delzoppo's family. Growing up in Gippsland in the neighbouring seat of Morwell, John Delzoppo was a name that was known to anyone who paid a bit of attention to politics, particularly later in life when he became Speaker of the house in the first term of the Kennett government.

John was born in Flemington in 1931 on 3 December and was educated at Ascot Vale State School and Moonee Ponds Central School, but the lure of the country was too good perhaps, and he moved to Neerim South, where he was the pharmacist from 1954. As the Premier indicated, John's service to the community, long before he came into Parliament, was exemplary. He was president of the Neerim South High School council from 1963; a member of the Latrobe Valley Water and Sewerage Board from 1973 to 1982 – that is the predecessor of Gippsland Water – and many others, including as a life member and council member of the Victorian Bush Nursing Association, no doubt with his involvement at that wonderful facility at Neerim South; and also a Buln Buln shire councillor from 1966, with three terms as its president.

I note that in his maiden speech John expressed a fear that he would not refer to 'Mr Speaker' but to 'Mr President' – and he did not do it; he got it right – but I think it is ironic that 10 years later he would be Mr Speaker himself, and only probably the member for Rowville could tell us what that must have been like in that first term of the Kennett government. Let *Hansard* record that was not meant to be a sledge on the member for Rowville! But dealing with the first term of the Kennett government when there was a lot going on and when the Labor opposition was going hard, no doubt, under Mr Brumby at the time, that would have been a trying time. Speaker, I am sure that you would say that all times for the Speaker are trying, but it is no surprise that Mr Delzoppo made that comment about meeting St Peter on the entry to heaven.

He was also an OAM, as the Leader of the Opposition indicated, receiving the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2009. But I am sure his greatest achievement was that extraordinary 69 years of marriage to Beth, and 69 years is an extraordinary time. I pick up a comment from an article in 1985 where

Mr Delzoppo praised his ‘loyal and understanding wife’, who had doorknocked every house in Yallourn North. I know a bit about the valley and Yallourn North. Yallourn North ended up in the seat of Morwell, which the Nationals won in 2006. In 2010 the Nationals won every booth in Morwell except Yallourn North. So I know exactly how hard you worked there, Beth, and credit to you. It was a great achievement and great support for your husband. The challenge of course is now for the current member for Morwell to do likewise in Yallourn North.

He had an excellent period of service as the member for Narracan. He also spent 13 years as the president of the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members Association, for which I am sure the Parliament thanks him. John had an exemplary record of service to the community long before he came into this place and also after he left in 1996. We thank him for that, specifically for his service to the community of West Gippsland. I extend my condolences to Beth, to Ian, to Lindsay, to Clare and to Anne, who are here today. Vale, John Delzoppo.

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (12:24): John Delzoppo was born December 1931 and passed away on 23 November 2024. I first met John Delzoppo when I was first preselected for the Liberal Party in 1991. I was immediately taken by his patience and his interest in me and my campaign. His memory was brilliant. Every time I met John he could recall every detail of all of our previous conversations.

John was the chemist at Neerim South, a great town in Gippsland, and he and his wife Beth were so committed to the Neerim South community. As far back as the 1960s John and Beth campaigned and campaigned to have a secondary college built in Neerim South. Rather than the local kids having to travel to Warragul or Drouin, they were successful, and the government built the Neerim District Secondary College.

This school meant a lot to John and Beth. He remained on the school committee for years, but more importantly he was a mentor for many, many students – something that he took a lot of pride in.

John was elected to Parliament in 1982, to the seat of Narracan, and he held that seat for 14 years, choosing to retire in 1996. When the Kennett government was elected in October 1992, John Delzoppo was elected as Speaker, a position that he held for four years, and he was an excellent Speaker. But those four years were tough years – very, very long days here in the chamber, starting at 10 am and finishing at 4 or 5 the next morning, starting again at 10 am, going through until 4 or 5 the next day, and so on and so on. By the end of the week, when we had had little sleep, we would start at 10 am on Friday and finish on Saturday afternoon at 5 pm. The number of bills being pushed through the Parliament was enormous, and the Speaker was under incredible pressure to maintain order and a proper running of the house, but even at 4 am – sometimes when John was not in the chair because there was a committee vote he would duck into Strangers for a coffee – he was always a statesman, patient, upbeat, and never shared the enormous pressure that he was under.

A close mate of mine and to many in the chamber – maybe not the Greens – is the previous member for Narracan Gary Blackwood. John Delzoppo rang me prior to the 2006 preselection to push the case for Gary to be selected. John made it clear that Gary was the only credible candidate for Narracan, and what an outstanding choice he was. Gary was a fantastic member of Parliament. John was Gary’s campaign chair for the 2006 and 2010 state elections and was part of the committee in 2014. John was a longtime friend of Gary’s but more importantly a mentor, instilling a strong commitment to the community in Gary’s daily work.

Whenever John visited Parliament after his retirement, Beth was always with him. Beth, you know that he worshipped the ground that you walked on. A good man has moved on – a man totally committed to the Liberal Party, the Anglican Church and his community but most of all to his family. My condolences to Beth and family.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (12:27): I am honoured to rise today to talk about the life of the Honourable John Delzoppo and the contribution John made to the electorate of Narracan, this Parliament and his much-loved community of Neerim South. It is fair to say we do not get many state

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funerals in our area – I think John’s might be the third that I can recall – but no-one deserved it more than John.

I would like to start by mentioning the government’s representative at the funeral, our Deputy Speaker and member for Ashwood, who in my opinion – and I know John’s wife Beth agrees with me, and the family do as well – paid an absolutely amazing tribute to someone he had not met. It reflected the sentiments of the community and was a very heartfelt and sympathetic contribution. It was very, very well received, so I would like to personally thank the member for Ashwood for his contribution on that day.

John was the loving husband and partner in life of Beth for an amazing 69 years; dearly loved father of Ian, Lindsay, Clare and Anne and their partners Mary, Jan, Gavin and Martin; loved grandpa to Emma, Amy, Sophie, Cathy, Nick, Elly, Evan, Alex and Sarah and their partners Christian, Brendan, Julian, Sophie, Matt, Fernanda and Rai; and loved old grandpa to Zara, Luca, Alba, Arthur, Winnie, Maverick and Charlie.

As has been stated, John was elected to the seat of Narracan in 1982, but ironically he served in the Buln Buln shire from 1966 to 1986. That overlap of four years in being a councillor and an MP is quite amazing; I would like to see someone in this chamber try to pull that off today and see how they get away with it. He served his community with passion for many, many decades, and he never wavered from that passion.

His time in Parliament was interesting. He had some interesting journeys along the way. I will say this: most of us in Parliament, when we get up to make a contribution, we like to think we are right.

Well, unfortunately for John, on one such occasion when he was the shadow minister, I believe – no, he was not a shadow; he had only been in the Parliament two years – a story came out. The Thomson Dam was under construction at the time. The story came out and John got a whisper that this was going to happen, that the Thomson Dam was going to burst its banks and was going to flood from Walhalla to Bendigo – the way John would have described it at the time. But unfortunately for John, he was not quite right. The Thomson Dam was only about 11 per cent full at the time – the million-megalitre dam was only 11 per cent full. But what was funny about this story is that back then the media used to have an annual event, the pollie of the year award. It was described in the newspaper on the day as being ‘bigger than the Brownlow and more exclusive than the Emmy’. John won the award that year, and he received from the media team a plunger, a plug and a book titled *Dam Busters*. It is quite an interesting story.

John’s passion was his community, and none more so than the Neerim South hospital. John went out there, he fundraised for the hospital and, in Beth’s words, hounded the architect and eventually got the hospital built, which is still there today. To give you an idea of how respected John was, I have got to tell this story. On the day of his funeral a very, very cranky constituent of mine, Jenny Muir, was driving past the hospital – John had a very close relationship with Jenny; he used to call her Little Blondie – and she was very upset when she saw that the hospital flag was not at half mast. It was fair to say that the staff in the hospital copped both barrels from Jenny at the time. I cannot repeat what she said verbatim because it would be very unparliamentary.

John had a unique way of dealing with being a Speaker too. Speaker, maybe you might want to use this tactic every now and again. When the chamber would become quite rowdy, John would simply get up and walk out. It was really simple. There was one day when, believe it or not, he and a belligerent Jeff Kennett – and I cannot believe Jeff would be belligerent – had a fairly robust discussion for hours and the chamber was left empty. So maybe, Speaker, if we get too rowdy, you can just go and have a cup of tea. But that was the type of man John was. He was about the job, and he took the job very seriously.

It is interesting to reference that John used to wear the traditional dress. He did, but there are some interesting stories about the traditional dress. When he decided to do this, it was actually a colleague

of his that suggested it. He said, ‘John, you’ve got to wear the traditional dress.’ When he asked why, he said, ‘Because you’ve got to separate yourself from the rabble – that’s us.’ So John said, ‘All right, I’ll do that.’ Now, John had a bit of trouble. He had to get his mother to give him a hand to put the tights on, for starters. So Mum was out there helping John get his tights on and everything else, and of course he had the wig as well. But Beth had one complaint about the wig: it used to make his ears smell. Unfortunately for Beth, she had to put up with smelly ears. That was quoted by Beth, by the way.

Jacinta Allan: We’re learning a lot today.

Wayne FARNHAM: We are. But I thought I would just talk about the type of man he was and what he did. There is another funny story about John’s time in the Speaker’s chair. His secretary Margaret had a fondness for ducks. Apparently there used to be ducks at Parliament out the back. One day when John came back to the chamber after doing his duty, he found all the ducks in his bath. Margaret had decided to collect the ducks up and put them in the Speaker’s bath. He took that in his stride.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: Yes, there used to be a bath in there.

One of John’s passions was fishing. He loved fishing. He was a fly fisherman, and he would try to get out and fish anytime he could. But for as long as I can remember, although it is getting opened up at the moment, you could not fish in the Tarago dam or the Tarago River. According to John, wombats always get through the fence, so John always went down there and pulled out a few trout. I think that for the service he gave to our community, we can forgive him for that.

He was very, very passionate about his community of Neerim South. He loved the community. He and Beth served in that chemist for 31 years. It was not a chemist like we have today where you go up and you just get the pills given to you; John used to make the medicines out the back – quite an amazing feat – and with Beth he worked for 30 years in that chemist in Neerim South supporting the community out there. He loved his community of Neerim South. He loved his Anglican Church as well. For many decades John was the one responsible for helping pick the bishops, and he would give them quite a hard time to make sure they deserved it.

He was a great, great local man. This was represented at his funeral, where we had former Liberal Party leaders in Jeff Kennett and Alan Brown, the member for Hawthorn was there as well and former members Gary Blackwood, Ian Maxfield and the Honourable Steve Crabb. This is how loved John was by this chamber. It is quite interesting that when Steve Crabb was the Minister of Transport and John was the shadow minister for transport John’s daughter Anne married Steve’s son Martin. It would have been an interesting Christmas dinner at that time, but I have been assured they never talked about politics.

John was very much loved in this place, even to the point where an attendant in the upper house invited John and Beth to their wedding – that is how much he was loved in this place.

Two of his passions, two of the things he loved the most about being a member, were deb balls and CFA brigades. John and Beth went to every deb ball they possibly could. They were like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers; they could both dance very, very well. Their love was so great that they would sneak into other electorates and go to their deb balls as well. I imagine that would not be received too well today, but back then it was. John also loved his fire stations and the CFA brigades because he felt that was the real sense of a community, a real sense of volunteers coming together and community coming together to look after their local community. That was one of his greatest loves as well. He will be very, very sadly missed in my area.

I know when I won the election, before I could even figure out how to log onto the parliamentary system on my computer, John and Beth were at my door. John sat down and gave me all the secrets

to being in opposition, which I will not share because I do not want the government to know. John was passionate about the Liberal Party. He was passionate about the seat of Narracan, and he was so pleased when I won the supplementary election that he was there front and centre – he was the first person to come and visit me.

To Beth and her family, we thank you very much for sharing John with us. He was a great local community advocate. He was unparalleled in his passion. Our community and that of Neerim South benefited greatly because of his passion and the difference he made. For that, on behalf of the people of Narracan, I thank you very much. Vale, John Delzoppo.

The SPEAKER (12:38): I would like to make a few brief comments and a contribution. On behalf of the Legislative Assembly and the Speaker's office, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the family of the Honourable John Delzoppo OAM. To his wife Beth, his children, his nine grandchildren and his seven great-grandchildren, you are in our thoughts.

As has been noted, Mr Delzoppo's service to this Parliament and his community was extensive. Not only did he serve as Speaker with distinction but he left an indelible mark on the Parliament through his time as the member for Narracan and as a diligent committee member. Mr Delzoppo's contribution as Speaker is still felt today. I and previous speakers have regularly referred and continue to refer to his many sensible rulings from the Chair. He garnered respect from all sides of the chamber for his fair rulings and for his ability to treat all members equally.

Hearing some of the stories in today's contributions and from Speaker Delzoppo's time is a reminder how much has changed over the decades but how much is also the same, particularly here in the chamber. For example, there are no baths in the Speaker's office, and, as you will have noted, there are two babies in the chamber today. So much has changed, but we thank the Honourable John Delzoppo for his contribution as Speaker and as the member for Narracan.

Members, the question is that the motion be agreed to. I ask all members to signify their assent by standing in their places in silence.

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

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:41): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 12:41 pm.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 2:02 pm.

Members

Ministry

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that there have been some changes to the government's ministry and that a copy of those changes has been provided to the clerks for circulation as needed.

I also wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Agriculture will answer questions for the portfolios of environment, outdoor recreation, and tourism, sport and major events; and the Minister for Emergency Services will answer questions for the portfolios of government services, women, treaty and First Peoples, and prevention of family violence.

Shadow ministry

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): I am pleased to also inform the house that the responsibilities and portfolio allocations for the Liberal and National parties in this house

and in the other place have been amended, and I would like to make those available to all members in the house.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Crime

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. In the past year Labor weakened bail laws, crime has increased by 15 per cent and aggravated burglaries and youth crime are now at record levels. What does the Premier have to say to the many victims of crime and their families who have been bashed, murdered or terrorised in their own homes because of the Premier’s failure to keep Victorians safe?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. As I outlined this morning, I understand from listening to people from across the Victorian community how crime hurts families. It hurts working people in particular – working people who have worked incredibly hard for what they have got. We also know from Victoria Police that particularly women and children are affected, and that is why we introduced into this place and into the Parliament last year tougher consequences for serious repeat offenders. I note that the Leader of the Opposition has asked me what I would say to the Victorian community. What I would say is: the Leader of the Opposition and his Liberal Party opposed those changes last year.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, question time is a time for questions to be answered in relation to government administration, not to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I said, those changes – strengthening the bail test, introducing serious offences and also the rollout of electronic monitoring for serious repeat offenders – were opposed by the Liberal Party in this Parliament. What we do know is that these laws are being rolled out and they are already making a difference, but it is clear to me that there is more to do. It is unacceptable that too many Victorians do not feel safe, which is why I have asked the Attorney-General and the Minister for Police to do further work, to look at our laws and to come back and provide advice to the government, because I am firmly focused on supporting those working families, supporting those women and children. There is more to do; we will do it.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): Last year the family of murdered man Ash Gordon met with the government and the opposition to call for a change to Victoria’s bail laws. Since then nothing has happened. Why can’t the Labor government just strengthen bail in Victoria rather than launch a review that further delays action and puts the community at risk?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): I thank the Leader of the Opposition. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that we put changes to this place that he and his party opposed, changes that are being rolled out and are already making a difference. But it is clear that we need to go further; we need to make changes. That is why the Attorney and the police minister, in addition, can I say, to the additional tools, powers and resources we have already provided to Victoria Police – Victoria has more police on Victorian streets than any other jurisdiction in the nation –

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, on a point of order, the Premier is debating the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the new Manager of Opposition Business is wrong. The Premier was not debating the question. She was in fact being succinct, factual and accurate in answering the supplementary question that was asked of her.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, in being factual and answering the question, there are more police on Victoria’s streets than in any other jurisdiction and we are strengthening knife powers for

Victoria Police. As I said this morning, there are further changes and we will make them to continue to support safety in this community.

Ministers statements: bushfires

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): Right now, today, and indeed for many weeks, hundreds and hundreds of fire personnel and volunteers from across the CFA, FRV and Forest Fire Management Victoria are out on the ground fighting fires in our state. For the Grampians fires that started back on 16 December as a result of dry lightning, they have worked for weeks tirelessly to save homes and lives against some of the largest fire fronts our state has ever seen.

These are the same men and women who spent their Christmas and their new year away from their families and friends, in tents, in trucks and in base camps. Many of them are volunteers, and they have come from every corner of our state and even further afield. I want to say thank you and show gratitude for the support of the interstate personnel from South Australia, the ACT, Queensland and the Northern Territory who have travelled away from their families, their jobs and their communities. Can I also say I had the opportunity to thank them personally, with the Minister for Emergency Services, when we visited the Horsham incident control centre in late December. We give them thanks because not only do they jump on the trucks to support their own communities; they have travelled long distances to come and support ours.

Right now there are large, dangerous and difficult fires that are happening across the Otways, the Grampians and the Little Desert National Park. The work is far from over and there are many weeks of summer still ahead of us, which is why again there is a role for all of us to do to support our firefighters and the volunteers. There is work we can do. We can stay up to date, we can download the VicEmergency app and we can be alert to local conditions. We do this because we know it saves lives. On behalf of the government and the Victorian community, I want to thank those hundreds and hundreds of personnel who have been working around the clock for weeks to keep our community safe.

Bail laws

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): My question is to the Premier. Just last week on Nova FM the Premier bragged about the Labor government’s bail laws – laws which failed to protect 19-year-old Isla Bell, who was violently murdered involving a person on bail. If murder did not change the Premier’s mind on bail laws, what did?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): In answering this question, I refer the Leader of the Opposition to the answer I gave to the previous question. Crime hurts people and it hurts families, and we have made changes already. We introduced those changes to the Parliament last year that were opposed by those opposite, and those changes are being rolled out right now, but from listening to communities and from understanding that one victim of crime is one too many, it is clear that we need to do more, and we will do more, which is why I have asked the Attorney and the police minister to come back with that advice on the further work we can do to support community safety in this state, alongside the significant additional investment we are providing to Victoria Police to provide them with the tools, the powers and the resources that they need. I thank them for their work, and we will continue to support them. I thank the Attorney and the police minister in advance for the work that they are doing in terms of understanding that there is more to do and we will do it.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): The supplementary question is: is the latest bail review about protecting Victorians or just the Premier’s job?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Frankston will come to order. The Leader of the House will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition will come to order. Members will be removed from the chamber without warning.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:12): I say to the Leader of the Opposition: where were you last year when you were opposing our stronger framework for youth justice in this state? I say to you, through you, Speaker –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members to address their contributions through the Chair.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier has to be factual. The Liberals and Nationals were trying to introduce a criminal justice bill for bail to ensure bail was tougher here in our state under a government we lead.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, there is no point of order. The Chair cannot determine whether any minister or Premier is being factual.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I have said already today, we are listening to the community. We have already made changes, which were opposed by those opposite. Those changes are being implemented right now. But it is clear that we need to do more, and that is what we will do.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:13): I rise today to provide an update on the Allan Labor government’s work to build more homes for Victorians. The most recent ABS data shows that Victoria continues to build more homes than any other state.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Polwarth withdrew from chamber.

Sonya KILKENNY: In the last 12 months Victoria leads, building 15,600 more homes than New South Wales and 28,500 more homes than Queensland. Others might have spent their summers plotting and scheming to get a new job, although I say: new leader, same old Libs.

Sarah Connolly interjected.

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

Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, former Speaker Brooks in *Rulings from the Chair* said that ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. It is absolutely necessary that the minister on her feet be given the opportunity to compare and contrast what the Allan Labor government is delivering with what those on the other side would do should they be elected to government.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House and Manager of Opposition Business, I ask you to be succinct with your points of order. It is okay to compare and contrast previous administrations. The Minister for Planning was not attacking the opposition as such, but I do ask the Minister for Planning to keep to her ministers statement.

Sonya KILKENNY: Over the summer we were focused on building more homes for Victorians. We made it easier to build more homes on smaller parcels of land in the outer suburbs of Melbourne and regional cities through changes to the Small Lot Housing Code. We opened applications for the latest round of growth areas infrastructure contribution – \$150 million for crucial transport projects in Melbourne’s outer suburbs. We have continued to say yes to more homes: yes to 243 new homes in South Melbourne, right near the new Anzac station, which will open with the Metro Tunnel later this

year; yes to 74 new homes in Ballarat within a short walk to the station; and yes to 46 more social homes in Mildura.

There is so much more to come: more homes near train and tram stops, delivering our 10-year plan for family homes with backyards in the suburbs, kickstarting the townhouse revolution with changes to make it easier to subdivide or to build two homes on your block and a fairer system that will see developers contributing to funding local infrastructure, parks and services – all that and so much more. But it remains to be seen: will we see the same old things from the opposition, blocking and locking Victorians out of homes?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I remind members at the table on both sides that you are not immune from being ejected from the chamber.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, personal reflections are disorderly.

The SPEAKER: I remind the minister that personal reflections are disorderly and not to reflect on members in the chamber.

Sonya KILKENNY: More homes means more opportunities for Victorians, and that is what we are delivering.

Bail laws

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:17): My question is to the Premier. When will the government change the bail laws?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): As I have already outlined to the house today, we understand that there is a need to do more, and we will do more, which is why I have asked the Attorney and the police minister to do that work.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: I remind the house that it builds on the work we did last year that the Liberal Party opposed, and we will do the work –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, this is very straightforward: when will the bail laws be changed? The Premier has not gone near it yet.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is being relevant to the question that was asked. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): How long will the bail review process take?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:19): Again I remind the Leader of the Opposition of the changes that we made in the Parliament last year – changes that were opposed – changes like the rollout of electronic monitoring, introducing a new serious offence and strengthening the bail test. But of course –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I realise the Premier was only a couple of seconds in, but the question was very narrow. It was only eight words long. On relevance, please bring the Premier back to answering that very narrow question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: My point is this: we have already made changes that are making a difference. It is clear that we need to do more, and we will.

Ministers statements: public transport

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:20): It is good to be back in this place. I am sure we are all feeling pretty excited about it. While some in this house have spent their summer focused on themselves, plotting against each other and maybe even mulling over which services they would like to cut –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister on her feet is clearly seeking to be disparaging to members on this side of the chamber. Under standing order 118, imputations are disorderly.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, just because the Manager of Opposition Business does not like the answer to a question or indeed a ministers statement, it does not mean that it is disorderly or against standing orders. I would ask that you counsel the Manager of Opposition Business about the frivolous use of points of order in this place.

The SPEAKER: It was not a frivolous point of order. However, the minister had not reflected on any particular member of the Parliament. The minister to continue, but be very mindful of not reflecting on members in the chamber.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: The truth is that on this side of the house we have been very busy and very focused on delivering the transport services and infrastructure that Victorians deserve. To compare and contrast, Speaker, to use your words, the Labor government helped Victorians to get to their new year celebrations with free public transport and more than 600 extra services. Meanwhile, those opposite were screening each other's calls. While they have been trying to work out how to explain the ongoing attendance of Nazis at their gatherings, this Labor government completed 35,000 –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, imputations are disorderly.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The fact is that the minister on her feet was speaking nothing other than the truth in her ministers statement. I ask that you ask the Manager of Opposition Business again to use her points of order wisely.

Danny O'Brien: On the point of order, Speaker, you specifically directed the minister not to attack the opposition, which is exactly what she is doing.

The SPEAKER: The minister has not mentioned a particular member of Parliament. However, I ask the minister to be mindful that what she is saying in her ministers statement does not implicate members of this house.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: In contrast, this Labor government completed 35,000 kilometres of train testing in the Metro Tunnel. With our Commonwealth partners, we announced over \$300 million for the Werribee Main Road and Princes Freeway interchange upgrade and the Ballan Road intersection as well. Meanwhile, the only dollars they were chasing were from donors to pay for silks. While they were knifing leaders, we kicked off works on the Ballarat station upgrade, we put on an extra 4500 tram services to help people get to the tennis – Victoria's biggest ever Australian Open – and we added 15 new school bus specials to help kids in Point Cook, Mount Atkinson, Clyde and many other

growth areas get to school. While they have been busy blocking housing for millennials, this Labor government has delivered on our election commitment to connect Eynesbury to –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is defying your ruling, and I again state former Speaker Brooks’s ruling that a ministers statement is not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I uphold the point of order. The minister to continue without attacking the opposition.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: We have delivered on our election commitment to connect Eynesbury and Weir Views to Melton station for the first time. The contrast could not be more stark. They spend every day looking inwards, and when it comes to policy they are looking in the rear-view mirror.

Grampians bushfires

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:25): My question is to the Premier. It is 49 days since bushfires began to decimate the Grampians, surrounding farms, communities and businesses. Grampians businesses have lost their peak summer season. Now, because both state and federal Labor governments have failed to provide small business disaster support in their time of need, they face business closures. When will small business support packages be made available for businesses devastated by the Grampians bushfires?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): I thank the member for Lowan for her question. As I said earlier in my ministers statement, I think we all understand the great challenges that are being experienced by those townships, businesses and communities around the Grampians National Park who have been experiencing continued fire attack since 16 December, when dry lightning started the first of those fires. As we have seen, other fires have been coming off the main fire as a consequence of the ongoing impact of that first ignition point.

As a response, there have already been a range of supports that have been provided with the activation of the personal hardship grants, the activation by the federal government for employees in those communities who have lost their income, so that income support has been provided to those employees. Also, I know from both visiting Horsham with the Prime Minister in late December –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: When I visited the Horsham incident control centre in late December, while the fires were still going, I had the opportunity to be briefed and to thank the emergency services personnel but also a large number of people from across the community who gave up their Christmas, who gave up their new year, who gave up time with their families to keep not just their own communities safe –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, the question goes specifically to small business support packages. I also acknowledge the amazing work of the volunteers and the emergency management workers. However, it is the businesses that are in critical need of small business support.

The SPEAKER: Order! What is your point of order?

Emma Kealy: Relevance.

The SPEAKER: Thank you. A point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The member for Lowan has raised relevance. The Premier is being entirely relevant to the question that was put to her, and I ask that you rule the member for Lowan’s point of order out of order and let the Premier get on with answering the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was outlining, there have been a range of supports that have been activated: the personal hardship assistance grants and also that 13 weeks of income support that is also available for sole traders in the local community.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is relevant to supporting businesses that are about to go broke because they have lost their trade and the government has not provided any support –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lowan will resume her seat. Screaming across the chamber is not going to make your point of order any more relevant.

Emma Kealy: Speaker, I apologise. I am extraordinarily frustrated.

The SPEAKER: I appreciate that, member for Lowan, but raise your point of order succinctly.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, I think I know what you are going to say, but there is no point of order, and I ask again that you counsel the member for Lowan further on the way in which she comes into this place and uses –

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House will resume her seat. I ask the Leader of the House to refrain from telling me how to do my job. I also ask the member for Lowan to be respectful of those on their feet and let them answer the question. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question, but she was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: As someone who lives in a high fire risk community, I know just how important it is to support our communities. That is why, in addition to the support that includes support to sole traders that I have already outlined, the Minister for Emergency Services has visited a number of times, including last Friday, Dimboola, and the Minister for Local Government has visited the Halls Gap community, as has the minister for small business. We are doing that to listen to those communities, but can I make this clear point: if you jump on your VicEmergency app, you will see there are emergency warnings out right now for these communities. There is still an active fire underway right now, and we will continue to support those communities. I remind the member for Lowan that those communities need our support and leadership.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:30): Today the Premier announced an inquiry into the McCrae landslip, stating that ‘too many people have been let down’. When will the Premier establish an inquiry into the Grampians bushfires to understand the impact of Labor’s failure to deliver fuel reduction to levels recommended by the royal commission into the Black Saturday bushfires, Labor’s failure to have the complete firefighting air fleet in place in preparation for the fire season and Labor’s failure to support businesses to assist community recovery?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I suggest that the supplementary question put by the member for Lowan was indeed not a supplementary question to her initial question but in fact a whole separate question. Her first question was about business support for the Grampians. Her second question was about an inquiry into the landslip at McCrae and whether there should also be an inquiry into bushfires. I suggest that it is not a supplementary question and that you rule it out of order.

Emma KEALY: On the point of order, Speaker, the question was in relation to the Grampians bushfires, and my final point was about Labor’s failure to support businesses to assist community recovery. That is directly in line with the substantive question that was put, and therefore I ask that you rule it in order. Further, I realise that you are looking at a transcript of the question. I am happy to make that question available to you, if you like.

The SPEAKER: I do have the question in front of me, member for Lowan. I am going to let this one through, but it is very tenuous.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): I reject the premise of the member’s question. This sort of misinformation reminds me of a time when someone stood up in this place and said no

career firefighter turned up to Black Saturday. The member for Gembrook stood up in this place and said no career firefighter turned up at Black Saturday. This sort of misinformation –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, responses to questions are not a time to attack the opposition. My community are desperate for answers; they want an inquiry. I ask the Premier to respond.

The SPEAKER: I ask members to make their points of order succinctly. It is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. The Premier will come back to answering the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I say this because this is a pattern of behaviour, of misinformation being spread at precisely the time when communities need to see us in this place supporting them, which is why we have provided hardship grants, which is why we have provided support for sole traders and which is why we have been visiting and listening to those local communities. We will continue to do that. In terms of an inquiry, the member for Lowan knows that after natural disasters like this IGEM plays a role in reviewing each and every emergency incident.

Ministers statements: health infrastructure

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:34): I rise today to update the house on the government's record investment in health infrastructure for all Victorians. The Allan Labor government is building \$15 billion worth of world-class health infrastructure, delivering new hospitals and upgrades right across the state.

It has been great to be on the road these last few weeks visiting some of these amazing builds, like the new Footscray Hospital, transforming health care for the people of the inner west. The member for Footscray has been a tireless advocate for this project, which will add 200 new beds, treat an additional 15,000 patients and enable an extra 20,000 people to access emergency care every year.

Just last week I was out with the member for Melton at the site of the new Melton Hospital. Excavation will soon start to deliver a brand new hospital to treat 130,000 patients every single year. Another vital project for the outer west is the expansion of the Werribee Mercy Hospital's emergency department. I know the member for Point Cook and our amazing candidate for Werribee John Lister are thrilled that this is being developed and will treat an additional 25,000 patients every single year. We are meeting the needs of Victorians with investments in the Northern Hospital, a project that has the support of the members for Thomastown, Mill Park and Yan Yean. In the south-east we are redeveloping Frankston Hospital, which will massively improve health care for the member for Frankston's community. It is a shame he is not here.

But our projects do not stop at the metropolitan border. We are making massive investments in our regions. The member for Ripon can tell you just how good the Maryborough and District Hospital is looking, and the member for Murray Plains – I know he is here – and the member for South-West Coast – unfortunately she is not – will be pleased to know that the Swan Hill emergency department and the Warrnambool Base Hospital are getting massive upgrades. It does not matter where you live, because unlike those opposite, who sell off and shut down hospitals – (*Time expired*)

Youth justice system

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:36): My question is to the Premier. In the 10 months since the government first announced the ankle bracelet monitoring trial for youth offenders, how many have been fitted?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:37): I thank the Shadow Attorney-General for the opportunity to remind the house that this was an initiative he and his colleagues voted against when we put this to the Parliament. Yes, the Shadow Attorney-General is correct: we did announce this

10 months ago. But guess what you need to do once you announce it: you have to put legislation through the Parliament.

Sam Groth interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: I know you are still new to the place, member for Nepean. You actually have to put legislation through the Parliament first before it becomes a law. This is providing factual information, Manager of Opposition Business.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, it was a very narrow question: how many have been fitted? On relevance, I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to answering that very narrow question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: There is no point of order, Speaker. The Manager of Opposition Business was unable to articulate what her point of order is, so I ask that you rule her out of order. The Premier was being entirely relevant to the question that was asked. Not only that, she was meeting all the requirements of answering a question in this place.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was giving context to her answer, but I do ask the Premier to be mindful that it was a very narrow question.

Jacinta ALLAN: It was, and I am answering it directly because in terms of when we announced this last year, the journey that this initiative has been on –

Sam Groth interjected.

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

Member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House is warned. The member for Mordialloc can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: The picture tells the story. In terms of the implementation of the rollout of electronic monitoring in this state, remembering of course that this was an initiative the Liberal Party opposed, following the passing of the legislation late last year work has been undertaken by the Department of Justice in partnership with the courts and Victoria Police to implement the technology but also to implement the supervision regime. This is about addressing the issue of repeat youth offending, and this will be implemented in coming months.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, it was a very narrow question. It did require a number. The number may be as low as 22; I do not know.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Michael O'Brien (Malvern) (14:40): My supplementary question is to the Premier. Ten months ago the government announced a trial of ankle bracelet monitoring. Last week the Premier said on radio:

I also want to flag we are rolling out this year electronic monitoring on some of these youth offenders ...

In the past year alone there have been 23,810 youth criminal incidents. Why is it taking up to two years to roll this trial out?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:41): We understood why we had to explain to the member for Nepean how the law and legislation works; I did not think we would have to explain this

to a former Attorney-General. The legislation needed to pass Parliament first, and then we had to reach its commencement date.

Michael O'Brien interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: Oh, sorry – very much. Not that one. My apologies. You used to be at the bar, mate, so I would have thought you would understand the law.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, again, former Speaker Brooks ruled that it is unnecessary and unrequired to attack the members of the opposition.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is a serious matter, and I apologise for promoting the member for Malvern inadvertently. We needed the law to pass the Parliament. The law was opposed by the Liberal Party. It has now commenced. The technology and supervision framework is being put together right now, and this will be implemented in coming months.

Ministers statements: schools funding

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:43): It is often said that politics is at its most elevated when it is a conversation about the future, and we know investing in public education is the single most important public investment we can make in our future. While our students were enjoying their school holidays over Christmas, the Premier and I were working very hard to make sure our public school kids would get a very big present when they returned to school. It was transformational, with the member for Bayswater, to be out at Boronia Heights last week with the Prime Minister and the federal education minister to announce a record \$2.5 billion for public education in Victoria – the most important investment we can make.

We have held the line for a whole 12 months. The Commonwealth were always wanting us to only increase the student resource standard by 2.5 per cent. We held the line, and before Christmas the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that he would give a 5 per cent increase to public education here in Victoria. What that also means is that states around Australia that agreed to 2.5 per cent are also, thanks to Victoria, now going to get the 5 per cent increase as well. That is a really important measure. Going from 20 per cent to 25 per cent is going to be transformational for our public school kids. We know that 73 per cent of disadvantage lies in our public education system. But it does not stop there. The reforms we have made in phonics are going to be embedded in the new national agreement – a phonics check, a mathematics check. The reforms we have made in student wellbeing and that focus on mental health are all embedded in the new national reform agreement.

I want to thank the Premier for her support and her leadership in discussing this with the Prime Minister. This is a big outcome. It builds on the Education State in Victoria, and it just shows why Victoria is leading the nation when it comes to education and why we will talk about this reform for decades to come.

Constituency questions

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:46): (950) My question is for the Premier, and I just want to address the growing crime on the Mornington Peninsula. Residents are reporting to me a significant uptick in theft, vandalism, car theft and antisocial behaviour, and many people in Nepean are feeling unsafe in their own homes. I had one resident come to me recently. He has a lawnmowing business. He was out mowing a neighbour's lawn; she is an older lady and he does it for free for her. He turned around and saw his car being stolen. When he went to approach the car and find out who was in there, he was hit from behind with a metal bar across the head, and absolutely nothing has been done to try to make sure the offenders are taken care of and brought to justice. This is an issue that is vitally important to

my community so they can feel safe in their homes, so my question is: will the Premier admit she was wrong to weaken the state's bail laws that have the Nepean community feeling at greater risk of crime?

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:47): (951) My question is for the Deputy Premier as Minister for Education. As the Deputy Premier is aware, by now thousands of families across Victoria have taken advantage of our government's \$400 school saving bonus. I want to take this moment to wish all families in the Laverton electorate a warm welcome back to school for 2025. I would also like to mark the first-year anniversary of Bemmin Secondary College, Truganina's first high school, as well as Warreen Primary School, which we built and opened last year. As students come back to school, the time has come for a lot of folks in our community to grapple with the cost of schooling their kids. It is why this bonus is our signature cost-of-living relief measure. We are talking about new uniforms for growing kids, new textbooks for the new year, graduation costs and even camps and excursions that may pop up throughout the year. My question for the Deputy Premier is: how many of the more than 4000 students and their families in the Laverton electorate who are eligible for the school saving bonus have taken advantage of this incredible cost-of-living relief?

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:48): (952) My question is for the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs. How many businesses have closed across the Euroa region in the past 12 months? Across my region we are seeing an alarming trend: shops and businesses are closing at a concerning rate. This is happening in towns that this government itself earmarked for growth. These communities should be seeing investment and opportunity but instead their main streets are lined with 'For lease' signs. The latest ABS data confirms this decline, with Heathcote, Benalla, Seymour and the Kilmore-Broadford area all reporting fewer businesses than last year. In Benalla alone there was a loss of 36 businesses just in the past year. Just last Friday I met with Heathcote business owners, and half of them told me they are either shutting up or going interstate because operating in Victoria is impossible. The reasons are clear. Skyrocketing WorkCover costs, an ever-increasing tax burden imposed by a financially incompetent government and the growing impact of crime are taking a serious toll on businesses. Again and again these business owners say the government is not listening.

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:49): (953) My question is for the Minister for Education and concerns the school saving bonus. Minister, how is the school saving bonus helping to alleviate cost-of-living pressures for families in my electorate of Narre Warren South? We know that families are feeling the pinch, and the beginning of a new school year brings about costs that can put pressure on the family budget. Families are just looking for savings, particularly at this point of the year. This government is continually investing, advocating and striving to provide the best education for students for their future, and we know that the school saving bonus is another initiative to help support students and their families. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:50): (954) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Why won't the minister listen to the feedback of the community regarding the North East Link Program? Last week I co-hosted a forum with the member for Menzies and the member for Bulleen to hear feedback from hundreds of residents about the impact on their homes and lives from the construction of the North East Link. It was very disappointing that not a single representative from the North East Link Program could make themselves available to hear from the community directly affected and answer their questions. Many issues were raised at the forum, including excessive noise, dust, pollutants, removal of greenery, graffiti and rubbish, traffic congestion and disruptions to public transport. However, the key issue that was strongly and clearly conveyed is that residents are frustrated by their interactions with the North East Link Program – an arrogant, out-of-touch authority that is

emblematic of this tired government. My team is compiling and collating all the concerns of the local residents and will provide an overview to the minister and the authority, but the question to the minister is: why aren't you listening?

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:51): (955) My question is to the Minister for Education. How are the Allan Labor government's education initiatives helping to improve the lives of students and families in my electorate of Tarneit? Families right across the state have been benefiting from this government's investments into education, and in Tarneit I have had the pleasure of seeing kids starting their days with a healthy breakfast supplied by Labor's breakfast club program. I have seen students able to afford new uniforms that will fit them better as they grow, and they will be able to afford camps and excursions that otherwise would have been unattainable if it was not for Labor's \$400 school saving bonus. With two young kids myself, I know just how much of a difference that sort of money can make to the lives of local families. I am proud to be part of a government which is making the cost of living easier for our community while prioritising the health and education of our youngest Victorians. I look forward to the minister's response.

Sandringham electorate

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:52): (956) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police. Every day residents in my electorate tell harrowing tales of the violent burglaries, home invasions and thefts happening in our community. One of the recent reports I received was from Michelle Pritchard, who shared that her family suffered an attempted home invasion in Beaumaris. Michelle and her family heard the sounds of offenders jumping over their fence and attempting to break in. Terrified, Michelle called 000 and waited with her family upstairs for the police to arrive. When the police did come, she was told that there were six attempted home invasions in the area that very night. The police believe that all six of the attempted invasions were likely to be by the same group of offenders. On the previous weekend 16 vehicles were stolen in that local area. Since the incident Michelle and her family have been living in fear, constantly worried about the safety and security of their home. Given the Premier's admission today that Victoria's bail laws are too soft, when will the Minister for Police bring legislation into this place to reverse Labor's weakening of bail laws?

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:53): (957) Speaker, it is great to be back in the house, and a very happy birthday to you for Sunday. My question is to the Minister for Education. How many families in my electorate of Sunbury have benefited from the \$400 school saving bonus? It is indeed back to school time, and local families are preparing for the year ahead. We are making it just that little bit easier to get back to school via the school saving bonus, providing eligible students \$400 to go towards school uniforms, textbooks and of course extracurricular activities. Local families, principals, teachers and the wider community have told me and my office of the importance of this program. Again I take this opportunity to thank all within our local school community. Thank you for all the work that you do, and I wish you a very happy 2025 school year.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:54): (958) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will the Allan Labor government take action to provide long-term solutions for the roads in Knox, which have led to accidents and deaths? More than a year ago we had a fatality on Wellington Road in Rowville just outside Wellington Village. My office was flooded with angry residents demanding more action on the condition of our roads. I wrote to the minister and raised the matter in the chamber, requesting dropping the speed limit from 80 to 60 kilometres, signs telling trucks to travel in the left lane, a speed camera with appropriate signage warning motorists, more police patrols and a major upgrade to Wellington Road. To date nothing has happened, as usual. This is in comparison to

the Liberal candidate for Aston Manny Cicchiello, who is campaigning for an upgrade to Wellington Road in the upcoming federal election.

Mulgrave electorate

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (14:55): My question is for the Deputy Premier in his capacity as Minister for Education. My question is: how many students have benefited from the \$400 school saving bonus in my electorate of Mulgrave, and how much have families in Mulgrave saved so far? The Allan Labor government understands that cost-of-living pressures are impacting Victorians across the state, and as the minister would be well aware, this payment will help ease the burden on families in paying for items like school uniforms, textbooks, excursions and activities. As someone who used to work in schools as a psychologist, I understand that costs can stack up going to school, the financial stress this may cause for the parents and the stigma which can be associated with financial hardship. My electorate has a high number of eligible families in non-government schools as well as government schools, where families will benefit greatly from this payment, and I am really glad that the \$400 school saving bonus is now available to families.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:56): I have reviewed the constituency questions from 28 November 2024, which was our last sitting week before the break. The member for Polwarth asked the minister to tell the people of Polwarth and others about a particular matter, which is requesting an action. I therefore rule the member's question out of order. The member for Lowan asked a broad policy question that was not linked sufficiently to her electorate or constituents. I therefore rule the member's question out of order. The member for Greenvale asked the minister to advise him and the Greenvale community about a particular matter, which I will accept on this occasion, although I encourage members to be clear when asking constituency questions that they are seeking to receive an answer themselves rather than seeking for third parties to be answered.

I will take this opportunity to remind members of my rulings and those of previous speakers that constituency questions must relate to constituency issues and not encompass broader policy issues, which can be included in questions on notice, and that members asking constituency questions should ensure that it is clear how their question specifically relates to their constituency.

I also remind members that constituency questions must ask questions of ministers and not seek an action. Members should take care in phrasing their matters to ensure that their constituency questions seek information and do not instead ask a minister to do something.

Bills

Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:58): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005, the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005 and the Land Act 1958 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:58): I ask the member for a brief explanation of the bill.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:58): The bill will amend the energy safety framework to make Energy Safe Victoria a stronger and more flexible regulator, making sure the framework supports regulation and enforcement activities to maintain safety for the Victorian

community during the energy transition and see improved consistency across the energy safety framework. The bill will provide increased certainty of public land tenure for proponents undertaking environment effects statement processes under the Environment Effects Act 1978.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:59): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Adoption Act 1984, the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996, the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021, the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003, the Domestic Animals Act 1994, the Electricity Industry Act 2000, the Environment Protection Act 2017, the Essential Services Commission Act 2001, the Housing Act 1983, the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990, the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Act 2023, the Service Victoria Act 2018, the Subdivision Act 1988, the Transfer of Land Act 1958 and the Water Act 1989 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (15:00): I ask for a brief explanation of the bill.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (15:00): The bill will amend various acts to support effective and efficient regulation as well as address minor regulatory issues, helping to modernise legislation, reduce regulatory burden on businesses and improve regulation and ensure that the regulatory framework is fit for purpose.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Petitions

Wild dog control

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) presented a petition bearing 632 signatures:

Issue:

Funding for the continuation of Victoria's Wild Dog Program continued without change, and increased reporting on the program outcomes

Action:

This petition of residents in the State of Victoria draws the attention of the Legislative Assembly to the urgent need to recommit to the wild dog control program, and calls on the Government to: 1. The three kilometre buffer zone for controlling dogs be retained without alteration, 2. All control measures currently available to doggers be retained without alteration, 3. The annual publishing of the number and location of wild dogs euthanized by doggers, and 4. The annual publishing of stock losses and reports made by community members in relation to wild dog attacks.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 1*

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (15:02): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 1 of 2025, on the following bills and subordinate legislation:

Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024
 Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024
 Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024
 Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024
 Justice Legislation Amendment (Committals) Bill 2024
 Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024
 Roads and Road Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 – house amendments
 Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024
 Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024
 SR No. 30 – Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) (Infringements) Regulations 2024
 SR No. 59 – Building Amendment (Fees and Other Matters) Regulations 2024
 Ministerial Order No. 1452 – Fees for Services Provided to Children in Government Early Learning Centres

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 – Budget Update 2024–25 – released on 13 December 2024
Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notices under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to:
 EPA Designation – Classification of PFAS-impacted soil (*Gazette G1, 2 January 2025*)
 Statutory Rule 41/2017 (*Gazette G2, 9 January 2025*)
Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986 – Certificates under s 7
Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014 – Practitioner Remuneration Order 2025
 Local Jobs First – Report 2023–24
Melbourne City Link Act 1995 – Operating Services Agreement Direct Deed: CityLink and Exhibition Street Extension
 National Health Funding Pool, Administrator of – Report 2023–24
 National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner – Report 2023–24
Planning and Environment Act 1987:

Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Ararat – C48
 Ballarat – C253
 Campaspe – C122
 Cardinia – GC206
 Casey – GC206
 Colac Otway – C130

Glen Eira – C263, C266, C268
Golden Plains – C102
Greater Bendigo – C291
Greater Dandenong – C244
Hepburn – C88
Hume – GC206, C276
Kingston – C221, C224
Knox – C203
Latrobe – C131
Macedon Ranges – C163
Maribyrnong – C184
Maroondah – C158
Melbourne – C384, C474, C475, C476
Melton – GC206
Merri-bek – C232
Mildura – C121, GC202
Mitchell – GC206
Monash – C157
Mornington Peninsula – C271
Nillumbik – C153
Port Phillip – C217
Stonnington – C348
Swan Hill – C78, GC202
Victoria Planning Provisions – VC237, VC269, VC272, VC273
Whitehorse – C254
Whittlesea – C278, GC206
Wodonga – C144
Wyndham – GC206
Yarra Ranges – C224

Report 2023–24 on Infrastructure contributions and development contribution levies

Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994 – Documents under s 9 in relation to the Royal Melbourne Hospital and Royal Women’s Hospital Project

Radiation Advisory Committee – Report 2023–24

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008 – SR 141/2024

Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 – SR 138/2024

County Court Act 1958 – SR 135/2024

Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 – SR 131/2024

Magistrates’ Court Act 1989 – SR 134/2024

National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008 – SR 137/2024

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 – SR 132/2024

Residential Tenancies Act 1997 – SR 130/2024

Service Victoria Act 2018 – SR 140/2024

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – SR 136/2024

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 – SR 133/2024

Water Industry Act 1994 – SR 139/2024

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 129/2024, 131/2024, 133/2024, 134/2024, 135/2024, 136/2024, 138/2024, 139/2024, 140/2024, 141/2024

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

Environment Protection Act 2017 – EPA Designation – Classification of PFAS-impacted soil

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 – 2025 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Rates.

PROCLAMATIONS – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Act 2024 – Whole Act (other than Part 2) – 1 January 2025 (*Gazette S671, 3 December 2024*)

Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Act 2024 – Remaining provisions – 19 December 2024 (*Gazette S686, 10 December 2024*)

Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Act 2024 – Part 2 and 3 – 1 January 2025; Parts 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 – 1 March 2025 (*Gazette S700, 17 December 2024*)

Prahran Mechanics' Institute Repeal Act 2024 – Whole Act – 1 January 2025 (*Gazette S700, 17 December 2024*).

Announcements

Parliamentary Integrity Adviser

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:04): I advise the house that on 5 December 2024 the Speaker administered to Professor Charles John Gordon Sampford, the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser, the affirmation required by section 95 of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Act 2024.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:05): I advise the house that on 3 January 2025 the Speaker administered to Stephen John Farrow, the acting Commissioner of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, the affirmation required by section 31 of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011.

Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:05): I advise the house that on 20 December 2024 the Speaker administered to David Wolf and Natasha de Silva, Commissioners of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission, the affirmations required by section 55 of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Act 2024.

Bills

State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2024

Council's agreement

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:05): The Speaker has received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2024 without amendment.

Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Bill 2024

State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2024

Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024

Royal assent

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:05): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Bill 2024, the State Taxation Further

Amendment Bill 2024 and the Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024.

Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024

Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024

Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024

Appropriation

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:06): The Speaker has received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 and the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024.

Committees

Parliamentary committees

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:06): We have received the following resignations from the Electoral Matters Committee: Brad Battin effective from 2 February 2025, Wayne Farnham effective from 3 February 2025 and Luba Grigorovitch and Emma Vulin effective from 4 February 2025; from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Bev McArthur MLC effective from 4 February 2025; from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, Moira Deeming MLC effective from 3 February 2025 and David Davis MLC effective from 4 February 2025; and from the Standing Orders Committee, David Southwick effective from 3 February 2025.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:07): I move, by leave:

That Chris Crewther and Dylan Wight be members of the Electoral Matters Committee, John Pesutto be a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, and Bridget Vallence be a member of the Standing Orders Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Reporting dates

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:07): I move, by leave:

That the reporting date for the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee's inquiry into workplace surveillance be extended to no later than 30 April 2025.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Motions by leave

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (15:08): I move, by leave:

That this house takes note of the 2024–25 budget update tabled days before the former Treasurer resigned, given the diabolical state of Victoria's finances, with net debt to reach \$155.3 billion by 30 June, interest estimated to reach \$6.6 billion and billion-dollar blowouts on employee expenses and major projects.

Leave refused.

*Business of the house***Program**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:08): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 6 February 2025:

Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024

Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024.

Here we are in our first sitting week for 2025. I want to extend my best wishes for the parliamentary year to all members of the place but particularly those on my side, and I want to thank them for the diligence they showed in the last sitting year when it came to getting up on their feet, speaking to bills and getting those bills through the house. Did you know, Deputy Speaker, last year this house passed 51 pieces of legislation that responded directly to the real needs and the lived experience of the Victorian people, who we so proudly represent week after week after week not only in this chamber but out in our communities.

This week is no different. We are here in this place pleased to be able to introduce some bills today, but we have also got a number of bills on the notice paper. This week the government proposes that we will look at the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024 and the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024 as well as the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. But let me just give you a bit of a brief outline.

The Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill – our newly minted Minister for Consumer Affairs and Minister for Local Government the member for Bentleigh will proudly steer debate on that bill in the house, which is amazing. We congratulate him for that. Our government has always been committed to making renting fairer and cheaper, because we understand that many, many people in our community rent and will rent for long periods of time, and we are the party that represents renters. Indeed our fabulous candidate out in Werribee is a renter by the way – what a contrast to another candidate who is a real estate agent from Essendon. But I digress.

The Retirement Villages Amendment Bill once again continues to build on our government's commitment to making homes fairer for Victorians. The bill follows a very important review, the retirement villages review, which highlighted the complexity and variety of retirement village contracts that make it difficult for people to compare villages and to understand their obligations and costs. I know that this would be a concern of many in this community as we look to best represent the needs of older members of our constituencies who are eligible to take up places in retirement villages. I fit into the over-55 category these days, but I have the good fortune of being a home owner. Not everyone is in that position, and indeed many people make lifestyle choices to downsize and move into retirement villages for all the social benefits that they can deliver, but we want to make sure that they are getting a fair deal and they are not getting ripped off. Because this is what our government does every single day: we stand for working people. We stand for people who have worked hard all their lives and who are now seeking retirement. We want to make sure that they can do so with dignity, that they are respected, that their hardworking money is cared for and looked after and that their investments are protected.

The Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 is a very important piece of legislation. That is why it was the Premier that made the call that in fact we would hold this bill over and not send it to the guillotine this week, because we want to make sure – knowing that the opposition has now come out and said that they are opposing the bill – that we give them every opportunity for each and every one of them to get on their feet in this place and outline to the Victorian community and to members of our religious communities, including our Jewish community, why they

will be opposing a bill that seeks to make antisemitism a hate crime. They can explain to our LGBTIQ+ community why they oppose the inclusion of the LGBTIQ+ community and members – and people living with disability also – in our anti-vilification and social cohesion bill. I look forward to that.

I congratulate the member for Evelyn on her newly appointed position as Manager of Opposition Business. I look forward to working with her; she is much better than the last one.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (15:14): I rise to make my maiden contribution on the government business program as the Manager of Opposition Business. It is a great privilege to hold this position, and I am very grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for providing me with this very important opportunity. Before commencing my formal remarks on the government business program however, I wish to thank the Leader of the House for her very kind words of congratulations. Thank you. I would also like to thank the parliamentary officers for their very generous time in providing me with briefings. Thanks to the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk and all in the Clerk's office for all of the assistance that they have provided in the past two weeks to help me prepare for this role. I am grateful for their advice and their outstanding professionalism; they are an absolute credit to this Parliament.

As I think the Leader of the House would agree, these roles do serve a very important purpose in this Parliament to help it function efficiently and fairly, and whilst the Leader of the House and I will undoubtedly disagree on many, many points over the course of the Parliament, I will do everything that I can to assist in the efficient and smooth running of this Parliament, as challenging as that may be, because we owe it to all Victorians to do that. This is their Parliament, and the effective functioning of this Parliament is for all Victorians.

Having said all of that, I respectfully advise that the opposition will be opposing the government business program on the basis that it has sought for the two bills on this government business program to be taken into consideration in detail, but unfortunately the Leader of the House has denied that very reasonable request for us to go into consideration in detail on the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. On that basis we will be opposing it. It is a shame because we consider that this Parliament is at its best and most effective when it is given the ability to apply proper scrutiny to proposed pieces of legislation to ensure all voices in the debate are heard, and it is a shame that we are not going to be given that opportunity by this Labor government. For instance, the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill seeks to make wholesale reforms to the retirement sector, and one of the many measures of a civilised society is how we care for our most vulnerable and our senior citizens. We wanted to go into consideration in detail on that bill, and it is a shame that we have been unable to do that.

The other bill we consider deserving of considerably more scrutiny is the anti-vilification and social cohesion bill. We understand there was a very last-minute change last night – that the government chose, extraordinarily, to change and revise their proposed government business program to curtail it so that this particular bill is not taken to the guillotine this week. I think that that is very interesting, to say the least. I should say, lest there be any doubt, that the opposition abhors racism and vilification on the basis of race and religion in all its forms, and the opposition has been at the forefront of this debate. In recent times we have witnessed and called out unacceptable levels of racist and religious vilification on our streets. The bill does seek to make considerable changes. It seeks to introduce some criminal and civil penalties which have implications under the Commonwealth constitution's implied freedom of political communication. In short, it is not a bill that should be just waved through under the radar, that should be rushed through; rather, it deserves close scrutiny and consideration to ensure that it strikes the appropriate balance to protect all Victorians from vilification at all times. So we will be opposing the government business program.

I want to take this opportunity to deviate from that just slightly and reflect on and pay tribute to all of those communities in the Grampians bushfires. We have got bushfires in Grampians, bushfires in Mildura and bushfires in a number of parts of Victoria. Many communities are doing it very, very tough. Our hearts are going out to those communities. We thank the emergency services and all our

firefighters for the exceptional work that they are doing to protect our local communities in these times of bushfires and pay tribute to them.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (15:19): It is so good to be back here in this place again, speaking on our government's business program for this week, our first week back in Parliament for 2025. As the Leader of the House just said, 51 bills passed through this place in 2024. I would like to think I am not that competitive, but I would like to see more than 51 pass through this place in 2025. That means there is a lot of work to get on and do here in this place.

There are a couple of things that are different here in this chamber that we have to note from when we last sat. We have our fourth Leader of the Opposition in four years.

We have also got a revamped cabinet. I have to congratulate the member for Bentleigh on joining the front bench. The member for Bentleigh used to be, I think, on the same chamber duty swing, so he is very much and greatly missed over here on this side of the house. Congratulations, member for Bentleigh, if you are listening.

I do want to give a big shout-out to the member for Evelyn. It is so fantastic to see her promoted to a position of leadership on the opposition's benches. It does not happen too often, but when it does happen – they have picked a good one. Congratulations, member for Evelyn.

With only two more years to go until the 2026 election, I know that our government is going to be working really hard to get things done on this side of the house.

Members interjecting.

Sarah CONNOLLY: As always – that is exactly right. So it is fitting then that in the first week back in Parliament we are continuing on with delivering a really big legislative reform agenda that is really about the Victorian people. This side of the house is absolutely committed to and passionate about delivering for all Victorians and making Victoria a safer and fairer place to be, to raise a family and to be proud Victorians.

There are three pieces of legislation that are up for debate this week. The Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024 is going to deliver on a number of housing- and rental-related commitments that we have made to strengthen Victoria's rental market. I have been out and about in my local community over the summer talking about those, and I know that they are extremely popular with our local community, particularly amongst young people. This is all part of our housing statement and is part of the suite of reforms that we have introduced over the last year. So I look forward to contributing to this one later today.

We have got the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024 continuing the tremendous work that began in previous terms of government to deliver meaningful reform for the retirement village sector and the wonderful and incredible folks that live in these communities. I have gone and met so many wonderful seniors, some of my favourite people in the local community. I know I got Christmas cards from a lot of them in December last year, and it is wonderful to be able to make a contribution here in this place this week on that amendment bill.

We have also got the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024, which makes good on our government's commitment to strengthening our anti-vilification protections and, by God, cracking down on hate speech. We have seen far, far, far too much of that over the summer since we were last here, and this bill comes at a really important time when we are seeing so much division and hatred fester in our community. I for one am a really keen to speak on this one later in the week.

All three pieces of legislation we will be debating this week reflect the kind of forward-thinking reform that Labor governments are renowned for and that many people time and time again vote for. Whether it is through what I consider to be landmark reforms, like the anti-vilification reforms, or major

protections like those that are going to be found in the housing statement bill and the retirement villages bill, we are making meaningful change. It is change which the Victorian people have time and time again voted for and which will again come through and be put at the 2026 election; we are going to talk about things that we have gone ahead and done here in this place to make people's lives better and fairer.

None of these bills are necessarily tinker-around-the-edges-type legislation. They make genuine change to make our state better and fairer for everyone because, as I have just said, this is who we are as a government. This is what Labor governments are about. They are about governing for everyone in this state, ensuring that we are an inclusive state, a fair state, and that this is a great place to live and raise kids and be proud to call yourself a Victorian. I will be supporting the business program.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:24): It is wonderful to be back, because there is a lot of work to be done in Victoria. I do not know that we will even get anywhere near 51 bills. As the member for Laverton pointed out, 51 bills were passed in the Parliament in the last year – and have a look at the state of Victoria. We are in the worst state that we have been in for a long time. Crime and justice – honestly. The roads are crumbling; 91 per cent are in a poor or very poor condition. The cost of living is out of control. There are legislative levers that could be pulled to alleviate some of these issues.

When we talk to communities and say that all of these bills have been passed, what kind of a difference has that made to everyday Victorians, to the common man? It has made it worse. As the Manager of Opposition Business pointed out earlier, we are opposed to the government business program because, although some bills will be introduced that could actually make a difference in everyday Victorians' lives, they are all lumped into one bill and omnibus bills and not able to be considered in detail. Although there are elements – quite large elements – that we may not be opposed to, because there are a couple of clauses that make us uncomfortable or we are opposed to, lumping them all into one bill is why we oppose not only the government business program but also these bills.

There are things that could be alleviated. For example, when we talk about the housing bill that is to be debated this week and rental providers, if you ask any rental provider in this state how easy it is now to be a rental provider for long-term rentals – it is so hard. No wonder there is a housing crisis and there is an abundance of short stays and Airbnbs, and the 7.5 per cent tax is not going to fix that in a hurry and neither is this bill that is coming through the house this week.

When we talk about the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024, I know that the Nationals elders, some who may or may not be qualified to go into those retirement villages, are looking forward to speaking on this. Maybe there will be brochures circulated. The point is that the Nats, as per usual, are keen to debate these issues and these topics on behalf of their communities because that is what the Nationals do best. We are out living within our communities. We have been there before – maybe not to retirement villages, although maybe not so far away – and we are out in our communities each and every day. On the way here in fact on my very long drive down from Mildura I managed to stop into the township of Wycheproof, at the Terminus Hotel, and the issues on the cards there were renewable energy zones and the right of appeal that has been taken away as part of those 51 bills that were introduced last year, making life much, much tougher for regional and rural Victorians and doing business tougher for our food producers, who provide food not only for the cities but internationally as well. This is not a numbers game; this has got to be an outcomes game, and even though the numbers are in the 50s, the outcomes are very, very poor. Life is getting tougher, particularly in regional and rural Victoria, where farmers in particular feel like they have been backed into a corner, and that was the message I received loud and clear over the weekend.

Before I conclude I do need to acknowledge the CFA volunteers. We have also now got bushfires in the far north-west. Two houses have been lost at Colignan. I had a briefing earlier today, and I did have a chat with the Minister for Emergency Services. The fires were started with dry lightning, and there has been a huge amount of dry lightning. It is very, very dry out there. There is a lack of moisture in the soil. CFA volunteers – there was a fire in Ouyen over the weekend on Sunday as those storms

started to roll through, and they had 30 appliances and 30 crews turn out. Meanwhile, we had crews from Merbein, Red Cliffs and Mildura all fighting fires in the Grampians over their Christmas or what should have been their Christmas break. Thank you, CFA volunteers. You are the very best of us.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:29): Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I am a bit closer than I am normally used to being, but it is good to see you there.

It is great to rise on the government business program today and recognise a really important start to 2025. While the positions over there have changed, some of the rhetoric around government business and what might or might not be has not. I mean, I did like the member for Mildura trying to dress up that the opposition to the government business program was found in how the legislation might be presented.

I will differ from the approach of anticipating the bills or even bringing them on for discussion. But the notion that they would not just oppose for the sake of opposing probably does not stack up from recent form. It also lends itself to a well-worn path that I anticipate, where rather than moving amendments, there will just be a reasoned amendment, a catch-all, as they say, where you leave your homework too late in the day and you cannot be bothered to actually put forward amendments, so you just say, 'Reasoned amendment: we oppose everything until it's pushed off for consultation.' What I am hoping for is that with these three bills and the shadow ministers that represent those portfolios there is something a little more fulsome in this discussion. I mean, it has been three months. Half the shadows over there have changed over, and we have an anticipated grievance discussion. There might be a bit of a winners and losers segment to do over there, but hopefully those shadows bring forward some actual meat into what they see the housing reforms and targets to be, because there has been a lot of opposition. There has not been a lot of vision of what they would change or do.

The other big, big element of legislation this week is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. This is a really important piece of legislation to have on the record. Some 15 of the Legislative Council recommendations from that important parliamentary inquiry are brought forward for consideration. What I want to see here – and this is a challenge for the opposition, crossbench members and the Greens – is: where do they stand on behalf of their communities? How will they support vulnerable Victorians that are impacted and demonised each and every day? We have seen the proliferation of some of the most dangerous and destructive types, and we need to see on the record those members opposite bringing it forward.

I live in hope, because what we have seen in the greatest hits of 2023 and 2024 is the Nationals – sore backs, those Nationals. They carry the team over there, don't they? Goodness me. I mean, even Walshy, who just got put out to pasture by the member for Mildura, is –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Correct titles, member for Mordialloc.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Murray Plains is an absolute superstar but will contribute more than some of his Liberal colleagues, just on average. We need to see far more engagement that serves our democracy and lives up to the important institutions of this Parliament, because when you are averaging a bill speech at 0.33 – it takes some of those over there two months before they get up on a bill to even speak. You are not doing the job of what opposition should do. You are not putting forward an alternative vision, and you are not coming in here on behalf of your constituents. So we will be taking receipts, taking numbers. We will see how we go. Just looking, I mean, some of the Nationals have a very high speech load. The member for Narracan gets a few runs away early as well. We just want to see: where do people stand on the anti-vilification legislation? After a lot of talk around the impact on communities, what are the things that they are opposed to? When people are under a huge amount of pressure – and we are seeing it in conflicts around the world and we are seeing it based on their race, based on their identity and based on who they love – there is never a more important time to be counted than now in this place on that legislation.

If there are changes, as the member for Mildura talked about, do not come in here with a reasoned amendment that outsources and just says, ‘Oh, we just don’t think there was enough discussion’ when this was literally a parliamentary inquiry a few years ago with 15 recommendations, an open source engagement that was put forward – I mean, how much more? That is such a cheap way of outsourcing opposition to someone else. So that is the key thing; that is the key challenge this week. Let us front up and start 2025 with momentum, with vigour, with importance and with at least just a few speakers on the opposition side every now and then.

The member for Laverton summed up the importance of the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024 as well, something that is a big, key important contribution. I am a bit further down the bill speech list. I do not think I might get on that one, but that is a really important one for members who will talk about it.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Narracan says that is a shame. That is okay – he gets tickets to the Mordi show. But that is a really important bit of legislation that we want to see debated as well.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (15:34): I rise to speak on the government business program. In doing so I would firstly like to welcome everybody back to the new parliamentary year and to acknowledge the hardworking parliamentary staff, clerks, security, electorate officers, speakers and all that make sure this place functions effectively – especially, of course, the member for Rowville, the father of the house. I also acknowledge the hard work of the whips, leaders and managers of government and opposition business on all sides, and I particularly would like to welcome my colleague the member for Evelyn to the role of Manager of Opposition Business.

On Labor’s government business program itself, the coalition will be opposing it for the reasons outlined by the Manager of Opposition Business. On the organisation of this government business program, this appears to be a government that increasingly does not seem to know what it is doing. First, we were only sent the first version of the government business program after 6:30 pm last Thursday night. Under the Allan government it has continually been like this, whereas we normally had the government business program well before 5 pm on a Thursday under Andrews. This government business program set out that we would consider and guillotine three bills –

Members interjecting.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do not want to interrupt, but it is appropriate that former premiers of this state are referred to by their proper titles.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order, Leader of the House.

Chris CREWETHER: As I mentioned, this government business program set out that we would consider and guillotine at the time three bills – the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024, the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024; however, at 8:08 pm last night the government then sent out a revised business program where they will only now consider and vote on the retirement villages bill and the consumer and planning bill. They have said they will still look to debate the anti-vilification bill this week but will not guillotine debate on this alongside the other two bills. Either this government cannot plan their week to start with or are worried about the serious backlash from the Christian, Islamic, Jewish and other groups over their ill-thought-out and religious-freedom-smashing anti-vilification bill – or both. Overall though, it is worrying that this Labor government have had a two-month break from parliamentary sittings to prepare and still could not get their original government business program right.

Now, you will have to excuse me. I am a little bit nasally today at the end of a cold, but it seems that this government has also caught a cold and equally cannot handle the heat. This government business program reflects an unwell government that is increasingly worried about crushing polls, the most

recent putting Labor's primary vote at just 22 per cent. That could explain some of the bills put forward in the government business program, combined with the Premier's recognition of Labor's failed bail laws.

One of these bills is the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill. This is meant to be the most significant reform in decades, and the government has taken about six years to reach this point, yet stakeholders, particularly residents, have still raised so many concerns about the rushed nature of this bill. Just last week I met with local residents of retirement villages in my electorate, and many were very concerned about this bill as it is – particularly in light of what they have experienced themselves. They were very surprised when I told them that the bill was going ahead this week. Instead of doing the necessary further consultation, we have a government that is just determined to ram this bill through in the first sitting week of Parliament. There are massive issues in the retirement village sector that need to be fixed, and Labor are worried about their polling numbers, but they still are not getting it right.

We also have the anti-vilification bill, which the government was originally going to guillotine this week but now is not but has said that they might debate. This bill may be well intentioned, but it is completely flawed in execution. Perhaps the government have delayed this bill from being guillotined given the potential unintended consequences particularly with its new 'genuine political purpose' defence, which has already raised serious concerns from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim community groups alike.

Finally, there is the consumer and planning bill as well, a bill that introduces very sweeping changes to the rental and planning sectors without properly considering the impact on rental providers and tenants. The Leader of the House talked about 'fairer and cheaper', but all I see is a fair price hike.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (49): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (28): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, 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, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallenge, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Gippsland Centre

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:45): Yesterday in Sale we had a very disturbing incident where a utility was driven through one entrance of the Gippsland Centre shopping centre and out the other. This occurred just after 3:30, when schoolchildren had just left school. They are often in the centre, and that no-one was injured or worse was somewhat of a miracle. Thanks to the first responders, who were on the scene quickly to assist but thankfully not required to treat any members of the public. We do not know what caused the incident, but it is not an easy thing to smash through the doors and then drive through the centre and out the other side, so it is unlikely it was accidental. One can only

wonder what motivated this action, and I hope the perpetrator is caught and suffers the full consequences of what could easily have been a fatal incident.

Fletcher Doherty

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:45): On a brighter note, it was fascinating and inspiring recently to hear from young Fletcher Doherty of Sale, a recipient last year of the Charlie McCallum Scholarship to undertake a trek along the Kokoda Track. The scholarships were established by Craig Guthrie and Kylie Wilmot and the team at Sale RSL and Community Club to cover the cost of a Year 11 student to undertake Kokoda and learn more about the history of this brutal but crucial World War II campaign. Incredibly, Fletcher is a great-great-grand-nephew of Charlie McCallum, a local who was born in Foster and lived in the Tarra Valley before heading off to war. The member for Gippsland East has been a champion of the scholarship program since establishing it himself in East Gippsland, and we now have young people from across the state heading to PNG each year for a challenging but rewarding experience. The 2025 scholarship will be launched soon, and I will be encouraging Year 11 students from local schools who would like to apply.

Australia Day

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (15:46): On 26 January this year I went to a Vietnamese event in the morning, I went to a Filipino event in the afternoon and I also went to a citizenship ceremony after that, and that night I celebrated Lunar New Year with our wonderful community in Sunshine, as we do each and every single year. At all of these events people were happy and they were proud to celebrate Australia Day and the vibrant multicultural society that makes up modern-day Victoria and Australia, including me. They were proud to be Australian and part of our community.

This year, more than previous years, there has been something of a cover over Australia Day celebrations – a more overt and nasty racism that has reared its head, particularly around this debate. Folks are emboldened by the racist rhetoric and cultural wars that are being stoked by people that should know better. This week I have had a slew of the most appalling racist commentary on my social media by people parroting these messages about Australia Day. In my 43 years I have never seen anything like it. This included the racial vilification of students in grade 6 in one of my wonderful local schools in Truganina, because the picture of the class that I put up was not white enough for them. This stuff is sick, and I am going to be calling it out. It is un-Australian; it is not who we are and is most certainly not who we are in Melbourne's west. Our Labor government does not just tolerate multiculturalism, it celebrates it, including on Australia Day. It is coming together with your community to celebrate the good in this country.

Country Fire Authority Coldstream brigade

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (15:48): On Australia Day the Coldstream CFA fire brigade gathered for a very special ceremony to recognise a number of their exceptional volunteer firefighters. The brigade paid tribute to Robert Bethell for his incredible service to our local community. Robert has served as a volunteer firefighter for 63 years, with 23 years of those as captain of the Coldstream CFA brigade. During these six decades Robert was involved in the Lilydale fire brigade's group, the Melba group, the Maroondah group and district 13. Robert was instrumental in founding the Coldstream fire station, which has served our community so well. Robert is a highly decorated firefighter, having been awarded the National Medal, the National Emergency Medal and the CFA Outstanding Service Medal, so it was an absolute privilege to unveil the naming of the Coldstream brigade's pumper truck the Robert B Bethell on Australia Day. How his wife and brigade member Yvonne and his son and current brigade captain Sean kept this secret from Robert we will never know, but it was fabulous to surprise Robert with this special honour, unveiling the naming of the truck with my federal colleague Aaron Violi.

Also in the ceremony the brigade honoured its former member the late David McClellan, who sadly passed away last year, by bestowing David with life membership. It was lovely to see David's wife

Debbie attend and receive this award recognising David's exemplary service as a firefighter. David was also awarded the National Emergency Medal along with firefighter Steve Kelso for their efforts in the 2019–20 bushfires, and Julie Asquith was awarded the National Medal for her services to the Coldstream fire brigade.

South Sudanese Australian Graduates Association

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (15:49): I recently joined the South Sudanese Australian Graduates Association to celebrate local South Sudanese young people who recently finished year 6 and year 12 in 2024. It was a real privilege to join very proud families, friends and community leaders who wished to acknowledge and indeed celebrate the efforts of so many young people who had completed a milestone in their education. I was proud to present the awards alongside newly elected City of Casey councillor Jennifer Dizon, and I appreciated the opportunity to speak with the students about their future aspirations. The South Sudanese Australian Graduates Association in Melbourne and the South Sudanese – Australian Academic Society are led by Andrew Gai, who ensures that students from this community are supported in their education and future endeavours. With a vibrant South Sudanese community in my electorate of Narre Warren South, groups such as these foster a sense of belonging and support by helping young people and their families to navigate and overcome several challenges at school, in the workforce and at home as well. We know that education is the key to opportunity, and community groups such as the society play a crucial role in addressing the barriers that these students face. They have homework clubs and basketball clubs, they increase school engagement and they really do have some very positive outcomes. I thank Andrew Gai for inviting me and all who made the event such as success. Congratulations to everyone.

Goldfields

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (15:51): I am sick to my back teeth of the narrow-minded focus that this Labor administration has on and the ignorance and deliberate disregard it has for all those other seats that it does not currently own. Last week this Labor government trumpeted the World Heritage bid for Victorian goldfields, including Bendigo, Castlemaine and Walhalla – the best surviving gold rush landscape in the world, they said. But we have got Beechworth, Yackandandah, Chiltern and Bethanga. We all say hello. The gold rush happened at the same time in all the places in that claim zone, and it is living history today. We are all major players in it. Anyway, near Beechworth there are the Wallaby and Rechabite mines, where \$3 billion of gold was extracted out of the tunnels during the 1850s. The nearby gold battery remains in place today. There are a lot of these historical landmarks that are largely forgotten, with tracks to the mines now overgrown and some just fenced off. The Spring Creek tunnel diverted water to get gold from the riverbed and still runs under Beechworth township today. Chiltern's Magenta mine is a significant tourist attraction, but forgotten mines and tunnels litter the landscape. At Yackandandah Karr's Reef mine has organised tours and is a testament to the skills of the Cornish miners of the day. I am well aware that the north-east is now being considered for inclusion in the World Heritage bid but only after the assessor demanded it, and how they were not at the top of the list beggars belief.

Bushfires

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (15:52): Firstly, I want to take a moment to send my thoughts to everyone facing fires or dealing with the aftermath across Victoria, many of whom have been in a state of preparation or facing threats since December. I also want to acknowledge our firefighters and incident controllers, particularly the volunteers who give up their time to keep communities safe, and of course our wildlife carers and shelters and other volunteers and agencies. A big thankyou to you all, and also a special shout-out to members of my own brigade in Upper Beaconsfield CFA, who have been busy recently on deployments.

Australia Day

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (15:53): For me these have been some pretty great weeks. It was terrific to be able to formally welcome our newest Australian citizens on Australia Day and share a lamington. I was also very, very pleased, as I am sure others in this chamber would be, to hear that Neale Daniher AO is the Australian of the Year for 2025. The work that Neale and his family have done to undertake to raise awareness for MND has impacted my life in so many ways. Neale's commitment, compassion and empathy mean so much to me and others diagnosed with MND.

Kuyim Primary School

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (15:54): On another note, we had thousands of kids head back to school last week, and I do not know that any were more excited than those students who were attending Kuyim Primary School in Pakenham. I was delighted to welcome everyone on the day, and a big congratulations to principal Cope, staff, students and families on their beautiful new school.

Lowan electorate bushfires

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (15:54): It has been a long summer for us in Lowan, where we have been battling fires for nearly the entire season. It started off with fires at Kadnook, which still continue to flare up, and of course the Grampians National Park. Little Desert was burnt out not that long ago – over the weekend – and our fires continue to burn. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who has been there to support our region over the past 50 days: the CFA volunteers, Forest Fire Management Victoria and all of the interstate fire crews that have come to help us, and particularly I send out my thoughts to the New South Wales crew that was impacted by fire and injured last night; I wish them all a speedy recovery. To the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, to all of the contractors, the dozer workers who are building those mineral earth breaks, to the pilots and ground support crews of our air fleet: thank you so much. Parks Victoria are absolute gems and are doing a fabulous job in protecting our tourism assets, in particular Emergency Recovery Victoria – Kendra Clegg, you are a legend. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, our police officers keeping our community safe, Ambulance Victoria, the councils – Northern Grampians, Southern Grampians, Ararat, Horsham, Hindmarsh, West Wimmera – the businesses providing food to keep our crews fed and watered, the Sikh community who turn up with free curries every single fire, the Salvation Army turning up with beds and bedding and toiletries, all of the base camp crew, the volunteers and generous community members who have offered their homes – *(Time expired)*

Sunbury electorate infrastructure

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:56): It is terrific to be back in the Parliament with you, Deputy Speaker, and many others, delivering things that matter to the local community. Speaking of such, the government recently appointed Spowers Architects to design the new \$25 million Sunbury TAFE in partnership with Kangan Batman. This is outstanding news and very warmly welcomed by the community, and locals cannot wait to see this new facility delivered by the Allan Labor government. Of course this stands in stark contrast to gutting TAFE. We on this side have invested heavily in TAFE, and our local community is very excited about what is to come.

2025, like 2024, will be a huge year for the electorate. This government will open new facilities at Goonawarra Primary School, open new facilities at Diggers Rest, remove two level crossings in Diggers Rest and start construction our brand new senior citizens centre, and that is not to mention – member for Frankston, I know you are excited about it – the delivery of the TAFE. What this will mean is of course the delivery of training and skills and new opportunities for people within my community and an opportunity for them to get the job they want. This is something that only Labor will deliver.

Australia Day

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (15:57): It finally seems the tide is turning for Australia Day all over Victoria. We have seen everyone getting behind our national day of pride, and nowhere could it be stronger than in Knox.

I started the morning by welcoming over 200 new Australian citizens at the Knox City Council with mayor Lisa Cooper and Liberal candidate for Aston Manny Cicchiello, with another two ceremonies of over 200 new citizens later that day. Manny and I also joined in the Australia Day celebrations at Waterford Park, where every single person had an Australian flag and was waving it with pride, before wrapping up the day with a very proud community of Australians at the fantastic Quarry Reserve for a picnic. Without a doubt everyone I spoke to on Australia Day was proud to celebrate being Australian.

I would also like to say a special thankyou to the Scoresby residents who put up Australian flags all along Scoresby Village. I am also looking forward to the return of the Knox Council Australia Day awards next year.

The Nest youth hub

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:58): The Geelong youth hub, now known as the Nest, was recently opened in central Geelong by the Minister for Youth. The Allan government has provided funding to ensure the Nest becomes a reality, along with the support of the City of Greater Geelong. It was fantastic to see so many young people turn out for that opening. The Nest is going to be so much more than just a physical hub; it will be a place of warmth and stability for young people in the Geelong region to connect, come up with new ideas and get involved. Young people told me that that is what they wanted – a central hub – and they told me they wanted a say in what it looks like and what it offers. They have played a critical role in creating the Nest with the support of the City of Greater Geelong youth support officers.

Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:59): Over the past weekend Geelong turned on the weather for the 10th anniversary of the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race. It kicked off on Friday with the GeelongPort family ride and Saturday morning with the TAC people's ride, with record numbers participating. The world's elite cyclists – the women on Saturday and the men on Sunday – raced through our beautiful region, negotiating scenic roads, rolling hills, technical corners and the infamous Challambra climb. Many locals had barbecues, picnics and parties on their front lawns to watch and cheer as the riders passed their homes. I also want to acknowledge and thank the many hundreds of volunteers who helped make the race a huge success. The race continues to boost the Geelong economy.

Rental reform

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (16:00): New modelling from the independent Parliamentary Budget Office shows that if rents keep rising at the same rate as in the last few years, it will take the average renter 66 years to save for a house deposit – 66 years to save for their first home deposit. How outrageous is that? What kind of society are we living in when it takes someone 66 years to save for their first home? Consider a 15-year-old today. They have just got their first job. A 15-year-old will have to spend 66 years working to save for a house deposit. They will not be able to put a deposit on their first home until they are 81 years old. This is simply ridiculous. There is something we could do about it though. Rents are completely out of control. It is the start of a new year. People should be excited about sending their kids off to school and starting back at work or study. Instead people are worried about whether they are going to still have a home if their landlord jacks up the rent one more time – they might get evicted into homelessness. We have this situation in Victoria because unlimited rent rises are still legal.

Members interjecting.

Ellen SANDELL: Members of the Labor Party are saying that is not true. It is true. Unlimited rent rises should be illegal, though, shouldn't they? It should be illegal to jack up the rent so much that it evicts someone into homelessness. The Labor government could do something about this. We could freeze and cap rents now.

Melton electorate projects

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (16:01): As we return from the break it is fantastic to see the momentum behind so many key projects in Melton. This week I had the opportunity to visit the Melton hospital site, Cobblebank secondary school, Melton TAFE college, all the level crossings that are being removed and the Melton station to witness firsthand the incredible progress being made. Last Wednesday, alongside Minister Horne, who is at the table, I visited the new Melton hospital site where Lendlease provided an update on key milestones. The land is being excavated and groundwork is underway and once it is completed major construction will begin. When finished, the Melton hospital will have the capacity to treat 130,000 patients each year, including nearly 60,000 emergency visits. This is critical infrastructure that will serve our growing and diverse community, ensuring that people can access quality health care close to home.

Beyond health care, we are also seeing significant progress in education and infrastructure. The Melton TAFE site has now been sectioned off and both Cobblebank secondary college and Weir Views primary school are well on track to open in 2026. Transport upgrades are also moving forward. The removal of Melton's level crossings and the construction of the new station are progressing, with it all set to be completed by 2026. The business case for the Western Freeway has been completed and planning for those upgrades is now underway. Meanwhile the High Street intersections at Coburns Road and Norton Drive are now being completed, further enhancing safety and traffic flow in the area. Melton is transforming rapidly, and the Cobblebank development area will see major changes this year. I encourage all road users to stay alert and follow the safety precautions.

Boroondara citizenship ceremony

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:03): I was very pleased to attend the Boroondara citizenship ceremony on 26 January. It is one of the great events on the local calendar. I was very pleased to be able to help welcome 141 new citizens from 37 countries. I know, Deputy Speaker, you have often attended these events. It was a great event.

Australia Day awards

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:03): I can also pay tribute to our Australia Day honours recipients from my own electorate of Hawthorn, who were acknowledged on the occasion: Mrs Anne Coghlan, for significant service to the legal profession and judicial administration; Mr David John Briggs, for significant service to performing arts as a guitarist, songwriter and producer; and Mr Patrick McClusky, for service to the manufacturing industry.

Boroondara Citizen of the Year awards

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:04): I also acknowledge our successful citizens of the year from Boroondara: Angus Aikman, the Young Citizen of the Year; and Reverend Natalie Dixon-Manou, who was our Citizen of the Year. I further acknowledge Ms Jan Black, Ms Jane Stewart of the It's the Little Things Community, Ms Nora Lay and Ms Val Cunniffe for their success in being finalists in the Boroondara citizenship awards.

Hawthorn Bowling Club

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:04): On 26 January I was also very pleased to be able to attend the Hawthorn bowls club for a local tournament on Australia Day which brings together people from all over Melbourne. We were joined by other local clubs, the Camberwell bowls club and the Auburn

Bowls Club. I want to congratulate all of the clubs which participated in maintaining a fine tradition on Australia Day.

School saving bonus

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (16:04): I want to thank every school across the Clarinda district for the role they play in our community and wish all the students and families the best for the school year 2025. Upon return to school, the popular school saving bonus continues to provide cost-of-living relief to thousands of Victorian families, paying for uniforms, textbooks and activities thanks to the Allan Labor government. I was delighted to join the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education at Athol Road Primary School in Springvale South to remind government school and eligible non-government school families that they can still spend their \$400 bonus on items leading up to the start of term 1 and beyond. I was thrilled to see that Athol Road Primary School families have already benefited from the cost-of-living support provided by the school saving bonus, and it was amazing to hear from families just how important the bonus is, helping all kids to fully participate in school and get the most out of their time in and out of the classroom.

Lunar New Year

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (16:05): Finally, Happy Lunar New Year to all those celebrating the Year of the Snake. Lunar New Year brings rich celebrations to many multicultural communities in Victoria. I am so proud that our state is home to those celebrations and vibrant and diverse communities. Best wishes to all.

Lunar New Year

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (16:06): I rise today to wish all those celebrating in the Mulgrave electorate and beyond a very happy, prosperous and healthy Year of the Wood Snake. I recently had the honour of representing the Minister for Small Business and Employment at the Springvale Lunar New Year festival hosted by the Springvale Asian Business Association, and I want to thank the president Daniel Cheng and all those who put on another wonderful festival this year in its 33rd year. I want to thank the Allan government and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs for their contribution of \$400,000 over four years for this event, which allows Springvale to showcase how well we celebrate our cultural diversity. I am going to give it a go in Chinese to say happy new year, xīn nián kuài lè, and in Vietnamese, chúc mừng năm mới.

Pongal festival

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (16:07): I would also like to wish the many Tamil constituents in my electorate a very happy Thai Pongal as well, a harvest festival which symbolises gratitude and prosperity. I attended Tamil Festival Australia's Thai Pongal event recently, which was a vibrant display of the Tamil identity, heritage and culture, filled with traditional music, dance and of course delicious food – another wonderful example of why Victoria does multiculturalism so well.

Government achievements

Alison MERCHANT (Bellarine) (16:07): Recently I was in a conversation with a local constituent who said to me, 'I'm not so political, so what's the difference between Labor and Liberal?' I took the opportunity to explain that from my own personal experience.

Just a few weeks ago I was at school uniform shop. I saw many Bellarine parents and caregivers eagerly using their \$400 school saving bonus voucher to help cover those costs. You could literally see the relief at the checkout. The difference that this Labor government initiative was making for families was undeniable. Labor believes that in a community we must look after each other and that we all thrive when those in need receive the support they need. Labor values using the power of government to change lives for the better. Living in the Bellarine I see people who give back in their community even when they do not have much themselves. I understand many are feeling the pressures of the rising cost of living, but that is why I am proud to be part of a Labor government that puts its

values into action. We have expanded the breakfast program for across all Bellarine schools, with toasties and cereal to fill tummies served with a smile to help create that positive start to the day. There are virtual emergency departments, urgent care clinics, a new emergency department in Geelong for children and families, free pads and tampons – all designed to support Bellarine communities. There are free car regos for apprentices and capped V/Line fares because we believe every single day this government should be used to make a difference in people's lives. We know there is still more to do, but I also know there is a big difference, and I know that Labor cares about looking after people.

Dr Moss Cass awards

Katie HALL (Footscray) (16:09): I am delighted to rise today to congratulate the students who were awarded the Dr Moss Cass award last year in my electorate of Footscray. They are: Mia Bastianon from Maribyrnong College, Leena O'Brien from Footscray High School, Ethan Constantino from St Margaret's Primary, Marko Tudorovic from St Monica's, Francesca Miller from Corpus Christi School, Bella D'Rozario from Yarraville West Primary School, Pearl Grass from St Augustine's Primary School, Yuna Dao from Footscray West Primary School, Victoria Truong from Footscray Primary School, Alice Courtel from Footscray North Primary School, Sophie Luong from Kingsville Primary School, Vincent Tran from Yarraville Special Developmental School and Sage McCrabb from Footscray City Primary School. The Dr Moss Cass award acknowledges students who demonstrate leadership through kindness, acknowledging the work of Dr Cass, a great environmentalist, heart surgeon, community leader and the former federal member for Maribyrnong.

Early childhood education

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (16:10): Recently I co-hosted a children's round table together with the Parliamentary Secretary for Children Nathan Lambert, who is here in the chamber to discuss early years education. The forum was attended by parents, educators, administrators, centre directors, and representatives of playgroups and also child and maternal health. I have to say that the breadth of knowledge and the commitment and dedication to early education by these participants was really remarkable. We discussed all aspects of early childhood learning, including support for special needs in NDIS, the positive impact of the Allan Labor government's free kinder program in supporting better attendance and access to early years education and also of course helping with cost-of-living pressures. We also received really thoughtful feedback on experiences when accessing particular services, the extent of services and the ways that services from all levels of government could be improved.

We all know how important the early years of a child's life are, and we in the Allan Labor government are all so focused on and committed to giving all children the best start in life. We have got lots of initiatives of course, such as free kinder, building state-of-the-art early childhood education centres, scholarships, a job board to connect employers and people wanting to get into the sector, and professional development. We are also looking at bilingual programs. I know there is Auslan taught in the kindergartens in Thomastown – *(Time expired)*

Marine Search and Rescue

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:12): It was a great pleasure to join the Minister for Emergency Services to catch up with the St Kilda coastguard unit and see how they are benefiting – and I should say Marine Search and Rescue units and volunteers across the state are benefiting – from the rollout of new digital radios. We have invested more than \$1.3 million to deliver 130 portable radios for volunteers and to install radios on 22 vessels and in eight vehicles. The radios are connected to the Victorian radio network, giving MSAR units real-time communication. We heard it live, I must say, with the water police – we got to catch up with them as well – through the rescue coordination centre. This is a step up in connectivity when responding to rescue operations, and I should say it is incredible the work they do. They must have really tough stomachs, but also really strong hearts too, because they have to see some pretty delicate scenes at times. But what inspires them to keep going – and I do not want to speak for them, but what they reflected to the minister and me – was the amount of people

they do save who get into dire straits in our beautiful but nevertheless dangerous oceans, as they can be at times. So it was really inspiring to catch up with these amazing people.

Midsumma Festival

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:13): Also, along with the Premier, the Treasurer, the Minister for Equality and so many colleagues I attended the Pride March, which is an important part of the Midsumma Festival that we support. Why? Because it is about fairness, and it is about celebrating diversity in our state.

Professor Arnold Dix

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (16:13): Professor Arnold Dix represents the best of our country, our state of Victoria and the district of Monbulk. Yesterday it was an absolute honour to attend the launch of his book *The Promise*, alongside the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, at the Victorian Tunnelling Centre, which Arnold himself helped design.

For those who do not know Arnold, he is the international tunnelling expert who, at great risk to his own life, dropped all things to rescue 41 miners trapped in a tunnel in a Himalayan mountain in November 2023. His calm, assured approach to the almost impossible task before him set all around him at ease. Despite having never rescued anyone alive prior to this event, he somehow knew – fundamentally knew – that his team would be successful in their rescue of these men who were otherwise certain to die. And the Indian community have embraced him.

Yesterday the High Commissioner of India, His Excellency Gopal Baglay came down to Melbourne to officially launch Arnold's book, a testament to how the people of India both there and here have embraced Arnold. He is extraordinary: a geologist, an engineer, a barrister and a professor. He has also studied welding, and he is qualified as a hairdresser, but he assures me he is better at colouring than cutting. He is also the self-described worst flower grower in Monbulk. He used all of his knowledge, skill and courage to rescue 41 complete strangers on the other side of the world. He is unfailingly kind and represents the best of humanity, a truly great Victorian. I am proud to not only be his local member but also honoured to call him friend. Hear, hear.

Nazareth House

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (16:15): I would like to say happy birthday to my mother – she is 93 years old – and I would like to thank the sisters at Nazareth House and everyone at Nazareth House for their amazing care.

Bills

Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (16:15): I am delighted to be back here in 2025 and to rise to make a contribution on the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024. It is another year, and this is another attack on rental providers, which I find quite astonishing. In their bid to try to win votes off the Greens, Labor forget about the hardworking Victorians who have invested in second houses to get themselves ahead and to build their family's futures, which is another attack on the great Australian dream.

Let me make it clear: Labor's war on rental providers is a war on renters. It is a war on nurses and a war on teachers, because 19 per cent of our rental providers are teachers and nurses who own one or maybe two properties. They rent them out in order to supplement their income and provide for their future. These people are good, hardworking men and women. They are aspirational and they want to

build a better future, yet they are also the very same people who are bearing the brunt of these Labor changes. By punishing these hardworking rental providers Labor is also punishing the families who then go on and rent these properties. In the current cost-of-living crisis and the housing crisis Labor is failing to support the people they claim to support.

But make no mistake, the Liberals and the Nationals support renters. We are the party of renters and rental providers, and we are also the party for aspirational Victorians who want to see their bills lowered and the cost of living decrease. We also support better standards in the rental and real estate sectors, and we support greater training and transparency. What we do not support is the constant shifting of the goal posts that leads to higher costs for renters and greater uncertainty for property owners.

There are plenty of great aspects to this bill, I have got to say, that we are very pleased to get behind – many sensible and commonsense aspects – but as always Labor want to just push that little bit harder and hurt the proactive people who want to support the rental housing pool, which will in turn hurt the renter in the long run. And if they have not hurt schoolteachers and nurses enough already, they are giving them a backhander on the way past.

There are a couple of things we have serious concerns about. This is an omnibus bill covering consumer affairs, planning and the Attorney-General. I am sure my colleagues will each provide an insight about the changes in this legislation, but obviously I will focus more on the consumer affairs portions of the bill.

Can I remind the house that 71 per cent of rental providers have only one rental property, so we are not talking about property barons with hundreds of properties who can influence the property rental market or influence the price that people pay to rent a property. Seventy-one per cent of rental providers only have the one property, and as I say, many of them are schoolteachers, mums and dads. Nineteen per cent of those are schoolteachers or registered nurses. These are mum-and-dad investors wanting to build a retirement plan. They have aspirations to secure their own self-managed retirement, to remove themselves from the pension pathway and look after their own welfare and their own future. They have chosen to purchase property and subsequently rent out that property to support themselves into the future. Most of these mum-and-dad investors have mortgages, so they are also battling high interest rates and the cost-of-living crisis that has been driven primarily by the Allan Labor government's poor decision-making.

In terms of the bill, part 2 makes amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997. Many of these amendments address Labor's promised changes as per their housing statement, which we know has not gone that well. The 800,000 houses over 10 years does not look like it is going to come to fruition. That should have been 80,000 a year, and I do not think we are anywhere near that. But under the changes any and all rental applications and agreements will have to be made using prescribed forms, ensuring consistency across all agencies. That is a good thing. We do not need people applying for a rental property through agency A and then when they go to agency B to apply for a similar property having to fill out another form with different questions and different requirements. The rental market is mature enough to have consistency in application forms, and we strongly support this concept.

The bill also makes it an offence to solicit or attempt any form of rental bidding, again a commonsense approach. This means that an agent can only accept offers for a property at the price it is advertised at. Rental bidding can also be where a potential renter offers incentives to increase their chances of winning that property. They might say they will give six months rent up-front or different inducements or appetisers that would help them win that rental property. This bill limits the ability to offer rent in advance as a way of incentivising an offer, capping the maximum rent payable in advance at one month. As I said earlier, the coalition are strong supporters of a fair and equitable renting system, and we strongly support this change.

Further changes are being made to the period of notice required under rental increases, with the limit extending from 60 to 90 days in the case of either a rent increase or a notice to vacate. Under the current climate I fully support this. If you do get a notice to vacate in 60 days, which it currently is, it will be very difficult to find a property in those 60 days. We support moving that out to 90 days. It is a positive step forward.

The bill also seeks to repeal sections 91ZZD and 91ZZDA of the Residential Tenancies Act, thus removing the right of rental providers to issue a notice to vacate without reason at the end of the first term of a fixed-term rental. That is one of the two main points that we have a major concern with, and so do the Real Estate Institute of Victoria and rental providers; I will go into that a little bit later in my contribution. We have major concerns with this part. I say the government has done enormous good work to make this bill. It strengthens the opportunities for renters and gives them a fair go, which we support, but if the bill gets through in this current form, it will undo all that good work by removing the right of rental providers to issue a notice to vacate without reason at the end of the first fixed term.

Agents must provide a fee-free option to pay rent – another good initiative. The bill also makes it a requirement that any house that is advertised for rent must meet the minimum standards at the time of advertisement. This includes smoke alarms. In addition to this, new requirements around the retention and destruction of personal information collected by an agency are listed, increasing privacy and security for non-successful applicants – again, positive steps forward.

Part 3 makes amendments to the Estate Agents Act 1980. The changes outlined in part 3 of the bill are primarily centred around the real estate sector and the need for continuing professional development as well as accountability. Again, no argument from me on this one. I do believe that greater improvement can occur in this space with more dedicated courses, but we have no argument with the CPD.

Division 1 in part 3 of the bill details the changes to the Estate Agents Act in order to require registration of agents representing, including the eligibility requirements. Clause 54 repeals section 16 of the Estate Agents Act. This section prescribes the eligibility requirements for an agent's representative and who is responsible for assessing their eligibility. That is no longer required as an assessment will be done by the BLA, the Business Licensing Authority. The steps of registration as an agent's representative are outlined under clause 70 of the bill, including the application process and eligibility requirements. This also includes a variety of penalties for failing to comply with the registration requirements, with a penalty of up to 500 penalty units applicable to an estate agent who employs an unregistered person as an agent's representative. The rest of this part of the bill outlines various transitional provisions and subsequent amendments as a result of the changes, including increased penalties for various offences.

Part 4 of the bill makes amendments to the Owners Corporation Act 2006. There are a variety of amendments in the bill to the Owners Corporation Act, with the changes increasing the training and accountability in the owners corporation and strata management sectors, and we know there is a lot of work that can still be done in the strata management sector. The bill changes various definitions and also introduces a new officer in effective control of a corporate strata management company. We know they have officers in effective control in real estate businesses, and this will include it in the strata management business – again another positive step forward.

In order for an individual to be registered as an officer in effective control, they must undertake new mandatory training and meet the eligibility requirements for registration as well as undertake CPD, obviously continuing professional development. That extends to those who are applying to register as managers of an owners corporation, such as individuals appointed by a corporate manager and managers of a specific owners corporation. Those wishing to register in either instance may do so with the BLA or face penalties under the new offences for those operating despite having failed to register. This part of the bill also details additional duties and requirements of the officer in effective control as well as the requirement for an annual registration fee and an annual statement to be provided to the

BLA. Powers given to the BLA to cancel a registration of a corporate manager are also included in this section for a variety of reasons.

Part 4 of the bill includes transitional provisions to be included in the Owners Corporations Act, stating that anyone wishing to register must have already completed the mandatory courses and training by 30 June 2027. However, it also allows for new registrations in the intervening period for those who have not completed the courses.

The part 5 amendments to the Conveyancers Act 2006 are minimal. Once again they focus on the requirements for continuing professional development, and they include transitional provisions.

On the amendments to the Planning and Environment Act 1987, to touch on the planning and Attorney-General positions of the bill, I know that the changes to the Planning and Environment Act are designed to speed up the development process but give more power to the minister to call in projects and to sideline or ignore community concerns. This is the other concern I have with the bill. They are the only two parts that we have concerns around. The rest of the bill is completely fine in terms of the way it has been put forward.

A council is to provide a response of its decision to an amendment application within 10 days of making the decision. The bill does not stipulate how long it has to make the decision, but supposedly there will be a reduction of time, and the planning panel is only advisory to the minister. The minister has discretion as to whether to take the panel's report into consideration before an issue goes to VCAT. The minister can call it in and decide without going to a planning panel. Decisions could be made on a summary of reasons rather than substantive reasons, and that could have impacts or repeat appeal principles. Adjoining municipalities do not need to be advised of planning changes. This affects regional communities like those where I live in regional Victoria, with possible renewal development on municipal borders. There is a three-year expiry provision to start a development and five years to complete it, as opposed to the default two and four years respectively.

Further, part 10 of the bill provides VCAT with the power to deal with planning matters without having heard from the parties and decide on a case only on the papers. I do not support this change. This is part of what I was talking about before. If a case is going to VCAT, people should be called in. They should have the opportunity to discuss, and not just send in the paperwork and hope for the best.

Clause 164 allows for VCAT to prevent witnesses from being examined or cross-examined and provides powers to put stringent limits on the timing of hearings and otherwise actively manage permit proceedings in a way which might be more efficient but potentially be at the expense of an objector's ability to have the proper say that they would like to have.

Part 13 of the bill amends the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 to include reference to RDRV, Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, providing it with the proper powers and authority needed to deliver binding regulations under the alternative dispute resolution method. The bill also changes the definition of ADR, alternative dispute resolution, to include mediation, early neutral evaluation, settlement conference, reference of a question to an expert, expert determination, compulsory conference and conciliation.

Again, they are positive steps in the way we are moving forward. It is a very difficult area, rent providers and renters and the Residential Tenancies Act, and we do need to make sure there is a smooth transition for people renting. But again, we have always got to make it fair and make it balanced. With this bill many fair things are coming in, but I think it does tip the balance with some of the things in it. I suppose it tips the pendulum away from being fair to siding with the renter. If you continue to side with the renter – and I have got no problem about supporting renters; we do not on this side, but at the same time if you tip the balance too far – you will find that rental providers will leave; they will sell their properties and move on.

That will just make our housing crisis even worse than it currently is. We do need to look after both sides of that pendulum, as I said, between the rental providers and the renters.

Clause 178 outlines the proceedings of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria and the various ways that a case can be heard and dealt with. Part 13 also makes further amendments that tidy up RDRV's inclusions in VCAT and ensures it has the proper resources and processes in place to commence work as an alternative dispute resolution body.

As has been noted, the bill is wideranging and covers a lot of different topics and changes in order to implement Labor's housing statement reforms and, amongst other changes, to speed up development and planning. However, the feedback we have heard from the industry, such as the Real Estate Institute of Victoria, is there are simply too many changes in too short a time. They have got some concerns. Rental providers are exhausted both financially and mentally as they try to keep up with the changes that are going on.

We have also had people raise concerns around the removal of the no-fault notice to vacate at the end of the first fixed term, and I agree with this 100 per cent. Removing this is a mistake. If we think about a renter and a rental provider, they go into a contract together. At the end of that first lease period, whether it is six months or 12 months, the rental provider can issue a notice to vacate without a reason to do so. They can only do it at the end of the first period. They have an opportunity, and I liken this to a probation period for an employee or a staff member that comes to your business: after three months or six months, whatever that probation period is, you can say that this is not working out and the staff member will move on, no questions asked, no strings attached. By removing this I think it really is swinging the balance away from the rental providers.

The government's justification for this is that rental providers will kick out tenants in order to jack up the rent, and then they can re-let the property at a higher price. This is not actually how it happens in the real world. Rental providers like to have good tenants. If they get a good tenant, they are more likely to not jack up the price; they are more likely to keep a good tenant than they are to kick that good tenant out and take the risk of getting someone who is not as great as the tenant that was there. You will find rental providers are more likely to remain with a good tenant, and if a good tenant has done the right thing they have nothing to worry about. So I encourage the government to consider our thoughts on this, because rental providers, as I said, value good tenants, and I think the government is going down the wrong path by removing this no-fault notice to vacate.

This is a false narrative, and it is another example of Labor attacking or being harsh on rental providers without any serious evidence behind it. Yes, it sends a great, clear message to renters: we are looking after you. But you are really not looking after renters if you go hard on rental providers and they sell their properties and there are less properties on the market. You might think that you are helping renters, but at the end of the day it will bite you on the backside because there will be less rental providers in the market as time goes on. We have heard a lot about people who are serious about selling their rental properties because of the rules and changes that have come in, and the opposition feels that the government has not entirely consulted with key stakeholders or considered the full impacts that these changes will have, either intended or otherwise. Rental providers need an outlet to ask a tenant to vacate before things get messy and have to go to VCAT. Removing this option risks making the system too complex.

With that I would like to move a reasoned amendment. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted to take into account further consultation with rental providers and industry about the unfair impact of the removal of no-fault notices to vacate.'

It is clear to those of us on this side of the chamber that more work needs to be done with the industry. We met with many industry stakeholders over this bill: the Real Estate Institute of Victoria, as I mentioned, and also rental providers.

That is why this reasoned amendment is being moved, in the hope that the government will take us up on this and see that there is a fair compromise between providing renters with the important security and peace of mind that they deserve and not throwing rental providers under the bus and having to go through VCAT right from the word go. It begs the question: is it really a fixed-term agreement for both parties? If you put a renter in your property and you cannot ask them to leave, is it really a fixed agreement at that stage?

I spoke earlier about probation for a new staff member coming to your business, and I think this is exactly the same. If everybody is happy – the renter is happy and the rental provider is happy – they will, in good faith, no questions asked, move on and make another agreement. If this clause remains in the bill, it becomes quite an unfair bill. We support 90 per cent of what is in this bill, but there needs to be further consultation with the industry because, as I say again, 71 per cent of rental providers own one property that they rent out. There is this fear that people are land barons and property barons and they influence this and they do all these things, but at the end of the day they are mums and dads, they are teachers and nurses and others who own properties and rent them out. If a rental provider is unable to end a fixed-term contract at the end of the term without reason, it begs the question of whether that contract really is a fixed term at all or merely a long-term periodical contract.

When we compare that to other states and territories around Australia, we are out on a limb compared to every other state, and I will go through them. In New South Wales, under the Residential Tenancies Act 2010, a rental provider can remove a tenant without a specific reason by giving notice of termination. Typically the notice period for a fixed-term lease is 30 days and 90 days for a periodic lease. In New South Wales you can have that no-reason notice to vacate. In Queensland it is the same. A rental provider can give a tenant a notice of termination – that is what it is called in Queensland – for a periodic agreement with at least two months notice. However, there are restrictions on no-fault notices to vacate when a tenant has lived in the property for more than six months. There are little bits and pieces you can put in there to sharpen that up a bit. Fixed-term leases in Queensland can also end without cause when the term expires, with notice requirements in place. In South Australia a rental provider can issue a notice of termination without specifying a reason provided the notice period is at least 60 days. Western Australia allows for a rental provider to end a periodic tenancy by providing at least 60 days notice without the need to give a reason. In Tasmania a rental provider can end a periodic tenancy by providing at least 42 days notice. The Australian Capital Territory is the same and so is the Northern Territory, so we really are going out on a limb.

The government might say, ‘We’re being leaders in this space; we’re proactive and we’re charging forward.’ But at the end of the day if you are charging forward and making life difficult for rental providers, you have to realise that you are making life difficult for renters in the long run. It might not be next week and it might not be next year, but it will be difficult. Whatever concern rental providers have, there is only one place they can forward that on. That concern ends up as the renter’s concern at the end of the day, and that is what we are trying to stop. The Allan Labor government wants to go to war with rental providers, as I said, by taking this path, which I think could leave a black hole. Good clean rental accommodation will get reduced because rental providers are telling us they will leave the industry. As I said, should the bill make it through both houses unchanged, it will put pressure on rental providers and the vetting process, because once they are in, they are in. Rental providers will take a lot more time and a lot more energy vetting people to get them into their property because they are reducing the opportunity to give them a notice to vacate if they are not happy with that tenant. Let us hope the government will support our changes, and I will be interested to hear what those on the other side say when they have their opportunity.

The no-fault notice to vacate at the end of a fixed-term contract in turn allows rental providers to make a clean cut without needing to drag themselves through VCAT for potentially years and years if the issues cannot be resolved between the tenant and the rental provider.

This will ensure things move more quickly but fairly, and if a tenant believes that the notice to vacate is for reasons that are in breach of the act, they are entitled to take that to VCAT. But by not removing

this clause we risk locking in good rental providers with bad tenants and we risk adding even more cases to the VCAT backlog, and we know that VCAT has its hands full already.

Whilst we have concerns on our side of the chamber about what I have just touched on, the Liberals and Nationals on the whole support very strongly the need for ongoing professional development, CPD, and professional development training in the real estate and owners corporation sectors. We have heard many stories of poorly trained agents who have caused more issues due to their lack of knowledge and relevant training, and indeed there is a quirk that allows for a strata corporation manager to have no training at all. That means an 18-year-old fresh out of VCE could be a manager of a 100-unit strata corporation without having any training on the relevant laws or regulations. For those of us who have spent a bit of time studying and understanding strata and owners corporation law, we know it is incredibly complex at the best of times, let alone for somebody who has had no training at all. So again we encourage that professional development and training, and we absolutely support this along with the industry as it will lead to a better industry and deliver better outcomes for the owners committees and the owners of the units and strata titles.

Further, we also support the stamping out of all kinds of rental bidding and ensuring that rental applications and payments are free of third-party fees. We know how tight the rental market has been over the past few years, with sometimes more than 50 or 100 people inspecting a rental property before putting in an application. In many cases we have people with more cash on hand who have been able to incentivise their application by promising more rent per week than listed or by paying several months in advance, and this will stop under this legislation. It makes it near impossible for low-income families or young renters to compete when that rental bidding is in place. As a result they end up worse off, and that is what we do not want. So again this is another positive step forward. By stamping out any solicitation or accepting of rental bidding and by capping advanced rent payments at four weeks, these changes will level the playing field and ensure that when you apply for rental, you will pay what has been advertised, and the applications will be decided on merit, not just on financial gain or inducement.

Alongside these changes we also support the requirements for those houses that are advertised for rent to meet the minimum requirements at the time of advertisement. Obviously, as I said, the smoke alarms and everything else that a house needs need to be at the standard when it is advertised, not a promise that ‘When you move in we’re going to fix this’ or ‘We’ll do that’. It has to be at the standard before you advertise and not when that person moves in, because we know it never happens – or in some cases it never happens. By setting a clear rule, it provides clarity to rental providers about the requirements their house must meet, as well as to renters about what condition the property will be in when they move in.

The opposition supports the changes to the VCAT act in order to provide Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria with the powers it needs to operate as an alternative dispute resolution body, because, as I said, we do not want to be clogging up VCAT any more than it currently is. According to the government, this will reduce the waiting time of the residential tenancies list at VCAT, and RDRV will instead provide speedy and expert resolutions between parties. We have not seen it yet. We know it is in its infancy – it is in its embryonic stage really – and we will see how that turns out. But again anything that we can do that speeds up this process and reduces the backlog at VCAT I think can only be a good thing, and we need to trial it. We find that is a positive step in the right direction. So as long as it is not a toothless tiger and does not end up increasing the VCAT backlog, we will be keen to see how this rolls out.

Whilst the opposition supports many of the changes in the bill to improve the industry, we do not support Labor’s continued war on rental providers, which in turn ends up affecting renters. When Labor claim they are supporting renters and implementing change after change, they really are pushing up rents and making it even harder for Victorians to aspire to afford a home. Since Labor came to power in 2014 rent for metro Melbourne has increased by \$200 per week, a more than 55 per cent increase, with a \$170 increase in the last four years alone. Regional numbers are the same, with the

median increasing by 60 per cent in the last decade and more than \$130 per week in the last four years. Labor's failure to build houses and their regime of tax, red tape and even more tax are punishing renters by forcing rental providers to sell up or increase rents to cover their costs. This is not sustainable, and it is not fair.

I will finish up my contribution. We will not be opposing this bill. We have put a reasoned amendment, as you have heard. I do hope the government considers that reasoned amendment, because we can make this good bill into a great bill if we consider that reasoned amendment and work together for the benefit of both renters and rental providers.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (16:45): I am very proud today to speak on the bill that seeks to increase and strengthen protection for Victorian renters by shoring up education and registration standards for property professionals and bolstering penalties for those doing wrong. The Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024 also proposes improvements to planning processes and clarifies the role of VCAT in alternate dispute resolutions. I certainly do not support the opposition's amendment to withdraw the bill. This is a very important bill, and we need it to proceed. It is a lengthy bill and an important bill, and in the sum of its parts it will make a real and substantial difference for renters in my electorate of Wendouree and across Victoria.

In my contribution today I will be focusing one particular clause that has particular significance for my community and the family who have powerfully advocated for the reform. Clause 17 extends the requirement for annual smoke detector checks to all residential rental properties in Victoria, particularly the 240,000 rental properties excluded from the 2021 tenancy reforms. Smoke alarms save lives. Homes without functioning smoke alarms are dangerous and lead to preventable deaths.

Since this bill was first introduced, in the last sitting week of last year, we have had a change of minister, and I am so pleased that he is in the chamber. I wish to congratulate the member for Bentleigh on his promotion to Minister for Consumer Affairs and Minister for Local Government. It is terrific to have you here. I would also like to thank the previous Minister for Consumer Affairs, the member for Dandenong, for pursuing the reforms to make sure every rental in Victoria has a smoke alarm inspected once a year, following the fierce advocacy of Simon Scarff's family. These reforms will save lives.

In 2022 Simon Scarff was 52 years old and lived in Alfredton in my electorate. He lived on Almurta Street, a street that I know like the back of my hand. It is not far from my childhood home and a street on my paper round. I would have ridden up and down that street a thousand times, passing the flat where Simon's life was tragically taken after it was consumed by fire. Members of Si's family are in the public gallery to witness what their advocacy has achieved and to ensure that no other family should ever have to experience what they have. Thank you to Therese Scarff; to Jo and Paul McConville and their children Georgia, Bella and Xavier; and to Paul's parents Anne and John McConville for being here today. Si's mum Joan Scarff, a magnificent woman, stayed in Ballarat, but she is here in spirit, and we look forward to catching up with her next week to tell her when this has all been passed.

I never met Simon Scarff. However, since his death I have learned that there are several connections between his family and mine. Si attended the Villa Maria primary school with my brothers, and Si's grandfather was our butcher. Just two blocks from where I live now his parents ran a small business. It is so Ballarat to have such intertwined lives.

Si died in the most horrific way after there was a fire in his rental flat and he was unable to escape. Si called 000 for help but was unable to communicate his situation or answer the questions asked by the operator. Despite the efforts of the 000 operator to establish what support was needed, there was no indication of a fire at the property as there was no smoke alarm sounding. The coroners report found that Mr Scarff succumbed to the effect of the fire while trying to escape the premises and that at the time of the fire there was no smoke alarm installed in the premises, despite one being required pursuant

to building regulations. A recommendation by Coroner Paul Lawrie from the finding into the death without inquest of deceased Simon Peter Scarff on 26 October 2023 is:

... that the Minister for Government Services/Minister for Consumer Affairs consider amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (or other such amendments as may be necessary) so that the safety related activities defined within section 27(2) of the Act ... may apply to all rental agreements, including rental agreements entered before 29 March 2021.

Through the Coroners Court Jo and Therese learned that in July 2023 43.5 per cent of existing rental agreements in Victoria – more than 240,000 rental households – had entered into leases prior to 29 March 2021. Like Si, tenants living in these homes are not protected by the 2021 rental tenancies reforms, including smoke alarm safety-related requirements.

The suffering experienced by Si is hard to comprehend, and it continues to haunt his family. They have listened to the 000 call from that fateful morning, listened to his distress as he sought assistance. His mother Joan wishes she could have swapped places with him, that she could have experienced what happened to him so he did not have to.

Action was needed to ensure that Coroner Lawrie's recommendation was adopted. Following the coroner's finding, the Scarff family started a petition on change.org in December 2023 calling for the recommendation of the coroner to be adopted by the minister and implemented. They wanted to ensure that no-one else was killed in a household fire and that all Victorian rentals received the same protections and level of safety on their homes regardless of the agreement date or lease type. More than 5000 people have signed their petition.

I received an email from Si's sister Jo McConville in December 2023 on behalf of her mother Joan and sister Therese. She wrote:

On Saturday the 12th of February 2022 my brother died in a fire at his home which was a rental property, 1/13 Almurta St, Alfredton ... Coroner Lawrie has made a recommendation that the Minister for Government Services/Minister for Consumer Affairs consider amendments to the relevant legislation so that the safety-related activities in respect of gas, electrical and smoke alarm activities, may apply to all existing rental arrangements.

My brother's name is Simon Peter Scarff he was born on 29/05/1969

Coroner Lawrie has requested that the findings be published, so it is available on the Coronial website for you to read.

We are asking for your support to have this recommendation –
adopted –

... so all renters are protected by the same laws. Our aim is that Si's suffering and death are not in vain and that all renters are protected by the same safety standards.

I met with the powerful sisters a couple of weeks later on 10 January, and their advocacy was compelling. I then spoke to the minister and organised for her to meet with Jo and Therese in Ballarat soon after. There were tears as the sisters shared Si's story and the impact that it had on all of their lives as well as their pleas to take action so no other family would have to experience what they had to.

The minister listened and acted, and it was a privilege – one of the best days ever – to join with the then Minister for Consumer Affairs and members of Si's family in Ballarat on 19 November last year to announce that the reforms campaigned for would be adopted by the Allan Labor government. It was one of my proudest days as an MP – yes, just great, to be there with your mum and your uncle and everyone. It was amazing.

As a direct outcome of the advocacy of the Scarff family, the changes proposed in this bill will make rental properties safer by requiring rental providers to conduct smoke alarm, gas and electrical safety checks by qualified tradespersons for all residential rental properties.

Thank you to the former Minister for Consumer Affairs the Honourable Gabrielle Williams for her compassion, determination and commitment to make this significant change for renters and for 240,000 homes across Victoria. The Scarff family have been so generous in sharing their story. Despite their immense grief they are to be commended for their advocacy following the death of Si. Thanks to their efforts all renters in Victoria will be safer.

The proposed amendments to the bill will ensure that smoke alarms are tested every year for every rental property. I commend the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024 to the house, and in doing so I ask you to support the Scarff family by ensuring that Si's suffering and death were not in vain and that all renters are protected by uniform safety standards.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (16:55): I rise today to contribute on the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024. I acknowledge the member for Wendouree's compassionate discussion of an important element in this bill. I guess one of the good things we do when we come to this Parliament is that we can make a real difference to people's lives and improve on where systems have let us down. That is a good thing. To the Scarff family here, who has been part of some of the journey of this bill, it is I am sure a very important day to see it come to fruition.

However, speaking as Shadow Minister for Housing and Shadow Minister for Planning, we also have a housing crisis in this state, and the housing crisis is bearing out terribly for so many families right across the state. In Victoria at the moment, despite the rhetoric of housing statements and endless media statements from this government, the housing crisis continues to get worse. Here are just some very basic figures: this government has spent, it claims, nearly \$4 billion on public housing. You would expect that over the time you would have an increase in public housing, but we have had a decrease of some 475 public homes in the state of Victoria after four years. In fact between 2017 and December 2024, a seven-year period, when you add all the public housing and community housing together, Victoria has only had a net increase of 4067, with the entirety of the increase being done by the community housing sector. This government will claim that COVID caused them not to be able to achieve their housing outcomes, they will claim building materials and other things, but in exactly the same period New South Wales have increased their public housing and social housing by some 10,454. There is a massive difference in what this state has delivered compared to what a comparable state, in New South Wales, has delivered. It is a shame on this government that at a time when our population has continued to grow we have now got fewer homes available for people. But not only have we got fewer homes, the homes we have are smaller. In fact the homes that have been built have actually been, on balance, single-bedroom units. We have some 4500 fewer bedrooms for Victorians to sleep in in public housing each and every night. It is quite an incredible feat to think we could shrink the offering to the most needy in this state at a time when the government attempts to trumpet its merits in this space.

It is not only the community and public housing sector which is a really important part of the housing story in this state, it is what we are also doing to the private rental market. This bill of course hinges on the fact that it is about trying to help attain the goals of the government's housing statement – a statement which, by the way, only 18 months ago trumpeted the fact that this government was aiming for 80,000 homes a year. The Productivity Commission has just come out and said we did not even get close. We are talking some 34 per cent less – only 52,800 homes provided here in Victoria from a goal of 80,000. That is not just missing the mark, that is about the way I play golf, trying to get it near the green. I would be out in the rough, on the side of the road over the fence on Queens Road if I were playing down at South Melbourne there. This is nowhere near good enough.

When we see legislation that is coming in here now that essentially will make the provision of the private rental market even more difficult, it shows that this government does not actually understand how the housing market works. What we know, for example, is some 30 to 40 per cent of housing sales in the state of Victoria at the moment are rental properties going on the market, with landlords fleeing. On the government's own figures, the rental bonds here in Victoria, there has been a 3.6 per

cent decline, so it has worked out at roughly 24,500 fewer homes being rented through the private sector last year.

So we have got this massive decrease in availability of private sector housing and a massive contraction in the availability of government-subsidised and government-supplied housing. Victoria is in a real crisis here, and this bill does not speak to anybody who is going to actually increase the availability of homes for Victorians to live in.

In fact to quote CoreLogic on the production of the massive decline in bonds lodged here in Victoria and the real estate market talking about the amount of rentals that are being taken off the market and going to be sold, they talk about, here in Victoria, this massive exodus of availability of rental properties, which as we know only sends prices up, stemming from high taxes and low yields and a lack of confidence here in Victoria to invest. And where are the investors going? They are going to other jurisdictions, Queensland and Western Australia in particular.

But I also want to draw people's attention to a part of this bill the government has made much of: 'This bill will introduce amendments to ban a rental provider or their agent from accepting unsolicited bids.' That is this government's attempt to stop desperate people from trying to get a home, and as one of the largest landlords – or the largest landlord – in the state, in Homes Victoria, you would think the largest landlord and the largest provider of rental property would actually show some responsibility in this space. But I have documents here from Homes Victoria, for example, where Homes Victoria are going out into the private market. They are going out into the suburbs, and I will name them – because they have named them – they are going out into Brunswick, Brunswick East, Brunswick West, Carlton, Carlton North, East Melbourne, Kensington, North Melbourne, Moorabbin, Princes Hill, West Melbourne, Sunshine, Sunshine West and Maribyrnong. Some of their representatives are sitting here, and this government is going out into these suburbs and offering landlords massive increases for handing over long-term rentals to them as a rental provider. What this means is at a time when we know – the facts are telling us – the private rental market is shrinking, there are fewer houses available and rents are going up, this irresponsible, hopelessly organised government is going out into the private market and taking homes from hardworking Victorian families, from mums and dads and single people and elderly people and people escaping domestic violence. All the people that are on the waiting list, waiting years, are now having to compete against the government that says it wants to make rentals fairer and rentals easier and rentals less discriminatory, and here is the government of the day going out to the landlords, going out into the private market and saying, 'Sell. Give me your home. I'll pay you 5 per cent per annum' – so locking in rent increases well above inflation. They are out in the suburbs of Melbourne outbidding innocent, hardworking Victorian families and taking three- and four-bedrooms out of the market to give to the government because they have so incompetently managed their own housing stock.

We now have a situation where the government has a problem of some 4500 fewer bedrooms, so what is their solution? We are going to go and make it harder in the private market for mums and dads and people out in the suburbs on low incomes in a cost-of-living crisis. We are going to make it even harder for them to get a home. It is incongruent, really. It does not make sense that a government will go to the effort to bring this bill to us and on one hand spruik its credentials at trying to make renting fairer and easier for people, and at the very same time the same government is going out into the market, bidding up prices, bidding up the cost of rentals, giving deals to current rental providers that the private individual just simply cannot match. Individuals cannot match guaranteed 5 per cent increases. They cannot manage long-term rental agreements with generous terms and conditions. It is grossly unfair. It goes against the intent of this and it explains to Victorians how misguided this government has become.

I absolutely support the shadow minister's reasoned amendment that proposes that we omit all words after 'That' and replace them with the words 'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted to take into account further consultation with rental providers and industry about the unfair impact of the removal of no-

fault notices to vacate’, and quite frankly the other inconsistencies that exist in this bill. It is poor legislation, and it should be amended.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (17:05): I am delighted to rise to speak today on the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024. Before I do I would like to acknowledge the really heartfelt, compassionate contribution made by the member for Wendouree. Her compassion and her care for her constituents go to show why she is such an outstanding local member in this place. Before I speak to the bill in further detail I would also like to thank Minister Williams, the former Minister for Consumer Affairs, and now Minister Staikos for their work in bringing this bill before the Parliament.

The bill does number of things, but I am going to speak mostly to the planning reforms that are included in it. It acquits a number of key commitments that the Allan Labor government made back in September 2023 to get more Victorians into safe, comfortable and affordable homes, whether that is a home to rent or a home to buy. We have heard that the bill introduces a range of reforms to increase protections for renters and to help with cost-of-living pressures. It will also strengthen the Victorian planning system by implementing some key recommendations that were made by the former commissioner for better regulation. But – surprise, surprise – those opposite, we hear, do not support this bill. This is a bill that is going to bring about greater protections for renters, it is designed to give Victorians greater housing security and it is a bill that introduces reforms that we know industry has been calling for, reforms to reduce red tape so we can build more homes for Victorians. It feels like it is just the same old opposition, blocking homes for Victorians when we know more homes mean more opportunities. This bill is yet another example of the levers that the Labor government is pulling to work with industry, to work with communities and to work with local governments to get more homes built for Victorians.

This government is firmly committed to reducing costs, minimising delays in the planning system and creating certainty for the community. We have heard that in relation to the red tape commissioner reforms the bill will amend the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 to implement the recommendations that were made by the commissioner for better regulation and to ultimately strengthen the planning system. Several years ago the former commissioner for better regulation Anna Cronin, who is now the CEO of the Victorian Building Authority, prepared a really extensive and thorough review of Victoria’s planning processes. I want to thank Anna Cronin for all of her work and note that in her new role she is progressing significant reforms in the building system that work in a complementary way with reforms in planning that will deliver more homes for Victorians.

Her review sets out 27 recommendations, and I note that the majority of those are non-legislative and have been implemented. They focus on simplifying and streamlining the planning system to make sure that Victoria remains the number one place to invest, to make sure the planning system is working for Victorians and not against them and ultimately to provide greater certainty – greater certainty for industry, for local government and for community, and to support us, the Labor government, in our very clear aim to build more affordable homes for Victorians. The proposed changes to the Planning and Environment Act and the VCAT Act in this bill will acquit those recommendations and they will go to make our planning system much more responsive, more agile and modern and better equipped to deliver on our commitments in Victoria’s housing statement.

The planning amendments in the bill will update and modernise the planning scheme amendment process, and this is important for a number of reasons. First, it means that landowners for the first time will be able to formally ask local councils to prepare a planning scheme amendment. Currently we know there is no formal requirement for councils to respond to requests. It also means that councils will not be able to just simply abandon a planning scheme amendment without good reason, and it will give the Minister for Planning the ability to continue that amendment process. A new low-impact pathway for less complex amendments will also be created where the planning authority can deal with the submission without the need for a planning hearing. These really are commonsense amendments,

all of which go to helping improve the system so that ultimately we can help to deliver more homes for Victorians.

The bill will also amend the Planning and Environment Act to make improvements to the planning permit application process, and this means that councils and responsible authorities will have further authority over applications, with the capacity to reject incomplete applications and the ability, importantly, to extend default planning permit expiry times for the use and development of land. The bill will also enable the Minister for Planning to issue guidelines to help responsible authorities determine who to give notice to when dealing with material detriment. Again this is important. It will give certainty to communities on when they can expect to be consulted with and ensure this is standardised across Victoria.

Several amendments will be made to the operation of the planning panels – again, red tape reform aimed squarely at reducing hearing times and associated costs and ultimately improving the operations of panels. This means frivolous or vexatious submissions or ones that are wholly irrelevant to an amendment will not go to panel hearings. Parties can also be joined when submissions are largely identical, conferences between experts to narrow the scope of matters in disputes will be available and panels will be permitted to consider matters based solely on written materials in certain circumstances. These are amendments that industry has been calling for after the red tape commissioner conducted her review into the planning system. They are measures that are designed to make the system more agile and more efficient to enable us to get on and focus on what we need to focus on, and that is building more homes – more affordable homes – in all of the locations where Victorians want to live.

Whether they are renting or buying, Victorians want the security of a home. The reforms in this bill, the amendments in this bill, go to that very issue. It is about ensuring that efficiencies will be created in the planning system, that costs will be reduced, that industry will be supported to get on and focus on delivering the homes that Victorians need. As we go through and reform our planning system, together with the building system, we are giving confidence back to community and we are giving confidence back to industry that we have a pipeline of development, that we have a target of homes that are needed for Victorians and that by following this target we are ensuring that we are able to make homes more affordable, particularly for first home buyers here in this state. The Premier has been very strong on this: that what is so important is to be able to support first home buyers to get their foot into the market, whether they are renting or buying, but more importantly, get their foot in the market in places where they want to live – places that are well connected to public transport, that are well connected to services and to shops and to schools. These might be places where they have grown up or places where their friends and families live, and they want to be around that support network.

This is about ensuring that our planning system is working for Victorians, that it is interconnected and that our reforms are working to deliver on what we understand is such a core issue for so many Victorians, and that is being able to find the security of a home, whether to rent or buy, in a location of their choice, which is well serviced by public transport, jobs and services and close to those who they love. It is a question of equity, and on that basis it surprises me none that those opposite would decide not to support this bill before the house. I commend the bill.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (17:15): It is a pleasure to speak in the calendar year 2025 on a bill that involves – there goes the planning minister – the planning system. I heard the minister's strong grasp of her portfolio in her scripted speech. It was very interesting to start the year off that way. I want to make some comments on the bill, and I note in its title the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024 refers to the government's housing statement, on which I want to make a couple of comments, although I will start off by making some comments around the reforms. I note it has got changes to VCAT and planning laws, particularly in relation to PPV, Planning Panels Victoria. I understand that the government is saying, 'Well, we need these reforms to planning panels, and we need these reforms now because they are slowing up our housing statement and we have got to pass these to get these reforms'. The minister has had these powers since the 1990s. It is called a 20 part 4, and under the Baillieu government it was further amended under a

20 part A. I am not scripted, unlike the minister. I mean, I would know this; you think you would know this. You do not need to go to Parliament and say, 'We have to put our statement on hold. We haven't met our target for this year, and it will be harder next year to meet the same target because we've only got 50,000 as opposed to 80,000.' The government has got the powers now; it does not need a change. As I said, it is called the 20 part 4 in the Planning and Environment Act 1987 or 20 part A, which is for an authority to use it. Maybe one of their authorities would like to use it, because they have got the authority, which was gifted to them in this legislation by reforms from the then coalition government. But it has not been used. Why has it not been used? Because there is always an excuse as to why things cannot happen – 'You're blocking,' 'You're this,' 'You're that,' 'We haven't got this,' 'We haven't got that.'

At the end of the day the government has made a target, and it is not going to meet it because it is just not very good. They have taxed the industry out of existence in Victoria. We know that. I mean, look at Melbourne's skyline. I saw the other day a great, great big new twin tower project residential for Sydney, which is going up and has been approved off there in Sydney's CBD. Meanwhile, the same project which Dick Wynne boasted was going to be the tallest in the Southern Hemisphere appears to be on ice down in Southbank because they cannot get it off the ground in Victoria. They cannot get a builder; no-one will build here. They cannot get domestic purchasers to purchase 2000 apartments – no shock on that. And you cannot get overseas buyers because frankly they have gone to Brisbane. Take a reality check: that is what it is.

I notice in this bill, the housing statement reform bill, there are some interesting points in it about renters. It is so important to renters. I am not sure why it has taken three months to get to today. I mean, why wasn't it an urgent bill last year? Why didn't we pass it in the urgency of December? Okay, it is three months later and now the government are saying it is urgent. But they introduced it in December. We could have debated it then. We were happy to debate it. The government did not want to come back. Fair enough.

There are no new announcements of residential towers in the CBD of Melbourne in this time, and particularly in the last six months there has been nothing. That is contrary to Brisbane, contrary to Adelaide, contrary to the Gold Coast, contrary to Newcastle and contrary to Sydney. But that is the case in Melbourne. Okay. There have been no precinct structure plans approved by this minister in that time. We are talking about the housing statement in this bill from 2024. Here it is: housing statement reform. There are no precinct structure plans approved. So here we have a government saying – in its own title of this bill – 'We've got a 10-year plan.' Well, half of that 10 years is already gone in one of the years. It is already gone – 20 of it is already gone – with nothing approved, no CBD towers and no precinct structure plans. There has been no major development in activities areas commenced around the greater Melbourne area.

So it is a simple question to ask: if it is all so urgent and this all needs to be done to get houses off the ground, why is nothing happening? It could be happening right now. Where are the urban renewal sites?

Juliana Addison interjected.

Matthew GUY: Please, I let you speak in peace; you can let other people speak in peace, if you do not mind.

Where are the new urban renewal sites for Melbourne? Where are they? I mean, there is no new urban renewal, there are no new CBD towers, there is no new commencement of major residential constructions in any of the activity areas and there have been no new precinct structure plans (PSP) in any of that time, and yet we have to again come to the Parliament and be told that we are the blockers by the minister, who opposed development in her own seat. Here I have the minister saying more Victorians want to get into a safe and comfortable home – unless they are in Carrum.

I offered up that they should change the planning regulations around central Doncaster because there are mandatory height requirements and I do not think there should be. I think we should have a discretionary limit, because if people in a time of a housing crisis want to put in developments in an area which can manage, around a central area where people can walk to the shops like I do from my office and where they can walk to the bus service, as I do, because I get the bus most weeks of Parliament to the city, then you should optimise that development area. I accept that. That is what Box Hill is about, that is what Doncaster should be about and that is what Ringwood should be about, although with some restrictions on that. I accept that, but of course not in the planning minister's seat – no, no, no. There are mandatory height requirements in Preston too, which is quite weird, given that it is flat. I used to live in Preston for 12 years. Preston is quite flat, and you could manage quite reasonable growth there, which would be around the railway station. I would have thought the government would want to value-add to their level crossing removal. I mean, you would think they would want to value-add to it by putting residential growth across the market site, which could then provide for people to walk to the supermarket and to walk to the 24-hour chemist that is there. It has got great services on High Street and St Georges Road. As I said, I lived in three locations there for more than a dozen years, so I think it is a great location too. I do not understand why this minister and the one before her would come in and say, 'Oh, no, not there. Not there either. Not Frankston either. Not Carrum. But we really need homes and we cannot do anything about it until we reform VCAT.'

We heard all the words. Did you hear them? 'Efficient', 'responsive', 'agile', 'modernise', 'red tape', 'reform', 'confidence' – how about you just do something? I have heard – and this is quite true – from the development industry that the minister does not want to make difficult decisions and that there is something in her office called the 'scary cupboard' and the advisers put all the too-hard briefs in the scary cupboard. She cannot make those decisions because they are scary decisions. How about making one decision? Bring in a PSP and approve it. Approve a development in the CBD of Melbourne. Approve a new housing development in a major activity centre. Do something. You say there is a housing crisis but then do nothing. All the speakers on the other side come here saying all these words – 'efficient', 'responsive', 'agile', 'modernise'. But when it comes to doing something and when it comes to the housing crisis that we are going through, it was mainly created by Richard Wynne, who refused to approve anything for the best part of a decade and left every other minister with now a massive problem in Melbourne – that is, market demand that is up here, supply that is way down there, start times of four-plus years and now a high-taxing regime on top of that, which means that you cannot even get anything off the ground to respond to the market demand.

This is what we are living with: a delusional government that now believes that it needs to race into the Parliament and blame, of all people, Planning Panels Victoria for delays in the system. I mean, I have heard people in the industry just laugh and laugh and laugh. Can you believe it? They blame developers. Well, they tried that one for a decade. They tried the Liberal Party for more than a decade. They tried the federal government. They tried to blame everyone. And now they are blaming poor old Planning Panels Victoria, which is part of their own department. That is theirs to control. You can override it. You can call them in. Now they are blaming poor old PPV. I feel sorry for them. I know a few people down there. They just shake their heads. It is like they have tried every trick in the book. It is like when you go into one of those circus acts where you turn the wheel around and the thing pops out – 'It's this. It's that. It's something else.' No, they have blamed everyone, and it is about to run out because there are not the homes being approved that need to be approved to address the supply constraints that we have in the government's housing statement.

If you want to address them, then maybe the best way to start, as I have said over and over again, is to go and look in the mirror, because it is the government's policies that have created this crisis. But it is the government can fix the crisis. They could fix it fairly promptly. They choose not to. They choose to blame others rather than fix the crisis. That, to me, is the telling part of this discussion, and it will not be solved until we get a change of government.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (17:25): I rise in support of this bill and its important purpose to increase protections for renters and deliver greater security and certainty in our housing system. Our Labor government is committed to making renting easier, fairer and cheaper, and that is why I am also honoured that this is my first speech as the Parliamentary Secretary for Renters. The very existence of this role reflects the seriousness with which our government takes housing security for renters. It is a topic I have raised many times as the member for Northcote, and I am looking forward to working closely with the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Consumer Affairs Victoria, the Department of Government Services and our many important stakeholders to deliver tangible outcomes for renters and continue the Victorian Labor government's legacy of landmark reforms.

Renting is a critical part of our housing mix. In 2025 a third of Victorians are renters, a record number that is expected to grow. In my electorate of Northgate that rises to around 40 per cent of constituents, and I know that other parts of Melbourne share those high numbers. In sought-after suburbs like Northgate or Thornbury there can be lines out the door during inspections. I cannot count the number of conversations I have had with people in my community who are in real distress about their housing circumstances. People go from viewing to viewing and make application after application but are unable to find homes. People are living in awful circumstances and conditions, such as mould-ridden properties or homes without proper heating and cooling. Parents have to uproot their lives and their children's lives because their landlord has calculated that they can impose a big rental increase or simply evict them for no reason. People have to go through drawn-out VCAT processes just because a rental provider wants to roll the dice on claiming their bond, and there is no real consequence for doing so. Most of all I hear about the disempowerment and genuine fear people feel in a system that for far too long has not given them the dignity and security that they deserve.

Our home should be a sanctuary, a place of comfort and peace, whether we are renting or not, and the fact is that renting is not just a transition into property ownership. For many people it will be their long-term or lifelong housing. That is why this bill is so critical and why over time our Labor government has put in place rental protections and reforms that are now considered the strongest in the country. It is why we are addressing the serious issue of housing supply with an enormous pipeline of social and affordable housing and why through our housing statement we are making bold decisions to streamline the planning system to get it moving faster and more effectively and incentivising the private market to contribute to increasing housing stock. Victoria continues to approve and build more homes than any other jurisdiction in Australia. That is not by accident; it is because our government is firmly focused on giving Victorians every chance to have safe, stable, secure homes. That is what everyone deserves and that is the foundation for opportunity, aspiration and hope.

Yet there are those opposite who are so out of touch that they cannot fathom the idea that it is good policy to increase housing in suburbs close to public transport and close to employment, schools and services, and there are those in the Greens political party with the exact same sentiments who will actively block homes from being built even while they try to make us all swallow this narrative that they care about people in housing stress. The contortion is quite something to witness. No doubt if one of them graces us with a showing on this bill, we will witness the mental acrobatics that it takes to reconcile blocking critical housing reform and critical housing projects with the slick slogans that they put on their campaign material.

Our Labor government has made housing a priority and has progressed a huge suite of substantive reforms to give more Victorians the support, security and safety they deserve. This bill represents the latest tranche of reform, with key measures like repealing the remaining no-reason notice to vacate and banning no-fault evictions. That means tenants will not be able to be asked to leave without a valid reason and certainly not just because someone wants to hike up the rent. Of course usual reasons, like property damage or not paying the rent, or repairs or if the owner wants to move back into the property, will still apply.

The bill will also ban all types of rental bidding, a harmful practice that unnaturally drives up the cost of housing and undermines fairness and integrity. We already made it illegal for real estate agents and

landlords to solicit or encourage higher offers, but now we are also making it unlawful to accept an unsolicited higher rental bid or accept more than a month's rent in advance. This evens the playing field for renters, and there will be tough penalties for agents and landlords who break the law.

In a tight rental market, a notice to vacate or an unaffordable rent increase can be incredibly stressful, and 60 days is often not enough time to find affordable and secure housing or prepare for an increase in rent. That is why this bill increases the notice period from 60 to 90 days in these cases, a practical way to give both landlords and renters more lead time.

Regarding rental increases, the bill importantly makes amendments to enhance the rent increase review framework. At the moment there are pretty strict limitations on what the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria or VCAT can consider when rent increases are reviewed. We want to expand those considerations so that, for example, things like the size or proportion of the rent increase can be assessed, not just whether it is commensurate with the neighbouring properties. Such a change would make a big difference for renters facing staggering rent increases. I have heard some really distressing instances where rents have been increased upwards of 200 per cent in some cases.

Of course things do not always go to plan – they do not pan out as we plan – and sometimes disagreements arise. Sometimes these disputes can be hard to resolve independently, and this can be incredibly stressful, draining and time consuming. This bill supports the establishment of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria – RDRV – offering a quick and free service that empowers landlords and tenants to resolve their disputes outside of VCAT, because frankly VCAT should be the last resort and not the first point of call. The quick resolution of a dispute can make a huge difference to the material circumstances but also the wellbeing of both the tenant and the landlord, and we are looking forward to getting that service up and running by the middle of this year.

This bill also makes a very important change, which I have spoken to advocates about at length. It makes it an offence for a rental provider or their agent to advertise or offer to let a home that does not meet the minimum standards at the time of advertisement or offer to let. Prior to this, compliance with minimum standards has only come into effect after a rental agreement has been signed. That has meant that dodgy rentals have entered the market and left renters seeking urgent repairs after they have moved in, which risks then that retaliatory action by rental providers. They are on the back foot from the beginning. With this change, rentals cannot be advertised unless they meet the minimum standards first. It makes for a much fairer, much more robust rental system.

We are also making rental applications easier with standardised forms to better protect renters' information. Given the volatile digital landscape we are all in, I think it is really important that we limit requests for unnecessary information and personal data, and when that data is shared that it is protected and stored appropriately and when it is not needed anymore it is destroyed.

A key reform of course that the member for Wendouree so emotively outlined is extending smoke alarm safety requirements. It comes about after that tragedy, with a life taken in Ballarat – Simon Scarff, who died during that fire. His rental property did not have a smoke alarm installed. That was a preventable tragedy, and we need to amend our legislation to adapt.

Housing insecurity is a real and lived experience in my own community. Right now around 5 per cent of Victorian households are facing serious rental stress, driven by housing supply issues and cost-of-living pressure. It is why at every opportunity I will always stand up for and back policies and projects that deliver more homes, more amenities and more services in my community. We have had many, many homes built in my community, including 99 new social housing homes that have opened just recently in Preston. We are doing that work to build more homes, and we are making renting fairer. I commend this bill to the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): Before I call the member for Mildura I would just like to acknowledge that former member Jaala Pulford is in the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:35): I am always happy to rise in this place to talk about housing, because as the member for Bulleen pointed out earlier, there are a lot of rental providers that have been taxed out of this state. When you live in a tri-state area such as Mildura, you can physically see that happening every single day.

We know that there is a housing crisis in this state. When you go out and talk to your communities, top of the list are health care, housing, roads and cost of living. Housing and cost of living of course are very closely related. Yes, rental stress is a huge issue, a massive issue. It is basic supply and demand, and when you make it so hard, through reforms, for rental providers to actually provide rentals, of course there is going to be a lack of supply. There is a lot of talk – we always hear it – and shifting of blame about who is to blame for the housing crisis. As the member for Bulleen said earlier, it was developers, then it was the coalition – everybody – but there is no accountability personally.

What could fix the housing crisis is incentivising those private rental providers to provide long-term rentals, but we are just making it so hard for rental providers. No-one is saying there should not be a minimum standard for rentals. Of course every dwelling on the planet should have a smoke alarm. There should be minimum standards for mould. No-one is saying that there should not be; of course there should. There is an issue, though, particularly in rural and regional Australia, that we see now. I will illustrate a couple of points. One is that of the rental providers a fair chunk of that market are teachers, for example, nurses – nurses I think are 9 per cent of the rental provider market; teachers are 10 per cent – and mum-and-dad investors who might have one additional property, which are around the 35 to 40 per cent mark.

A member: 71.

Jade BENHAM: Seventy-one – I was being conservative with my figures. That one additional property is purchased with the view of providing a long-term rental, but there are a lot of homes out there that are purchased that are perhaps ageing – that have been soldier settler houses, for example – and that do need a lot of renovations to come up to minimum standards. If that is going to mean that a \$50,000 to \$100,000 renovation is required to upgrade insulation or to upgrade an air conditioner or to upgrade a water system from a rainwater tank or whatever it might be, it gets more expensive the further away from a metropolitan area you get. The ability to actually get tradies to do that work is – I mean, I have been trying to get a plumber for 12 months now and cannot get one. I have been trying to get a builder to do some brick – I mean, you just cannot –

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Jade BENHAM: The member for Morwell unfortunately is no longer a plumber, otherwise that might have been an easy fix. Maybe there could be other reforms for regional and rural areas, because people do want to live out in the bush. Why wouldn't you? It is a wonderful lifestyle. You can get very large houses. Some of these houses are very large, but they are ageing – pre-insulation, the pipework might need to be redone, all that kind of stuff. No-one is saying there should not be minimum standards, but it might be an ongoing thing. So by putting someone under pressure to spend \$50,000 to \$100,000 to renovate before actually listing a rental while the property is sitting there not being able to make a return on the investment, that is a poor investment.

When the rules are different literally 100 metres away, where you can invest your money and get a return straight away, that is why we see developments, and that is why we see people literally jumping the river or jumping the South Australia border – and they do.

I was talking to a real estate agent last week, and he has been a real estate agent in Mildura for 20 years. When I asked them at the start of last year, the reports were that they were losing 12 homes per week from their property list. Now it is around 10 per fortnight, so it has not really slowed up. They are still losing homes, particularly over the summer period. We live in a tourist area if you can handle the heat and like to water ski, and a lot of these go to short-stay accommodation, but the lack of incentive for the private sector to provide those long-term rentals has been taken away. They have been taxed out

of the market in Victoria. It is simple as that. It is not that hard to understand what would fix this. Unfortunately with those 58 new or increased taxes, half of which are property related, is it any wonder they are leaving the state and literally going across the river or across the South Australian border? Even this real estate agent that I was talking to has ceased investing in property himself in Victoria. He is now going to Victor Harbor because it is easy. Even if they want to build new apartments, in Victor Harbor it is much easier and it is much, much quicker.

Again, renters obviously need to be looked after. There needs to be minimum standards, but not to the detriment of those that provide those rentals in the first place, because that is just madness. Guess what? It leads to a housing crisis, and that is what we are seeing instead of some practical solutions. You know I am a pragmatist by now. I like practical solutions that will actually have tangible outcomes so that we have not got people who cannot get a rental property for months and months and months and only then they may have to go and live in someone's second dwelling.

This is another issue in rural areas: the planning schemes do not allow people to excise old block houses. Small farmers who could once make a living off a 30-acre irrigated horticulture block can no longer. Farming has got really hard too, so those small-time farmers are being bought out by the bigger guys next door. Unfortunately even if they have lived in their house all their life, they cannot excise that dwelling on a 30-acre block from that land and stay in their home, so they are going to buy another property – not to provide a long-term rental – or they will move into one that they have had for 20 years when that was a long-term rental. They are having to give notices to vacate because they need those places to live in. So there are planning-reform levers that could be pulled to alleviate and offer some practical support in the housing crisis. You just cannot tax your way out of debt, and you cannot tax your way out of a housing crisis; it just makes it worse. We need practical solutions to this housing crisis, of course.

I was listening to the member for Ovens Valley too, who gave a very, very comprehensive bill report. He seeks to move – and I support – his reasoned amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this Bill be withdrawn and redrafted to take into account further consultation with rental providers and industry about the unfair impact of the removal of no-fault notices to vacate'.

Again, it may not be the fault of those renting. It may be the fault of other rules and other flow-on effects of this government implementing so-called reforms that have led to this housing crisis or have led to people not being able to live in a home that they have lived in for 50 years.

I know that this is something that it is quite specific to rural and regional Australia, but guess what? We matter too, and we also need somewhere to live. Someone that has worked the land for the past 50 years to provide food and fibre to the people of this state, this country and internationally should have the right to choose to stay in their home if they want to.

It is not that hard. It is really not. It is pretty simple actually.

A couple of reforms that we know do not fit the city certainly do not work in regional and rural Victoria. When we sit on the borders with New South Wales and South Australia and can see land being cleared for more housing developments and 'Sold; signs going up quite literally daily, whether it is for investment properties or for housing – people will live in New South Wales but still use Victorian hospitals, schools, police and ambulances a lot of the time – it does not make any sense.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (17:45): I am delighted to make a contribution to the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024. It speaks to the Allan Labor government's steadfast commitment to deliver more homes for Victorians. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Homes, I am very proud to be contributing to this reform work.

I would like to begin my contribution by reflecting a bit on some of the things we have heard from the other side. I think the member for Mordialloc called it earlier today in debate on the government

business program when he predicted that the Liberal Party would just move a reasoned amendment, because it is a pretty lazy approach to dealing with legislation of this nature. I do not know how you can sit in this place and oppose a bill that is going to make sure that renters are safe in their homes with the security and safety of smoke detectors.

Michaela Settle: Because the landlords matter more than people.

Katie HALL: That is absolutely true, because if you listen to the member for Bulleen, the weasel words are spectacular. He spoke about optimised planning. When I think about his track record in planning I think about Fishermans Bend with no schools or infrastructure. How is that optimised planning? If you look to my community of Joseph Road – the precinct in Footscray that he approved; thousands and thousands of dwellings, 40-storey buildings – our government had to take the developers to court to get them to pay developer contributions so that they could build roads in there. That is not optimised planning; that is a disgrace. That is letting people down. The importance of housing is not so developers can make a coin, it is so that people have homes to live in, homes with dignity. Residents in my community are still living with a gravel road in these enormous apartment complexes – only now is the council delivering that road infrastructure – overshadowing the Maribyrnong. It is basically falling into the Maribyrnong; in fact we had one developer encroach on the land a metre over what was approved. The whole thing has been a disaster because the Liberal Party was more focused on giving developers a fair go than on people who are going to spend every cent that they are ever going to have on a place that they want to call home.

When we build homes we are also thinking about building communities. That is why our government's work in precincts is so important, because it is not just the house, it is the infrastructure around it, the accessibility to schools and hospitals and train stations and bike paths – active transport. These are all crucially important things to make a community livable. I will not cop hearing the words 'optimised planning' when it is just 'Approve, approve, approve, tick and flick, do not require the developers to pay developer contributions so that there is community infrastructure'. That is a disgrace. That is what that is, and that is the Liberal Party approach to planning.

But here we are working on massive reforms that are going to benefit some of the most vulnerable people in Victoria, and although I am someone who represents a seat with a diverse range of suburbs, in the suburb of Footscray alone I have twice the state average of renters. For those renters every single one of these protections is crucially important. These reforms will join a suite of over 130 reforms already in place to make renting fairer, and I could not be prouder to be part of a government that has introduced the strongest rental reforms in the nation, because if you are a renter, Victoria is the place that you want to live.

I must have missed something in the Liberal Party contributions over there. I do not understand this argument that if an investor who owns many, many properties decides to sell a property, that is then automatically denying a renter a home. No, it is not – the house still exists. Maybe a renter might buy that home off an investor. So these changes are not as simplistic as those opposite will have you believe. They are so important to the people of Victoria.

I think many aspects of this bill are going to be transformative to renters, the first being Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria. What a wonderful thing, to establish Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria so that renters are not having to go through the costly and lengthy process of going to VCAT. Renters almost always need to take time off work to attend a hearing, and I know this. One of my staff members had to do this when he was dealing with a VCAT matter for his rental property. For many this results in lost income. In a cost-of-living crisis it is unacceptable for renters to incur significant financial loss to have their most basic of rights upheld. You should not need to become an expert in tenancy law just to get minor repairs done. You should not lose income because your landlord cannot be bothered to do the right thing. And the wait times for VCAT cases can take months, if not years. This means that renters can be out of pocket hundreds, sometimes thousands, of dollars while they wait for their day in court. The RDRV will be accessible to everyone with a lease agreement, including social housing

tenants. It will be available online, over the phone or in person, ensuring that every Victorian can access the service where and when they need it.

The bill will amend the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 to clarify that VCAT can provide a broad range of alternative dispute resolutions to parties and clarify VCAT's roles. But the RDRV hearings will be less intensive than a regular VCAT hearing, making the process more accessible and less daunting to renters, and that is something to celebrate.

The mandatory licensing for property managers I think is also a really compelling part of these reforms. This bill makes amendments to the Estate Agents Act 1980 to require agents' representatives to be registered – pretty basic. Agents' representatives assist estate agents with their functions and typically work as property managers or sales consultants. As someone who has rented a lot of properties in my life, from share houses to living on my own, I know that sometimes there has been a bit of an all care, no responsibility situation in dealing with some of the estate agents or agents' representatives I have been dealing with, and I am sure many members of this place have heard countless stories from constituents about property managers making inappropriate and often illegal requests.

With the time I have remaining I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the member for Wendouree and her advocacy on behalf of her community.

I found her contribution regarding Simon Scarff's terrible and tragic death to be really sad, and I am so proud that she has been able to help secure this change. The fact that a rental property does not have a smoke detector, or have a smoke detector that is working, is absolutely shocking to me. This reform will change lives, and I am grateful to Simon Scarff's family for their advocacy as well. This bill is excellent, and I commend it to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (17:55): I rise to speak on the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024 – an interesting title – and I do so to basically, first of all, outline that there are really eight areas of change in this bill. Six of them I have no problem with. Two of them I do have an issue with, and that is why I support the reasoned amendment put forward by the shadow minister:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this Bill be withdrawn and redrafted to take into account further consultation with rental providers and industry about the unfair impact of the removal of no-fault notices to vacate'.

Now, some of these changes are reasonable, like being able to have transportable bonds and standardising application forms so renters do not have to just continue to fill out the same form over and over again for different providers or real estate agents. Then there are some other changes which I also see as reasonable, like going from 60 to 90 days to give renters more time to find another rental property, because we are in a crisis; and rental bidding. It does seem unreasonable, when people are lining up to rent a property for say \$500 a week, that they say on the quiet, 'I'll pay \$700,' because that is making it even more difficult for renters to find properties.

But I would say they are problems of the government's own making. I mean, why are renters having to bid? Why are they taking longer to find other properties when they have to vacate? It is because we are in the middle of a housing crisis, and we are in the middle of a housing crisis because the government have created this problem. They have created it through two avenues: the first one is the taxes that have been introduced by this government – 58 new and increased taxes in the decade that they have been in, and half of those taxes are actually on property. When you put taxes on property, you have an outcome that we are seeing play out at the moment, and that is a very negative effect on being able to have enough rental properties available to renters. So we have a crisis of the government's own making.

I think what we also are seeing in this bill are the very bold words of a government saying they are producing a housing statement reform. First of all, can I begin by saying this is a government that has

been in for 10 years, and last year we saw them come out with the statement that they are going to build 80,000 homes a year. Well, what have they been doing for the last 10 years? Do you wait for a crisis before you address it? Seriously. And what have they done in their first year of addressing the problem? Did they meet the target of 80,000 homes? Absolutely not. They missed that target by a whopping 34 per cent. So instead of building 80,000 homes, they built less than 53,000 homes. A 34 per cent miss of the target – an absolute fail, and that is what this is. These whole reforms that the government have put in muck around the edges of the problem, like we are seeing today with these reforms to the Estate Agents Act 1980, Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and other act amendments. These are just more changes over the last 10 years that they have done. There have been a significant amount of changes to that act, and all we have seen are more challenges for people trying to find a rental. It has not improved it. If it improved it, we would see renters not struggling like they are to find rental properties, but instead what we have got is a housing crisis and a rental crisis.

We are seeing many of these taxes make people who want to be rental providers unable to do that. The government keeps saying that rental providers are massive land barons, and it demonises people who want to provide a home for somebody to rent. Let us be clear about who these people are. What group makes up these people who want to provide a property for somebody to rent? Seventy-one per cent of these people have one home other than the home they live in that they provide for a family or someone to rent. A significant proportion of those are teachers and nurses. These are not people who are out there to crucify poor people who they want to see out on the street. That is one of the reasons why the reasoned amendment has come through as it has; it is to withdraw one of the changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, and that is that after the first term of a contract you have to have some reason to give to stop the contract being renewed. When you employ someone it is very similar: you have a probation period, and sometimes it just does not work out. That is the case with this analogy that I am trying to use to help people understand. It is not after the end of the second extension of the contract or the third extension of the contract. If it is not working out, it is very reasonable to say, 'Look, let's call it quits.' But that has been taken away from the rental providers to be able to utilise, and this is just making people walk away from that sort of investment – these mums and dads who want to provide rental properties to help people to stay in rental properties. Not everybody can afford to buy. Here is an email I will read out from a constituent, who wrote to me and said:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

This is why I am no longer investing in a rental property. Not long ago my wife and I received some inheritance money and decided to purchase a unit in Warnambool, with the idea of putting someone in it who could not otherwise afford rental accommodation – a noble idea.

We put a lady into the unit who was a refugee with a young child and set the rent at \$220 per week. This mostly worked well, but after a couple of years our tenant's circumstances changed and she now has moved to Portland, so we advertised the unit for rental through a local agent. In addition, our tax bill is now three times what it was and there are new requirements coming for heating, cooling, insulation and we think further expenses.

He goes on, but his point is he cannot afford to keep that property anymore. What he did was invest that money that he inherited to help others, and he cannot afford to do that anymore. The stories that I hear in my office are from people coming in saying, 'I can't afford to pay these taxes. I have to put the rent up or I can't actually keep the property because I can't meet the mortgage that the property has on it.' So people are exiting the market. They are going to Queensland and they are going interstate. The evidence is clear when we look at the figures of how many bonds are being put forward. It just indicates there is a massive loss of people who want to provide a rental property for people. They are not able to do so in Victoria. The government's own changes over 10 years have totally failed and destroyed the balance that is needed between people who want to provide a rental property and those who need to rent.

The second reason the government has failed is because it has not invested in public housing. When you look at this reform, they are supposed to be saying how well they have done with their target of 80,000 homes a year. In the public housing sector, with the \$4 billion that this government has

supposedly spent on public housing, you would think we would see more houses in the market. But no, what we are really seeing is 480 houses less. That is less. After spending \$4 billion we have got less properties – by 488. From 2015 to 2024 that is the outcome we got from that spend. Yet in New South Wales we have seen public housing increase by 10,454 houses. The same figure in Victoria is just 4067. It is an absolutely dismal fail. Not only that, but most of these properties are smaller single-bedroom units, so we actually have 4551 fewer bedrooms. This is a government housing reform that sets an 80,000-a-year target and fails to meet that target by a whopping 34 per cent.

How it plays out and what it looks like is people who are fleeing family violence having to wait extraordinary amounts of time, such as nearly 20 months, for a home. They are sleeping in their cars and they are trying to raise their children. They have been promised by this government they will be looked after, because family violence is abhorrent and we should care about and protect these women. And that is what happens: they end up on the street when they finally get the gumption to leave. That is how this government is treating them. That is what I see in my electorate office frequently, and that is why we are seeing so many more people sleeping on the streets.

This government's housing reform is delusional. It is nothing about reform. They have had 10 years in government. The time for excuses is over. They have failed dismally, and the people of South-West Coast are certainly feeling and suffering the consequences of a government that has not invested in public housing, has taxed people to the hilt and has sent rental providers fleeing to other states, leaving people needing a rental on the street.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:06): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024. I think it is a little bit rich for the Liberal Party to be attacking us on social and affordable housing when they have attacked every build we have ever endeavoured to do and delivered, whether it be in my electorate or whether it be in Hawthorn. Their record stands strong in that regard – they oppose it wherever they can. So we will just dismiss that outright for a start.

Moving forward to the bill proper that we have in front of us, the purpose really is making renting easier, fairer and cheaper. Certainly I think a fundamental premise here is reasonableness, so when we are thinking about landlords it is not about attacking them per se – and I will go into the specific caveats in the bill that are protections for landlords with regard to legislation, because it needs to be fair on all fronts – but also recognising the significant increase in the proportion of people renting in Victoria. A third of Victorians rent, more than ever before, so there is naturally an imperative to make sure that the system is fair and reasonable on all fronts. I know the government has already worked hard to expand and protect renters' rights, with more than 130 reforms already in place and more to come through our housing statement commitments.

I am somebody who rented for over 20 years. I do not think I should be continuing to reflect on that, save for the fact that I do recall first moving into one property that was in Elwood and I could smell a gas leak. I contacted the agent or the landlord, who fought back and said, 'No, no, no, you're imagining it' and all sorts and did not want to heed my request. I will say: why would I make this up? If a plumber was going to visit, they could tell pretty quickly if there was or was not a gas leak. As it turned out the plumber came in and 2 minutes later said, 'There's a gas leak. Oh dear. We need to repair that urgently.' So I had not made it up; it was a fair and reasonable request. I think if we just think about those fundamentals as the purpose underlying these reforms, we can see that we are not driving for the impossible or the unreasonable but that which is fair and proper in the circumstances in which renters find themselves.

Firstly, we are repealing the no-reason notice to vacate and banning no-fault evictions. It means all remaining no-reason notices to vacate in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 will be removed and no-fault evictions for fixed-term agreements will not be permitted full stop. But let me say the caveat here: you can still be evicted for the usual reasons, such as damage, not paying rent or if the owner is moving back in. This is not a reform without the appropriate caveats in place, respecting of course that a renter

must treat the property that they are in with respect, as I know I certainly did as a renter. That does not mean all renters do, and in that event we can see that is where that reform would have appropriate caveats to protect the landlord and their property.

We are banning all types of rental bidding. The bill will introduce amendments to ban a rental provider or their agent from accepting an unsolicited rental bid or accepting more than a month's rent in advance. It should go without saying that this kind of reform is absolutely essential, because nothing speaks to inequity more than having to pay any more than you have to in order to secure a rental property and creating a situation, which obviously there has been in the market, whereby some people would receive favour because they would put more money up-front when we know for renters already the costs are enough.

You should be paying a fair price, but you should not have to pay months and months in advance just to get that little bit ahead of somebody else competing for the same property. We certainly made it illegal in 2021 for real estate agents or landlords to solicit or encourage higher offers than the advertised price of a rental property. But we note the pressures of a tight rental market with vacancy rates at record lows has put a lot of pressure on prospective tenants. We see more and more people making their own unsolicited bids either to pay more weekly rent or to pay more than the four weeks in advance to try and give their applications a competitive edge. But in endeavouring to get that property as quickly as possible, that inherently is creating a very unfair situation.

The good thing about these reforms is that the legislation is levelling the playing field for renters by closing this loophole and banning all types of rental bidding for good. I would hate to think anyone would argue against this premise. We will make it an offence to accept bids and introduce tougher penalties for agents and landlords who break the law. I just want to be clear: it is not about demonising the landlords; it is just saying this kind of practice is unacceptable. I am sure decent landlords and agents would agree. It is better for their reputations as well.

On increasing notice periods to 90 days for rent increases and notices to vacate, also in such a tight rental market it is only fair that renters have time to prepare for increases in costs or find a new home. I remember the nervousness prior to all the 130 reforms per se, just wondering 'Well, they might decide suddenly to kick me out' – you know, that nervousness, even as somebody who was earning an income, and I can imagine people who are on lower incomes as well. But it is also just availability, isn't it? It is being able to find that property that you need. Also, even prior to the reforms to do with pets, I always had pets. I was always up-front – I did not hide the pets, I might add – to make sure that the landlord was aware that I had pets so that I did not have that nervousness. But I am not passing judgement on those who may have quietly hidden the pets. I thought in fairness to the landlord that they should know that I had my two cats.

But I am very relieved to see a change, because for someone who may indeed, as many Victorians do, live for the long term in a rental property having to go without pets et cetera or not being able to put up some pictures on the wall and make it a home was really deeply unfair but also emotionally not good for those renters. So it is good that we are seeing better times resulting from important reforms that really value the contribution also that the renter is making to that property. It is a two-way situation. On the one hand the landlord, yes, is providing a place for the renter to live, but the renter in turn is providing rental income to the landlord. So that two-way respect situation is really important. I should say making rental applications easier and better protecting renters' information through enhanced use, disclosure and collection requirements just seems like common sense. There is also protection of renters' personal information – no need to share more than is required for an appropriate transaction when it comes to the contract. The bill will standardise rental application forms to prevent requests for unnecessary information and personal data that are often collected by agents and rent tech apps when renters apply for a home – a very pragmatic concern there.

Something that is a big, big issue, I must say, that is reflected locally particularly by a lot of people in Southbank, but not only there – I am sure it is across the state where people are renting – is to do with

owners corporations. The bill amends the Owners Corporations Act 2006 to extend registration requirements for owners corp managers to a natural person in effective control of an owners corporation's management business. As the majority of registered owners corporation managers are currently corporations rather than natural persons, this reform will enable education requirements to be applied to a natural person in control of each owners corporation management business.

When you think of the huge amounts of money they are managing and the incredible responsibility over many, many, many people in a community, it is really important that we have these kinds of, again, reasonable requirements to ensure that the money and the way that the renters themselves and the properties are managed is fair and reasonable.

I am absolutely thrilled to see these changes coming through. I advocated hard to the previous Minister for Consumer Affairs, and I am glad they are being carried through, because this is certainly something that has been mentioned as being really important in my electorate. You can be quite vulnerable to those owners corps, so it is fair enough that they should have to meet certain educational or other requirements to ensure best possible outcomes for renters. This is about reasonableness, this is about fairness and pragmatic changes. I commend the bill.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (18:16): I am pleased to rise today to contribute on the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024. It has been an interesting debate today. I do not know how many on the other side listened to the Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs the member for Ovens Valley when he made his contribution on this bill, but he basically said 90 per cent of this bill is a good bill and we do not have a problem with it. He was very specific about that. The problem he had and the reason he has moved the reasoned amendment is basically because of the no-fault notice to vacate. That is the only thing he wants changed. He believes that will make the bill a better bill.

We are in a housing crisis at the moment, and we continually hear this government blaming other people for it. Let us go back to why we are in a housing crisis. Let us go back to this government being elected in 2014. How many applications were there in 2014 for public, affordable, social housing? There were about 10,000 applications. Nothing happened for six years – nothing. Then in 2020 they came out with their Big Housing Build: 'We're going to spend billions and billions of dollars. We're going to build thousands of houses across the state – 13,000 homes.' Today there are 60,000 applications. We are committed to building 13,000 or 14,000 homes depending on which statement you read from the government, which is five times less than what is required. It is the lack of investment by this government in housing that is why we have these problems today. It is because of this lack of investment that we have things like rental bidding. People are so desperate. We support that part of the legislation where we take away rental bidding. We support it – we say no, that is wrong. The member for Ovens Valley was very clear on that, but this is why we are in the situation we are in today, because of the government's lack of action on social and affordable housing. That they are only investing in 14,000 or 13,000 and there are 60,000 applicants is problematic.

It would shock you to know that even non-essential work on a public house is a 99-year wait – 99 years. I was talking to a lady – I will not name her – who works in the department. She was trying to get something fixed on a house. She wanted it pushed up the list. It was an urgent, non-essential item. That item was item 271,000 on that list. At what point in time did this become acceptable? At what point in time does a 99-year waiting list for non-essential works become acceptable? It is not, and it is a direct fault of this government. The government does not realise this – it has its blinkers on. Investment is driving itself out of Victoria with the amount of taxes introduced in this state. Again, this no-fault clause that they are trying to impose on rental providers – they forget that through COVID it was the rental providers that kept people in houses. They forget that. Their memory is so short. People froze rents and reduced rents because people were not working. If they did not do that, we would have had a homeless pandemic, not COVID. It would have been completely different.

A lot of these rental providers were the unsung heroes of COVID, but ever since then they have been punished. Their land taxes have gone up. Land taxes are out of control. Everything this government has done to these people is punishing them, and these are the people – and this is the part the government has to realise – that take the burden off the federal government. When they retire, they will be self-funded retirees.

Here is an interesting fact. The latest adjusted ABS data shows that Victoria is down 11.9 per cent on new construction builds. Where have they gone up? They have gone up in New South Wales, they have gone up in Queensland and they have gone up in South Australia. Why is it going up in those states and down in Victoria? You can look up this data; it just came out today. It has gone up because this government is driving investment out of this state.

Since I have got my new roles – and I am now Shadow Assistant Minister for Planning and the Building Industry – I have had a lot of people reach out. I had one of Victoria's major developers talk to me, and he was going to invest \$400 million into this state. Where has that investment gone? South Australia. Why? The taxes and the penalties that any investor in this state is getting charged. They are driving investment out of Victoria and it is hurting our housing market. Land developers are throwing the anchor out. They are not chopping up land. We have got a housing crisis, but there is nothing to incentivise developers to do subdivisional work, nothing at all. We have got heritage studies that are taking years and years and years to complete. I heard the minister today saying, 'Well, we are going to speed up this process.' Are we going to ignore heritage studies now? Are they not going to be applicable? How are we going to speed up this process?

This government is solely responsible for the crisis we are in today. There is no doubt about that. You cannot dispute that. They have been in government now since 2014, and we are in the worst state as far as housing supply goes that we have ever been in. And it is at a critical stage. If this government does not start helping developers and everyone else to get moving again, we will go backwards again. As was pointed out today, and I have said this before in this chamber, if you want the basis of a good economy, you look at the cranes in the air, because you look out across the city now. Look out across the city – how many private cranes are in the air? There are not many, and that is problematic, because that is telling me supply is down. That is telling me our economic activity is down, and we need to fix this. But the government created this problem.

I was talking to another developer. We talk about supply, and the government talks about us being the blockers, but this is a cracker. I am talking about a developer who bought land in Cape Paterson in 2012. It is about a 400- or 450-lot subdivision. It was rezoned in 2014. The developer has been a decade doing all the studies – the heritage studies, the plover studies, all the environmental studies – and finally got it all to a point where this development is ready to go. What happens? The government has stepped in and said, 'You're not doing that anymore.' Four hundred lots; what is that going to house – 1000 people, on average? That is 1000 people that now will not have a home. Four hundred lots in an area that is growing – why? They did everything right. They did all the studies, they did the heritage studies, they did the environmental studies. They have spent hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of dollars getting everything going, and then this government again pulls the rug out from under them – and calls us blockers.

As was rightly pointed out earlier, the planning minister blocked development in her own electorate. It was only three storeys high. It was not a massive 30-storey high rise. Three storeys high – the planning minister herself blocked that in her electorate. So this government cannot look at this side of the chamber and say we are the blockers.

When the member for Bulleen was Minister for Planning, something like 200,000 units were developed in a four-year period – 220,000, I think it was. This government are saying, 'We're going to do 800,000 in 10 years,' and they are going to fail at that as well. They are not even going to come close to the 800,000 in 10 years, or the 80,000 a year. I think this year come September it will be two years since that announcement, and my prediction is the government will be, at that point in time,

probably about 60,000 to 65,000 homes short of their target – another 65,000 homes that have not been delivered. We have got a social housing crisis, and this government has literally done nothing to improve it. So as I said earlier, the shadow minister, the member for Ovens Valley – *(Time expired)*

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (18:26): I too rise to speak on the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024. I would caution the member for Narracan against speaking too quickly about the member for Bulleen's contribution in this state in relation to housing and building units, because I would welcome us to jump in a car together and go and have a drive through Footscray on the way through to my patch of Laverton. You will actually see a disaster, an absolute disaster that the member for Bulleen when he was heading up as the Minister for Planning approved, the most appalling state of affairs – apartment blocks that are built almost on the road there in Footscray. I drive past every time that I am coming home from this place. The first time I did it I was with my husband. I clearly remember the first time that these apartments went up, because we both looked at them and were like, 'What the heck is that?' And the fact that it was so close to the road – and I am not just talking about any road; I am talking about an ultra busy, busy, busy road, a mini highway in the inner west. That is what the member for Bulleen has left in the seat of Footscray. It is a real shame that the member for Footscray is not here to hear that. Actually, it is probably a good thing that she is not here to hear that.

This is exactly why the member for Bulleen's face for the last two years has been on a fence in my rental property, blocking the gaps, the holes in my dodgy rental property in the fence that the landlord would not fix for so long. I was so worried that my Beagle Ringo Starr would not only push through the fence but more importantly that he could see out, and he could see people walking around and he would go absolutely ballistic and be bang-up against the fence. So we put up some old corflutes I had, member for Bulleen corflutes. I think it was 'Matt Guy, the guy that cuts' – was that the slogan? That was one particular election. That kind of planning lost you guys elections time and time again. But that is the member for Bulleen and what he has done here to this state, particularly one part of the west.

Our government here on this side of the house is determined to ensure that in Victoria renters have fair protections – fair protections over their leases, their living standards and most importantly their finances. We know on this side of the house that the biggest way that we make rents cheaper is by creating more supply of homes and housing, and that is exactly what we have set out to do and we are doing. The Premier has made this the challenge of her premiership, and I for one will gladly support her in that challenge.

Much to the dismay of those opposite we have announced a series of new reforms aimed at jump-starting housing development en masse – projects that are well designed, close to major transport links and, most importantly, where people want to live, not where they absolutely have to live so far out in the burbs they cannot get transport. It is not there yet. These estates are going up from whoa to go before any kind of infrastructure has happened out there. There is nowhere left for them to go. Part of our housing statement is about addressing that fact. You cannot keep shoving families into the outer suburban fringes of metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria and expect that to be the right thing to do.

That is what this housing statement is about. This is also why we need to build more housing. It is why we have a housing plan, and it is why the Premier has made this the challenge of her premiership. Over the last six and a bit years here in this place I have not heard anyone from the coalition ever talk about a housing plan. They come here and they talk about a housing crisis. They seem to get that there is a housing crisis, and it is really great they agree there is a housing crisis. But they have no plan, no strategy and no greater vision that they have been able to communicate to Victorians about how they are going to address that, and that is really scary. That is really dangerous.

As a westie and someone who represents a growth corridor, I have time and time again said the announcements that we have made around not continuing to shove and push people further and further out into already busy and – I am not saying overpopulated, because people in the west and many of the families that I meet in the outer west love living out there. They love their suburbs, but they do not

want those suburbs to continue to grow as fast. So it is about slowing that down and building more housing where people, yes, want to buy and, yes, want to live but also close to already existing and extremely accessible, functional and satisfactory public transport. That enhances the standard of living here in this state. That makes for happy Victorians and happy Victorian families, and that is the kind of thing people on this side of the house and this side of the chamber are fighting for. We think about this with a broader vision, we go ahead and we implement it, we create the legislation and legislative reform agenda and we bring it to this place to debate, and time and time again those opposite block it. They block it because they think, 'We can't understand how it fits in here.' They have tried to block other things and have said, 'But we didn't get a long enough briefing,' only for folks like me to find out they did get a briefing but they chose not to attend or they did not ask a particular suite of questions but the minister's office has spent a considerable amount of time trying to educate those opposite.

Our housing policy and agenda is not just about rental reform and landlord reform and addressing a housing crisis, it is about addressing a population in coming decades, as the Premier has talked about, that will be larger. Melbourne will be larger than the size of London. If anyone has been to London over the past couple of years or happens to be on Instagram looking at all the amazing things they can do in London if they are lucky enough to go over, they can see it is a really busy place. And it is not just during tourist season; it is a really busy city, it is a big city, it is a major city, and that is the size that we are going to become. Not only do we need to be able to build the infrastructure to address that population – stuff like the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel and so on – it is also around housing, because people are going to need somewhere to live. Does that mean people are going to have to change the way in which they think about housing and the way in which people at different stages of their life will want to live in particular houses or apartments or townhouses? Yes, it does, and we need to make sure that the housing supply is there.

I feel like this conversation always ends up hitting 'Landlords versus renters'. Many of us in this place have been both, and we all know – and I would like to think that the member for Richmond would also know, but I will make that assumption after her contribution this afternoon – that is not true. It is not one versus the other. It is not pitting good versus bad. The world does not exist like that. These are laws and reforms that we are putting in place to ensure there is adequate protection for landlords and for renters, because we know more and more people are either choosing to rent or having to rent because being able to afford a house is not like it was when my parents were buying their first home. But is not us versus them. I am guessing, based on the conversation and the narrative of people like the member for Bulleen and the member for Narracan, that they are pushing it as one versus the other. They are saying that Labor is for the renters and the Liberal Party is for the landlords and it is one versus the other. It does not work that way. Everyone deserves to be protected equally, and at the end of the day what we know, what any rational person in this house knows, is that the majority of landlords and renters do the right thing.

But sometimes problems arise, and that is why laws and protection mechanisms like the ones in this reform bill are so important. But it is also important to realise if we continue this divisive debate and pit landlords against renters – because we actually need both in this state – and that one is better than the other or one is more protected than the other or one happens to behave worse than the other, that everyone has stories on either side and it is really important for people in this place to be able to have a balanced argument and not to be fearmongering out in the community for political gain.

I do have to commend the minister for bringing this reform bill before the house in the first sitting week for 2025. It is the right thing to do; it is the sensible thing to do. It is full of great reform, and I would urge those on the other side to go ahead and support this bill. It is about getting things done and protecting people that still need protecting. I commend the bill to the house.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (18:36): For too long landlords, real estate agents and private companies have been able to prey on renters. Think of the single mother that I spoke to just last week who has had to move five times in as many years – each time bidding against other desperate renters

just to secure a roof over their heads for her and her kids, each time slapped with hidden fees and privacy invasions. Until now all of this has been legal.

But now, thanks to the power of renters in standing up for their rights and demanding better, the Greens have won important rent reforms that will make renting fairer and more affordable for everyone. No longer will the real estate agent be able to accept higher bids for a crappy apartment that no-one can afford in the first place anyway. No longer will a landlord be able to kick you out for absolutely no reason. These reforms are welcome, and honestly it is about time. But our work here is definitely not done, because as long as a landlord can jack up the rent just as much as they like, renters will still be forced out of their homes and into homelessness, because an unaffordable rent rise is a de facto eviction.

An Anglicare report last year found that most rentals are unaffordable for nurses and hospitality workers. An out-of-work couple with two children can afford only 0.3 per cent of rentals in Victoria – that equates to just 40 properties out of 12,845 that are available on the rental market. An out-of-work single parent with two children faces even tougher odds, with only eight properties – eight individual homes – being considered affordable across the state. For a young person on JobSeeker, guess how many – zero properties are considered affordable. Eighty-two per cent of Australians are in rental stress, and Victoria has more people in housing stress than any other state or territory across the country.

The member for Laverton said that most landlords do the right thing and referred to false equivalences about needing to protect property investors and renters who are scrounging around for spare change to pay for medication or to put food for the table. Look at how much rents have gone up: 40 per cent in Victoria over the last three years. That is an average. That means that to balance out the landlords who might have put it up only 10 or 20 per cent you have got other landlords who have put up the rent 60 or 70 per cent over three years. That is an absolutely untenable situation, and something has to change.

Our system right now is plunging not just those pushed to the margins and not just essential workers but even families on two incomes into housing stress and homelessness. In a wealthy place like Victoria no-one should experience the stress of being without a home, no-one should have to beg for a couch to sleep on or choose between medication and food and rent. I think I speak for the hundreds of thousands of renters out there when I say the only way to make renting truly fair is to make unlimited rent rises illegal. Until that happens the power imbalances between landlords and renters will mean that all those other protections that have been introduced will not be enforced, because renters will live in fear of a retaliatory rent increase from their landlord if they dare ask for their basic rights to be met or if they dare take their landlord to court, if they have the time and money to do so.

That is why the Greens will keep pushing for rent controls, a two-year freeze on rents to allow the chance for wages to catch up and then a permanent cap on rent increases thereafter, 2 per cent every 24 months. Then perhaps in a couple of decades time that balance between our wages and the rent that we are paying might come into alignment. Sixteen European countries have some form of rent control, and the ACT, where the Greens–Labor government have introduced rent controls, is the only place where rents have not skyrocketed over the last few years. Is it any wonder? It is because they have introduced rent controls. We are willing to negotiate what that looks like. We have a proposal on the table, but 16 European countries cannot be wrong. This is a reasonable and commonsense intervention into a market that has spun out of control.

As more and more renters continue to face untenable living situations, Labor will soon come to realise that, until they come to the table, landlords will continue to have the power to just jack up the rent and force renters out, and they will continue to live in overpriced and substandard homes. There are a few more important things that the government must do to make renting fair and address that power imbalance between renters and landlords. The government promised last year to improve minimum standards for cooling, heating and energy efficiency. They were supposed to come in in October last

year, but there has been absolute radio silence. They do not even need legislation to do it; it is actually just in regulation. It could be done with a stroke of the minister's pen, and we are still waiting for those. They cannot just make a big song and dance about renters rights and then not act on it for months and months on end. These are people's lives that we are talking about. It is their living situation, and their ability to find work, their ability to look after their children, their ability to participate in civil society is impacted when they do not have a secure and comfortable home to live in.

How is it fair that a renter will still have to pay excessive break-lease fees if they need to move out, often forcing renters to pay double rent during a time when they are already facing the enormous cost and stress of moving home? Why doesn't this bill include Labor's promise to make landlords provide evidence for withholding renters' bonds, to stop them from trying their luck in a system that is geared to reward them? How is it fair that renters can be kicked out just because a landlord decides they want to sell? Renters' housing security should not be at the whim of their property investor landlords buying and selling their assets. This bill is a step in the right direction, but I challenge the government to go further so that our system truly treats housing as a human right and not as a commodity to be bought and sold. Today here is an opportunity to get hundreds of thousands of Victorians out of housing stress and maybe even give them the chance to save for a house deposit. This is about choices, and the government is choosing to drip-feed renters the basic rights that they should have had a long time ago, when it could just as easily make unlimited rent rises illegal.

I want to speak to a couple of the planning elements and acknowledge that community groups and stakeholders have some feedback about some of the planning changes. We are listening to those groups to understand their concerns. These planning changes increase ministerial power and cut red tape when it comes to large developments, which risks circumventing basic standards and checks and balances to ensure that developments are appropriate to the needs of current and future communities. This comes from a government that insists that fixing the housing crisis is just a matter of cutting red tape for property developers and property investors, when we know in fact that the housing crisis has come from a system that puts landlords over renters, a system that puts property investors over first home buyers, a system that needs to be dramatically rebalanced to ensure that housing is treated as a human right that everyone has access to and not as a commodity to be traded on, withheld and cashed in on when the profit is right. That is why we need to see an end to unlimited rent rises, that is why we need to see an end to property investor tax breaks and that is why we need a massive build of public housing for everyone who needs a home.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:45): I too rise to make a contribution on the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024. Goodness me, it would be remiss of me not to make a few comments on the preceding contribution by the member for Richmond. I am still unsure if you are supporting the bill after saying it is a step in the right direction, but let us face it: the Greens political party have voted more against housing than they have ever built. Federal level, state level, local level – you oppose everything. No-one on this side of the house is going to be lectured by the Greens when it comes to talking about renting and talking about renters rights. You have got to be in government to be able to make a difference, and this is what we have been doing. What is more, we do not get in the way when you are trying to increase supply, because, as you know, when you increase supply not only do people get into houses but prices go down and there is affordability. The member for Richmond was the mayor of the Greens-dominated Yarra council when she voted down social and affordable housing in Collingwood just down the road from the Fitzroy Gasworks site back in April 2021. Let us not forget that. They do not care about providing housing in the community; they only care about opposing our attempts to deliver it. Our government has built more social and affordable housing than any government in history.

Gabrielle de Vietri: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is misleading the house. Those were factually incorrect –

A member: What's the standing order?

Gabrielle de Vietri: I don't know.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): There is no point of order.

Gary MAAS: Renters in this state know who is on their side. Just the other day I was with a fellow by the name of John Lister in Werribee. John Lister in Werribee cares about renters and he cares about renters rights, and you know why he does? Because he is a renter himself, and he wants to come to this place, he wants to join the aspirations of his fellow people in Werribee and he wants to make a contribution to excellent housing policy. We are very hopeful for him this Saturday, and we want him to join us to be able to contribute to housing and the affordability of housing in this state. This bill goes towards that.

The housing statement reform bill formalises the Victorian government's commitment as part of the housing statement to increase rent protections for Victorians. The bill gives tenants more certainty about leases, living standards and finances and addresses issues that drive up the cost of living for renters with a range of reforms. These include repealing all remaining no-reason notices to vacate in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and ending no-fault evictions for fixed-term agreements, banning all types of rental bidding and increasing the notice period for rent increases and notices to vacate to 90 days. Rental applications will be made easier, and enhanced requirements for the use, disclosure and collection of renters information will be implemented too. As we heard from the member for Wendouree earlier today in her very compassionate and at times emotional but very, very compelling contribution, there will be the extension of smoke alarm safety requirements. We thank her for that fabulous contribution and indeed note the very strong advocacy of the Scarff family in Ballarat, who had to endure the loss of a loved one due to the very simple thing of a faulty fire alarm. Mandating yearly checks will go to fixing that. There will be mandatory licensing and training to deter poor conduct by industry professionals and tougher penalties for real estate agents who break the law as well.

The bill strengthens the Victorian planning system by implementing recommendations and related reforms from the red tape commissioner. These changes aim to modernise the planning system to make it more responsive and better equipped to handle the housing affordability challenges of today. These changes are supported by industry and councils, who will benefit from faster and clearer processes as well as cost savings.

The bill also supports the establishment of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria to resolve simple rental disputes. The RDRV service will be available to anyone with a lease, including social housing tenants, and will be operational by mid-2025 by phone, online or in person. It means that VCAT will not be a one-stop shop, because it will also alleviate that pressure from VCAT, with applicants triaged into dispute resolution services where appropriate instead of going directly to a hearing. RDRV will sit within VCAT, and if renters have a simple dispute with their landlord, including issues about repairs, maintenance, damage, bond claims or rental increases, they can access that free service.

We know that having a house is key to a good quality of life for Victorians – a life full of community, opportunity and security – and we know housing supply pressures are impacting the price of homes and rent and reducing the ability for many, particularly those from lower socio-economic communities, to secure a home. This is something I hear from my community in Narre Warren South particularly, being an area which has seen and continues to see major growth throughout its corridor.

Our government is getting on with approving and building homes to increase supply, from our landmark \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, which is on track to deliver at least 12,000 new social and affordable homes, to creating more housing options for Victorians through build-to-rent development projects. Melbourne is home to around three-quarters of all build-to-rent projects completed in Australia last year, at 73 per cent of build-to-rent apartments across the country. Eligible build-to-rent developments completed and operational from 1 January 2022 until the end of December 2031 receive

a 50 per cent land tax concession for up to 30 years and full exemption from the absentee owner surcharge.

The bill adds to the suite of reforms that have been made under this government to ensure that renters in Victoria have the rights, respect, security and certainty that they deserve. This includes the establishment of a renting taskforce to crack down on dodgy landlords and allows renters the ability to report properties for investigation. We have also invested in our hardworking community service organisations through the \$7.8 million rental stress support package, and this responds to the increase in demand these services have faced in light of cost-of-living pressures which renters are facing in Victoria. Past rental reforms have also included allowing renters to keep pets in homes and make modifications such as planting a veggie garden or hanging pictures without having to seek permission. We have also ensured minimum standards for renters, including the availability of amenities like hot and cold water in the bathroom and laundry; functioning ovens, stovetops and sinks in the kitchen; and a permanent heater in living rooms.

The bill is another important aspect of the delivery of the Allan Labor government's commitment to our housing statement, and as we all know, on this side of the chamber we know how important it is to ensure more Victorians, especially families, younger people, young renters and vulnerable people all have the opportunity to either own or rent a home.

While the Greens can talk big about how much they care about housing, they seem to care more about opposing any attempt that this government makes at delivering it. Rather than being blockers, we are getting on with the job, and we are delivering more homes for Victorians and building upon reforms that make our government the government for renters. I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:55): I rise today to talk on the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024. It is great to get up and get underway in 2025 amongst friends in the chamber that are here paying attention and doing what we do, which is representing our community. I hope that the member for Mordialloc has his chart out and moves the member for Morwell along – that he has ticked the box now I have spoken on the first bill of the year. He is not here, so hopefully he is watching back in his office.

I do want to highlight the member for Wendouree, who spoke about smoke detectors in units and houses – rental properties. I have worked on a lot of these rental properties that not only did not have sufficient smoke detectors but in general were not up to scratch for a human being to live in, let alone a family with little kids. There was black mould and there were toilets that did not flush properly. Anything that we can do to protect these people that do rent is a good thing. I think we have articulated that even though we have got a reasoned amendment, we are happy with a lot of the stuff that is in this bill. There are just a few bits and pieces that, unfortunately, we think need a little bit more work.

I move around my electorate, and I talk to our real estate agents. We are trying to get more houses online for people to actually rent, but our rental providers are walking away at the moment and not putting their houses up so people can move in and rent them. They are finding it difficult with the current climate, with taxes and other costs that are being heaped upon them, to actually be able to pass them on because at the other end the people that are trying to rent these buildings and dwellings cannot afford to pay it, so we need to find that happy balance. I know our local hospital down there, which is engaging doctors and nurses and physicians from overseas, is in the same situation – asking real estate agents to work hard to actually find houses that these doctors and nurses can actually move into. It is a really hard thing to get right. Although this goes a long way to ticking off a few checks and balances, there are a few other bits and pieces that need to be done.

Locally in the Latrobe Valley one of the other big issues is about expanding and having land that is available for us to use. One of the big things that we are finding is that, with coal overlays that are 40 or 50 years old, our council cannot release land to be able to start these new subdivisions to welcome new families and new people to the Latrobe Valley. There are a lot of outside influences that are at

play for the property developers that are going to turn this vacant land, with these coal overlays on them, into new estates – whether they be industrial estates or, more importantly down our way, housing estates to attract people to the Latrobe Valley, to make sure that they have the right to have a decent, proper, safe roof over their head and that they are able to take their children and put them in schools that are near these developments. Outside what we are talking about in this planning legislation amendment bill here today, there are certainly other factors at play. I have implored the Minister for Planning to look at these coal overlays to help us out in the Latrobe Valley.

As I said, I have been able to work in some of these rental properties that were not actually fit for purpose, but there is also the flip side where we have people that actually rent these properties that –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required by sessional orders to interrupt business. The member will have the call when the matter returns to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

ARB Corporation

David HODGETT (Croydon) (19:00): (971) My adjournment today is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to intervene and call on the federal government to resolve the skilled migration issue faced by ARB Corporation in Kilsyth. This year ARB Corporation celebrates 50 years of success as a proud global leader in the design and manufacture of four-wheel drive accessories. The cornerstone of ARB's success is the Kilsyth, Victoria, based manufacturing plant and innovation centre, which churns out class-leading products for domestic customers and supports a thriving export business. ARB employs 1400 team members in Australia and 2300 globally. ARB's Victoria-based operation serves a multitude of critical service customers. The company has framed agreements with the UNHCR, the Red Cross and the World Food Programme to supply fleet vehicles for global humanitarian aid and relief. It also holds national contracts with state-based fire and rescue departments, law enforcement agencies, ambulance fleets and specific defence organisations. Next time you pass a Victoria Police vehicle, note the ARB equipment that helps protect our law enforcement officers. The Kilsyth factory also drives export revenue. Around half of ARB's \$700 million annual revenue is generated offshore, exactly the kind of economic activity our Victorian government is meant to support.

Despite these contributions, ARB has been unsupported in its efforts to retain skilled migrants at its Kilsyth factory. With welding and metal fabrication skills on the decline nationally, ARB has had to rely on offshore labour to meet growing demand and to support both domestic and international contracts. While ARB continues to benefit from its talented local team, the federal Labor government's current approach places unrealistic expectations on the company to rely solely on domestic resources without providing the support needed to retain and attract additional skilled workers for future growth. As a result, these critical contracts are under threat and may ultimately be lost or sent offshore if this issue is not addressed.

I urge the Premier to intervene and call on the federal government to resolve the skilled migration issue faced by ARB Corporation and assist in securing the skilled workforce that is vital to ARB's continued success and to the broader economic and community benefits it delivers. ARB, Victorian manufacturing and local jobs must be supported, and this critical issue cannot be ignored.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Before I call the member for Laverton, in regard to the member for Croydon's adjournment item:

State government submission to federal body. It is in order for a member to raise a matter for a minister relating to the state government's submission or approach to a federal government body, but it may not be in order to raise a matter for the minister to take up with a federal counterpart.

There is another one here too.

David HODGETT: Deputy Speaker, if I may assist. Minister Hutchins has been out to ARB and assisted with this matter, so it is a state-related matter, but the actual skilled migration program is obviously in the federal arena. In order to assist ARB, Victorian manufacturing and local jobs, which are very important to our state, the action I am seeking is for the Premier to intervene to try and bring about a resolution to this matter.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: In the spirit of trying to get this done, it is in order for a state minister to be asked to write to a federal counterpart, if that is your wish.

David HODGETT: You are leading the witness! Then I will correct or change, if I may, my adjournment matter so that the action I seek is for the Premier to write to the federal government to resolve the skilled migration issue faced by ARB Corporation in Kilsyth, and the rest of my adjournment stands to put that into context. Thank you for your flexibility there, Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you for your assistance, member for Croydon.

Masjid Baitul Ma'mur

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:04): (972) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place, and the action that I seek is that the minister join me in my electorate for a visit to the Indonesian Muslim Community of Victoria Baitul Ma'mur mosque in Laverton. As the minister may know, Baitul Ma'mur is a small mosque with a very big heart. It is a place of worship for our local Indonesian Islamic community both in Laverton and across Melbourne's west more broadly. I first came across this gorgeous little mosque back in 2023, would you believe, through an open mosque day invitation, and I have to say, these are some of the most incredible westies you will ever meet. Happy, positive and with an absolute zest for life is how I would describe the hundreds of families I have met during my many visits. Their doors are always open and welcoming to members of the community, and they are always keen to contribute to the state of Victoria more broadly.

The minister may recall that in 2023 she met with representatives from the mosque with the then Attorney-General to discuss a number of issues pertaining to our anti-vilification reforms – reforms that are now before Parliament this week. Can you believe that? What was really special at the end of last year was that I was able to join the mosque in celebrating the completion of works on their newly renovated kitchen and fabulous new carpet, which our government supported through a \$36,818 grant from the Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund. One of the highlights for me last year was attending the mosque's annual iftar dinner during Ramadan, which we all know is such an important season for our Muslim community. With Ramadan coming up shortly, I absolutely cannot wait to be welcomed by this community, alongside my own family, who I took last year to the mosque for their annual iftar dinner.

I do want to say to my beautiful Indonesian community there at Baitul Ma'mur: thank you for always making me and my family feel so welcome and part of your family, whether it is at the mosque or even in your own homes. It is why I cannot wait and very much welcome an opportunity for the minister to come on down in person and visit the many families that make up this fabulous mosque and see firsthand the way our government is supporting our diverse multicultural communities, no matter how large or how small they may be.

Shepparton electorate bus services

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (19:07): (973) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is that the minister provides funding for a bus service review for the Shepparton electorate. It has been more than 15 years since our last review, and as you can imagine, my electorate has experienced significant growth during that time. There are a growing number of new housing estates or expanding estates that have no bus services.

Kammy Dhillon, a local business owner, has been advocating for increased bus services. He has a cafe in the Shepparton CBD and has said that he has staff having to get taxis to and from work, which is a significant cost to the staff. Kammy also recently built a house in Kialla, south of Shepparton, and said it was unbelievable that such a large growing estate has no bus transport services. Dysons bus company is also really frustrated because they want to support the community and provide more transport services and grow their business.

It is actually unbelievable to think that this review is taking so long. Currently, services on Saturdays are limited and there are no services provided on a Sunday. On top of this, there is only one bus that services the train station on the hour, but it does not align with the V/Line timetable. Public transport is a lifeline and an affordable option for many, including the elderly, youth and non-drivers. People need to get to where they need to go, whether it be to work or medical appointments; it is a community necessity. When the government released the Victorian bus plan in 2021, the then minister at the time, now Deputy Premier, said that this would include the regions and that the government was committed to a bus network that better meets public transport needs and demand. Well, that is not happening in my electorate, where the need for review is desperately needed. I request that the minister supports my community's needs and funds a bus service review for Shepparton as soon as possible.

Creative Projects Fund

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:09): (974) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Creative Industries and concerns the Creative Projects Fund. The action that I seek is that the minister provides further information on how the Creative Projects Fund will support artists in my electorate of Narre Warren South.

We know that Victoria has a tremendous reputation as the creative state, with excellent galleries, theatres, music, events and entertainment that draws crowds from across the country and indeed from around the world. The Allan Labor government recognises the importance of supporting homegrown creative talent and is committed to backing both new and established Victorian artists, groups and organisations to develop new work across all disciplines.

The arts are so important for the social fabric of our communities, and we need to ensure that they represent and entertain our vibrant state. I know many in my community of Narre Warren South would be excited to see new art and performances as well as installations and theatre much closer to home.

My previous life in music and indeed the arts included some time as a performer as well as an educator. I fully understand the pressures and the hard times that performers can go through, especially at the beginning of their careers, but I also know the joy and the excitement that music and the arts can bring to not only the performer but audiences as well. It is so important that we keep making connections that not only express the human spirit and expose the soul but also are reflective of our common experience. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

South-West Coast electorate weed control

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:10): (975) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit the south-west to see the government's mismanagement of the environment. Tower Hill is in a dreadful state. It is a salad bowl of overgrown weeds – hemlock, thistles and other weeds. Each Sunday volunteers weed, and they have been asking the Allan Labor government for an overarching weed management plan and support, which has never

been forthcoming. The Warrnambool foreshore and promenade are overgrown with highly flammable coastal tea-tree not native to the area. A CFA document designates the area as at catastrophic fire risk. This is not a term to be taken lightly. The risk is imminent and has a very real chance of affecting property and life. Ultimately the government is responsible as it is Crown land.

Every year constituents from all over the electorate, particularly from Heywood and Portland, contact me about overgrown roadside vegetation. When roadsides are well maintained they are used as a firebreak. Now that roadsides are not effectively cut back or sprayed, it results in massive overgrowth at the end of spring and a huge fuel load for the fire season. This load acts as a wick, which was demonstrated during the St Patrick's Day fires in 2010. Farmers are required to manage fuel loads and weed infestations on their properties, yet the government ignores its responsibility. I have raised this issue every year with the emergency commissioner, and the government continues to do nothing. These three are examples of government mismanagement, but there are many more.

To add insult to injury, this week the government is taking the Port Fairy golf club to court over a bunch of pulled weeds that allegedly contained protected beard-heath. They did not even bother to speak to the club as a first-line approach in an attempt to work with it. Instead they threatened, bullied, threw their weight around and laid criminal charges. Are they serious? What extreme action when there are other options, such as an official warning or a penalty infringement notice. Fancy picking on a small country club with a volunteer board when a government abrogates its own responsibilities. This is absurd. We have got examples showing how bad.

Let us be clear: the minister is responsible for his department. The fish rots from the head. Directives come from the top. Abrogating responsibility and picking on a community organisation are the norm of this government. It is a culture of mismanagement and heavy-handedness. The Allan Labor government cannot manage its own environmental responsibilities. Stop picking on people who are doing volunteer work and trying their best.

Road safety

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:13): (976) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest update on the electronic speed limit sign installation on Centre Road in Oakleigh South and Clarinda. As the project is on the boundary of both our electorates, the Minister for Environment and I are very proud that we are improving safety along the 1.5-kilometre stretch of Centre Road in Oakleigh South and Clarinda by reducing speed during peak school hours. The project includes nine highly visible powered electronic speed limit signs, which will provide a safer environment for all schoolchildren and families and provide for safer road use by slowing down vehicles during peak periods of pedestrian movement along Centre Road between Bakers Road and Eulinga Road.

The electronic speed signs are located close to three schools: South Oakleigh secondary school, Oakleigh South Primary School and Clarinda Primary School. These are three fantastic local schools, and I know that the principal Robbie Mallett, the school council and the families at Clarinda Primary School are very much looking forward to seeing these electronic speed signs in action. I was out at Clarinda Primary School on several occasions late last year, including at the school's 125-year anniversary. This was raised by parents, who are grateful to see improved safety in the school zone.

It is a great project, the funding for which was provided by the Victorian government in the 2023–24 budget under the \$1.25 million metropolitan roads upgrade program. I thank the minister and look forward to her response.

Polwarth electorate public housing

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:15): (977) My adjournment debate this evening is for the Minister for Housing and Building in the other place, and the action I seek this evening is that I would like to invite the minister to come down to Colac in the seat of Polwarth and to meet with Barwon

South West housing workers to discuss the government's promise some 18 months ago now for 50 new public homes in Colac.

I refer very specifically, as I have on a number of occasions, to the press release put out by this government on 24 September 2023. In that press release the government made it known to all and sundry that as of June 2023 there were 55,800 people on the homeless waiting list, and the minister I am sure is very aware that as of today there are some 63,803 people. Of course my electorate, like most electorates who are suffering this housing crisis brought on by the mismanagement of housing in this state, will well know that another 8003 families are waiting on the waiting list since that promise was made. Some of those 8003 people will in fact be in Colac, and they want to know where these 50 homes are.

The government said that they had announced a billion dollars for some regional housing projects. There was Colac, Wodonga, Shepparton, Seymour and Rochester, and to the best of my knowledge none of those have materialised – none at all. The government said at the time as part of that press release that they were undertaking the due diligence, feasibility and design. Well, no-one in Colac knows anything about these 50 houses. In fact there is general agreement that the land identified in the press release as being on Pound Road was in fact a fanciful notion that was probably never going to happen, because the land simply is not big enough. It is crammed in between a school and a cemetery. Nonetheless we want those 50 homes. The community needs those 50 homes – the 8003 extra families now languishing on an ever-growing waiting list, some of those in Colac.

The other thing that concerns me greatly is that we know families escaping domestic violence are now waiting three times longer than they were only five years ago, and some of those families are in the Polwarth electorate as well. The housing crisis is acute. It is significant. This government has made a commitment to my community to provide extra homes. We have not seen them. We do not know when they are coming, and it would be wonderful for the minister to come down and talk to those hardworking community housing workers that every day have to face up to families and single mums and others and tell them, 'I'm sorry, you're just going to have to stay in that motel unit or in that caravan a little bit longer because we don't have the housing stock.' So Minister, your visit would be appreciated.

Bellarine electorate schools

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:18): (978) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. Recently it was announced that the federal government have come to a historic agreement with this Allan Labor government to provide an additional 5 per cent of the schooling resource standard for Victorian public schools. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how this new investment will benefit students in state schools in my electorate of the Bellarine.

As a former primary school teacher, I know and can see how much this will mean for our schools and ultimately for our students. As the minister outlined in his ministerial statement in question time, this extra funding is to help reforms that we have already implemented in Victoria, such as phonics checks and early numeracy checks. These are vital tools that teachers use in the early years to ensure that they can identify students who may need additional help. The minister also spoke about how this will support mental health professionals in schools, increase access to evidence-based professional learning and of course support our teachers.

This is a significant agreement for a strong Education State, and it is important to see schools funded to this level so each student can reach their full potential. I know we have rolled out a whole lot of other things in our schools, including the rollout of phonics in prep to grade 2 classes, our breakfast club, glasses for kids and dental vans in schools. We also have a new round of the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, including the \$400 school saving bonus. I am really looking forward to hearing from the minister his response and sharing with my electorate how this new investment will benefit the electorate of the Bellarine.

State Revenue Office

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:20): (979) My adjournment this evening is for the Treasurer in the other place, and the action I seek is that she revises the State Revenue Office land tax assessment processes and procedures. I bring this to the attention to the Treasurer tonight because I received an email today. This is not unusual – I get a lot of phone calls on land tax – but I received an email today from Emmaly Gridley, and I will just state this. She states:

We bought a property in Moe in 2020 that was valued at \$440,000 on the Land Tax Assessment Notice for the following 3 years.

In 2024 it was stated that the value had jumped to \$1.6Million so the land tax bill for that year was just over \$20K. We filed an objection which has taken almost 12 months to finalise. The independent valuation came back that it was worth \$770,000 so our 2024 assessment was amended.

We have now received a new assessment for 2025 and the valuation is now at \$2.3Million – that is a 300 per cent increase –

with the land tax bill over \$30K.

I bring this to the attention of the Treasurer because this is not unusual. This is happening quite often. Now the sceptic in me may think that the State Revenue Office is overvaluing properties to create more taxes. That could be the sceptic in me. But what I would like to do is ask the Treasurer to revise how they are doing these valuations, because I find it very hard to believe that an independent valuation that puts a property at \$770,000 can increase to \$2.3 million in a 12-month period. I assume Emmaly and her husband David, I think it is, will probably appeal this new valuation. But they have to get this right because it is causing a lot of grief within the community and definitely in my community, where land tax assessments seem to be out of control.

I am asking the Treasurer to please look at this issue, and let us get some sort of consistency to valuations and not what it is at the moment.

Footscray CBD revitalisation

Katie HALL (Footscray) (19:22): (980) My adjournment is to the Minister for Local Government. I believe it is the first adjournment matter for the minister since his most worthy appointment in this role. The action I seek is for the minister to join me on a walk through Footscray to discuss strategies that may be used to help revitalise our central business district, including assisting and advising the City of Maribyrnong on the mechanisms that can be utilised to assist traders.

As the \$1.5 billion new Footscray Hospital approaches completion, I want Footscray to be in a position to thrive, a place where thousands of healthcare workers, patients and families can come to shop and eat at our fantastic businesses. These are businesses owned by predominantly migrant families and people with deep roots in our community. The Allan Labor government and the City of Maribyrnong have together and independently implemented several programs aimed at revitalisation. I will welcome the newly appointed Minister Staikos to Footscray so that he may assist in continuing the work that both the City of Maribyrnong and I have initiated.

Responses

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (19:24): It gives me great pleasure to respond to my friend the member for Footscray's adjournment request. The first thing I wish to say is that, as it happens, coincidentally I am going to be in your patch on Sunday, member for Footscray, because I will be attending the official opening of the Maribyrnong civic precinct and community hub, which was made possible by a \$10 million low-interest loan from our government. I was very pleased to accept the kind invitation from Cr Pradeep Tiwari, the mayor of Maribyrnong.

While I am in your neck of the woods, member for Footscray – through the Chair of course – on Sunday I would be delighted to visit Nicholson Street Mall with you. I know that the Footscray

electorate has benefited significantly from your work as the local member. You mentioned Footscray Hospital. That is just one of many projects that you are responsible for in your community, member for Footscray.

I can only look at my own community. I note the Minister for Small Business and Employment is at the table tonight, and I think she would back me up in saying that local traders associations do very, very good work. I certainly look at the Bentleigh Traders Association and the work they do for their members and the invaluable work they did through the COVID pandemic as well for their members. But I also look at the relationship that the Bentleigh Traders Association in my community has with the Glen Eira council. They have something called the special rate levy, which is allowable under the Local Government Act 2020, which has really enhanced the great work that the Bentleigh Traders Association can do. I am looking forward to joining you, member for Footscray, at Nicholson Street Mall and perhaps even meeting with some traders, maybe even meeting with the traders association, to talk about what we could possibly do together to enhance and revitalise that wonderful part of your electorate.

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (19:26): The member for Croydon raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action the member seeks is that the Premier write to the federal government raising the issues in relation to ARB, in particular the skilled migration matters. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to join the member at Laverton, in particular at the Indonesian Muslim Community of Victoria Baitul Ma'mur mosque at an upcoming event. The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to fund a bus service in Shepparton. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Creative Industries, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to advise on how the Creative Projects Fund is supporting local artists in the Narre Warren North electorate.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to visit the south-west region. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide an update on the speed limit signs at Centre Road in Oakleigh South. The member for Polwarth raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing and Building in the other place, and the action the member seeks is a visit from the minister to the Colac region to meet with Barwon South West housing. The member for Bellarine raised a matter for the Minister for Education, and the action the member seeks is for an update from the minister on how the historic agreement between the Albanese and Allan Labor governments for Victoria's public schools will be delivered for schools in the Bellarine region. The member for Narracan raised a matter for the attention of the Treasurer, and the action the member seeks is that the Treasurer revise the land tax evaluation process. The member for Footscray had a question for the Minister for Local Government, and that question was answered with the local government minister being present at the table.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, ministers. The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:29 pm.