



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 19 March 2024**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

### Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Georgie Crozier

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew <sup>1</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaëlle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira <sup>2</sup>	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem	Northern Metropolitan	DLP
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, David <sup>3</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
			Welch, Richard <sup>4</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

<sup>3</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>4</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Tuesday 19 March 2024**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Condolences*

**Hon. Digby Glen Crozier**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:04): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death, on 26 February 2024, of the Honourable Digby Glen Crozier and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Council for the electoral province of Western from 1973 to 1985, member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Portland from 1985 to 1988 and Minister of Tourism and Minister for State Development and of Decentralisation from 1976 to 1978, Minister of State Development, Decentralisation and Tourism from 1978 to 1979, Minister for Local Government from 1979 to 1981 and Minister of Mines and Minister for Minerals and Energy from 1981 to 1982.

It is a rather difficult but unique moment for me to be able to rise and move this condolence motion for my father, the Honourable Digby Crozier. I thank the Leader of the Government for giving me the privilege of doing so. It was something I never wanted to have to do, but at the age of 96.9 years, a huge age, Dad's time had come. He was of an era that served and gave back. So here I am, and with the indulgence of the house I will try and capture Dad's wonderful life and his contribution to this Parliament and to the broader community in the next few minutes.

Dad was born in London on 16 May 1927 to my grandparents Nancy and John – or as he was known, 'Towser' – Crozier. My grandfather had studied medicine and was working in the UK when Dad was born. They returned home to Australia in 1932 and bought a property north of Casterton, one of the most beautiful parts of Victoria, with undulating hills and fabulous red gums. It was a place which we all loved, and after a hectic time here in Spring Street, Dad would return home and turn his hand to whatever needed to be done on the farm. Dad not only enjoyed the physical work of the farm and working in the natural surrounds but was also very much part of the local community. He had a wonderful intellect, was a great raconteur, had a great sense of humour, was great fun and had a magnificent sense of duty that was instilled in him as a young man by his headmaster Sir James Darling, a man he had enormous admiration for. That sense of duty saw him serve his country and community in a variety of ways.

It was in his final year of school at Geelong Grammar and at the age of 17½ that Dad enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy. Dad was mobilised, and in the final stage of his training World War II thankfully ended. He was then posted to the HMAS *Warrego*. Had the war not ended, the plan was for the *Warrego* to be deployed as part of the fleet invasion of Japan. Dad was discharged from the navy and went home to Barnoolut before he attended Cambridge University, receiving a master of arts. It was Manning Clark, the great Australian historian, who taught Dad at school and said in a school report that he was very able with a pen and had a great talent for literary subjects. Dad was a great wordsmith, had a wonderful turn of phrase, could craft a brilliant speech and loved to recount anecdotes, stories and speeches from leaders long gone.

Throughout his schooling and university days he had a great interest in local and international politics, and 80-plus years later he still had an interest in all things political, whether that be state – which of course he had an extra interest in – national or international politics. Not only would he read the daily newspapers, but he was also an avid reader. He had a huge interest in history, military history and the founding values of our democratic institutions. Dad, until he went to hospital, had by his chair two books he was reading. He had just finished *Churchill: Walking with Destiny* and was reading Michelle Grattan's *Australian Prime Ministers*. In *Australian Prime Ministers* his bookmark was in the chapter on Sir Robert Gordon Menzies, a man Dad had the privilege of meeting and had great admiration for.

After Dad returned from Cambridge in 1949 he, like so many Australians, joined Menzies's Liberal Party. His interest in politics was only heightened following a trip to the US in the early 1950s, when he and a couple of friends visited the Massachusetts Senate and heard a young John F Kennedy speak. Dad was on an agricultural tour signed off by the then Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, so it was somewhat fortuitous that he had spent some time in Massachusetts. Dad recalled how this great striking man had such extraordinary charisma and spoke so passionately on a bill that was not all that interesting – something about water policy. But it was the way JFK carried himself that was so powerful, and it certainly left a lasting impression on Dad.

It was not long after this trip that through Dad's association in the UK with Colonel John Slim of the 22nd SAS Regiment UK, who later became Lord John Slim, together they moved to establish the SAS regiment here in Australia. There was a lot of letter writing and various correspondence back and forth to Canberra, but unfortunately they were not successful with that endeavour at the time. It was also unfortunate that Dad never kept copies of that correspondence. But Lord Slim, who attended a dinner in Perth a few years ago and who was well into his 80s, invited Dad over to hear him speak, and he mentioned Dad and what they both tried to achieve. It was not until 1964 that the SAS regiment in Australia was finally formed.

On the farm, Dad was involved in the CFA and was the first lieutenant of the Wando Bridge fire brigade for many years. He recalled how as a young man in his teens they fought the 1939 Black Friday fires near Casterton. In 1954 he joined the CMF, the Citizens Military Forces, or what is known today as the Army Reserve. He retired in 1970 with the rank of captain.

Dad also served as a councillor of the Glenelg Shire Council from 1965 to 1973 and was shire president from 1967 to 1968. In 1968 Dad started his foray into state politics. Amongst a field of 17 candidates he won preselection to stand for the seat of Western Province in a by-election. He was not successful at the time, but that did not deter him. In 1973, after finally being successful, he entered this place as a member for Western Province. In 1976 he was appointed by Premier Sir Rupert Hamer – or Dick Hamer, as he was affectionately known – as Minister for State Development and of Decentralisation and Minister of Tourism.

Dad was certainly passionate about getting the best for regional and rural Victoria and was not afraid to make decisions that could be controversial. He was of the view that if you did not decentralise, then the central power would remain within the city and country Victorians would be left behind. In 1976 he said:

Currently, Victoria has 70 per cent of its population situated with only 2 per cent of the State's land area. Our lifestyle is one of the most urbanised in the world. Admittedly, Melbourne does not suffer the severe slum blight evident in some other large cities of the world, but Melbourne's rapid growth has still produced disadvantages such as a backlog of uncompleted community services, housing shortages, inadequate open space and severe transport problems.

How things change but stay the same. He went on to say:

Surveys show that many of Melbourne's residents would consider Victoria's country towns and cities a preferable alternative if employment were available.

Accordingly, we need decentralisation to achieve a better way of life for all Victorians wherever they may wish to choose to live. This is an obligation which the State Government is meeting by providing and maintaining a livelihood for people in country areas.

During this period Dad was also deputy leader of this place in government. In 1979 he held the portfolio of local government, having to make some pretty hard decisions, including one about the Melbourne City Council. In 1981 he was appointed Minister for Minerals and Energy and Minister of Mines, until the Thompson government came to an end in 1982. Again, these portfolios were not without controversy in the eyes of some, but Dad knew that if the regions were to be successful, grow and provide opportunity, they needed industry, and for industry to succeed they needed energy.



Energy policy and climate change debate featured regularly in the Crozier household. Anyone who knew Dad knows he had very particular views on these two subjects, and they were passionately discussed with anyone who would listen. Dad was incredibly well informed on energy policy and could debate the case endlessly about the need for cheap energy, the difference between nuclear fusion and fission, his views on anthropogenic emissions and, as he called it, ‘the science’. Renewables also featured in debate. He did not disregard renewables – far from it. He embraced the innovation, and that is why we had solar panels at the farm in 1990 used to heat our hot water. He was a forward thinker and way ahead of his time in so many ways. But he was also a pragmatist and a realist as to what could be done and how.

Dad enjoyed the debates within this place and had great respect for a number of those opposite. Jack Galbally, who was Labor’s leader in the Council, Dad described in particular as having a brilliant mind. They would both enjoy from time to time some very witty repartee and banter. It was very much a different place then, with long debates, many late nights, discussions in the bar and, as he would say, thankfully no social media. Dad was amazingly computer literate but would often comment about how different it was for us as MPs given that we are connected to the job 24 hours a day through mobile phones, emails, social media and a fast-paced media cycle. He had a special relationship with Pat McNamara, the Leader of the Nationals towards the end of his term, where Pat told me he and Dad would work on amendments together on bills and get them through their respective party rooms and then through the Parliament, as in those days the Liberals and Nationals had a majority in this place. So together they literally formed their own coalition. On losing government in 1982 Dad moved to the shadow portfolio of police and emergency services. After his friend Don McKellar retired from the seat of Portland, Dad was approached to stand and run in that seat, which he did in 1985, before leaving the Parliament in 1988 when former Premier Denis Napthine took it over.

Dad went back to the farm, which he was so happy to do, working alongside John and Will and looking to further develop and improve our farm Kalabity, a place that Mum and Dad both developed from scratch, where we grew up and where political discussions and Dad being away for most of our childhood was the norm. His interest in politics did not cease, and in the late 1980s, with high interest rates and the collapse of the wool floor price, many farmers, including us, were feeling the pressure. Given his previous experience and understanding of government, he was appointed as a member of the Australian Wool Innovation wool taskforce and was an active member of the Victorian Farmers Federation.

In 1996 former Premier Jeff Kennett appointed Dad as commissioner for Glenelg council at a time when reform in Victoria was badly needed. His public life ended after that appointment concluded, but his interest in what was happening at a local, national and international level never did. Much of what Dad achieved was never reported, but it was recognised by the communities he represented. He understood the responsibility of government, and he recognised the importance of this place.

So many people have contacted us with wonderful descriptions and memories of Dad. Overwhelmingly, what so many have said of Dad was that he was the ultimate gentleman, and he was. His service to this state and our country is something that our family are immensely proud of: my brother John; my sister Annabel; his grandchildren Kate, Lachie, Sam, Charlie, Tom, Harry and Freddie; Gus, Sara and Prue, who are all very much part of our family; and of course Mum and Will, who worked closely with him and were so proud of all he achieved. Dad will be greatly missed by all those that knew and loved him, but his many achievements and legacy and the memories will remain.

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:17): It is an honour to support Ms Crozier’s motion today. On behalf of the government I convey our sincere condolences to Ms Crozier and her family but also take the opportunity to acknowledge the enormous contribution of Mr Digby Crozier to the state of Victoria. As we have heard, from serving in the navy, as a councillor, as a member for Western Province and then as the member for Portland, this is an enormous legacy that he leaves to the Victorian community. Ms Crozier’s contribution was beautiful and personal, and we really got an insight into the man that her father was. He would be very

proud of you. It was lovely to hear you speak of how proud you were of him, and I am sure he would reciprocate that. His contributions to public life will leave an enduring mark on those he served and particularly his connection to his local community, which we heard really shone through. I do pay my respects to the Crozier families; obviously their connection to the Parliament runs deep across multiple generations. On behalf of the government, I again extend my condolences and commend Ms Crozier for her heartfelt contribution and indeed for carrying on the legacy of her father in this place.

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:19): I rise on behalf of my Greens colleagues to offer our sincere and deep condolences to Ms Crozier and her family and community on the passing of her beloved dad and revered family member, the Honourable Digby Crozier. It is clear that he led a life of service in local government, the state Parliament and state government – in Parliament between 1973 and 1988, holding a range of portfolios and shadow portfolios. It is clear he was revered as a good friend, a loyal colleague and a loved family member, and it is a testament to the legacy of a life that this affection is reflected so strongly in those who speak about him that knew him so well. Perhaps it is our most enduring legacy: if we live a full life to where we are revered as beloved, it is perhaps the greatest achievement that we can all hope to achieve. Our best wishes go to you, Ms Crozier, your family and your community on the passing of your beloved dad.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:20): I am honoured to associate myself with this motion, and I think the whole of the Liberal Party and the National Party are too. I concur with the Leader of the Government's point that Ms Crozier's contribution was heartfelt and unique in the sense that she obviously has that deep connection across the parliaments, across the time, to this place through her father.

I did not know Digby Crozier well – I only met him a small number of times and briefly – but his reputation was very well known and very well understood. He was a gentleman, as has been said; a person of intellect; and a person with whom people in the party and more broadly in the community could engage. His contribution at the community level, at council, his military service, his international view through his education and his important contribution as a minister in both chambers of the Parliament as both the member for Portland and a member for Western Province is a very unusual heritage and something that I think the family can and should be very proud of. Ms Crozier should also be very proud of that contribution. As she singled out, energy policy was a particular area of interest of his. The work that was done to strengthen Victoria's energy position through those years in the late 1970s and early 1980s is something that will stand as testament to his work and the work of the Hamer government and the Thompson government, but the Hamer government in particular.

Digby Crozier was a person who was prepared to engage across the Parliament, a person who was prepared to work with all sides of this chamber and the community to achieve better outcomes. I say to the Crozier family: I think you can be particularly proud. There is a heritage here, and Georgie continues that with great erudition. What will stand as testament for Digby is his very strong principled position, his strong engagement across the community and the Parliament and his enormous contributions on some key policy areas, particularly energy policy. All on this side are very honoured to have had any association with him, as a number of us did, however brief that may have been.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:23): I am pleased on behalf of the Nationals to put my name to the condolence motion honouring a former minister in both this place and the Assembly, the Honourable Digby Crozier. We pass our sincere condolences to his broader family, to son John and daughters Georgie and Annabel and to his grandchildren and friends who are here today, and of course he is reunited with his wife and son. I suspect only a handful of people know how Georgie feels today, because it is most unusual to follow in the footsteps of a parent who has been in Parliament, and it is a unique position that they had been both in the upper and lower houses.

From reading and doing a little bit of research on your father, Georgie, going into the navy and having that strong discipline and intelligence to carry forth a career not only as a local councillor but as a minister in both this place and the Assembly is no mean feat. I reflect on his love and understanding

of the regions and his significant expertise in holding down those very important portfolios of state development, decentralisation and tourism; local government; and minerals and energy. And of course he was also Shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services. In doing a little bit of homework on Mr Crozier, I read an article from the *Sunday Telegraph*. This captures a lot of things that we also feel, but he said it very well. It is headed 'The way I cope with the critics', referring to the criticism that we receive in this place. It reads:

Mr Crozier, the most maligned politician in the state, this week exclusively revealed his secret for survival.

This malignment was due to the fact that he was catapulted into the spotlight for sacking the Melbourne City Council in his portfolio of local government. There are some questions and discussions that we might be able to have on that at a later stage. The article goes on to say:

His no-nonsense approach to politics has ruffled feathers in the garden State but earned the respect of supporters and opponents alike.

It quotes Digby as having said:

Politics is by its nature hard, and ... long running controversy must take some personal toll.

He talked about the way he kept fit as being a really important focus for mental health, but also he talked about balance:

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

I want to leave parliament in good health after accomplishing projects for the people and I intend to do so.

In summing up, I had a conversation with Pat McNamara – and a conversation with Pat McNamara involves a lot of listening, which I did very dutifully. This is the understanding I learned about Digby: Digby Crozier was a gentleman, a thoroughly decent person, well spoken, well dressed and an MP who enriched Parliament. When agreements were made, they were honoured. He was a man who represented and contributed to his local community, and as a minister of the Crown in state Parliament, one for others to emulate. He was a man who set the bar high in who he was, in how he conducted himself and in how he represented his constituents and Victoria. And as a minister he always kept his word.

In conclusion, my father died over 30 years ago, and when I stand in a place where I know he stood, it gives me comfort and connection to his memory. Georgie, your father – Crozier family, your father – stood in this place. He debated in this place, and he passed legislation that thousands of Victorians benefited from. I hope that the sense of his presence in the walls and in the columns gives you comfort and connection over the many months ahead.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:27): I too rise today to speak on the condolence motion for the late Honourable Digby Glen Crozier, former state MP, government minister, farmer, veteran and proud Liberal.

Digby will be remembered as a man who lived a life of service. At age 18 he enlisted and served in the Royal Australian Navy, and in 1954 he served in the Australian military forces. From 1965 to 1973 he was a councillor in the Glenelg shire, serving as its president from 1967 to 68, followed by 15 years of distinct public service in the Victorian Parliament as a member for Western Province from 1973 to 1985 and later as the member for Portland from 1985 to 1988. Digby served in several ministerial portfolios, notably as Minister for Minerals and Energy, Minister of Mines, Minister for Local Government and Minister of Tourism. Digby was a man ahead of his time. In 1983 he warned about the harms of prohibition of the nuclear industry, because he was worried about limiting future energy options. He was absolutely right.

Digby was a highly respected and widely regarded member of the Victorian Parliament and an outstanding citizen of western Victoria. I was honoured to know him, and my husband Stewart and I

send our condolences and deepest sympathy to my parliamentary colleague Georgie Crozier and the broader Crozier family and to his many friends and colleagues who will mourn his passing.

**The PRESIDENT:** To indicate the motion being agreed to, I ask members to signify their assent by rising in their place for 1 minute's silence.

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

**The PRESIDENT:** As a further mark of respect, the house will adjourn for 1 hour.

**Sitting suspended 12:31 pm until 1:33 pm.**

### *Bills*

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

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

#### *Royal assent*

**The PRESIDENT (12:34):** I have received a message from the Governor, dated 13 March:

The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the undermentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Council:

**7/2024** Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Act 2024

**8/2024** Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Act 2024

### *Questions without notice and ministers statements*

#### **Immigration detention**

**David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:34):** (461) My question is to the Attorney-General. I refer to the 149 former foreign detainees, 37 of whom were sex offenders and some of whom have been knowingly released by the federal government into Victoria. Attorney, I ask very simply: were you informed in detail by the federal government about the 40 detainees who were released into Victoria, and if so, how and on what date?

**Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:35):** I thank Mr Davis for his question. No.

**David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:35):** I ask the minister therefore: can you inform the house how many of these 40 foreign detainees released into Victoria are criminals?

**Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:35):** Mr Davis, I do not have that information, but as you have outlined in your question, this is a matter for the AFP. They consult heavily with VicPol in the management of any of these types of issues, and in my role as Attorney there is limited crossover.

### **Housing**

**Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (13:36):** (462) My question is for the Minister for Housing. 26 Dunlop Avenue, Ascot Vale, forms part of the government's public housing renewal program. This was public land where no public housing was rebuilt and where residents in the private housing are already starting to experience significant problems. Grace Bell, a resident, has found that her brand new affordable home has a plethora of problems, including mould growth, dampness, cracks in the roof and tap water that may be unsafe to drink. Grace's housing provider has ignored every request for these issues to be rectified, and Homes Victoria made thinly veiled threats about Grace's housing

tenure. This has left Grace with no choice but to move to an Airbnb and pursue the matter in VCAT, creating significant stress for Grace, who lives with a disability. Grace reports that her neighbours are facing similar issues but are too afraid to raise the matter with their housing providers for fear of eviction. Minister, will you intervene and rectify the issues at 26 Dunlop Avenue, Ascot Vale?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (13:36): Thank you, Dr Ratnam, for that question. I am not familiar with the details of the matter that you have raised. Again, as I have invited members in this place and indeed your colleagues in the other place to do, I am very happy if you want to approach me directly. As the matter is before VCAT, I am not going to make any comments in relation to the progress of that matter. That should not come as a surprise to you, Dr Ratnam. For us to seek to intervene in a proceeding that you have brought to this place with what can only be an incomplete picture of events and assertions made by you and not directly by the person involved means that it would be at its highest irresponsible of me to be making commitments in the terms that you are seeking before the chamber today. Dr Ratnam, if you do have general matters that you wish to raise, rather than what appears to be a very broadbrush approach to concerns held for other residents, then please feel free to talk with me about them rather than saying that you are seeking an intervention in the legal process currently on foot.

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:38): Thank you, Minister, for your response. I am surprised that you have not heard of the issues at Ascot Vale, because we have heard from a number of residents who are having very similar issues and I thought you would be monitoring the situation quite closely. Grace's situation is showing us what happens when private developers are left in charge of housing vulnerable and low-income people. She was turned away from the housing registrar, who says affordable housing does not fall under their remit. Homes Victoria, the National Affordable Housing Consortium, the tenancy manager and the estate agent have all failed to support Grace. They have passed the buck or simply ignored her. We have already heard from many public and community housing residents about the dismal state they are being left in due to a backlog of maintenance requests, and now it seems these issues are plaguing affordable housing tenants too. If this is the future of affordable housing built around this state, we should all be very concerned. Minister, you have failed to release the social housing regulation review and the government's response two years after it was completed, and while we wait, residents are falling through the cracks. Minister, which body is responsible for holding affordable housing providers to account?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (13:39): Dr Ratnam, I find it curious that the preamble to your supplementary question goes on to allude to an assertion that Homes Victoria is not responsible for the particular matter that you have raised here, and I would seek, out of an abundance of caution, that you are aware of the way in which the housing portfolio operates and the work that is undertaken within this portfolio. Again, I cannot speak to the matter that you have raised because you have not provided me with sufficient detail to be able to do so on my feet. It would perhaps have been a better use of your time to approach me before this particular process in question time to actually talk about the fact that affordable housing is covered by a range of different portfolios. There is an element of affordable housing within the social housing portfolio, for which I am responsible, but I cannot say whether it falls within this portfolio or not. Again, I am really happy to take this offline and to perhaps make a bit better use of the time that you have got here in the chamber.

**Ministers statements: Natalie Rabey and Phil Carswell**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (13:40): I rise today to honour two exceptional members of our communities. The late Natalie Rabey, who was chair of the Ashburton Ashwood Chadstone Public Tenants Group, sadly passed away two weeks ago. Since 2005 this group has worked really hard to represent the needs of local renters, providing free advice and assistance and running the popular annual event Public and Proud, which has brought public housing community members together. In 2017 Natalie and the AAC tenants group won the Frances Penington Award for social housing volunteering. Natalie was also a

long-time board member of the Victorian Public Tenants Association, sat on the board of several neighbourhood houses and frequently participated in broader public consultation, including the recent statewide public housing consultative committee for public housing residents. Natalie was dedicated in her advocacy for public housing tenants and community involvement, and she will be remembered for her tireless efforts to help those in need. My condolences to all of her family, friends and colleagues and indeed the broader community and those who were touched by Natalie's advocacy and passion throughout her life.

In the equality portfolio I rise to pay tribute to the late and wonderful Phil Carswell. Phil passed away on 17 March, leaving behind a remarkable legacy for our LGBTIQ+ communities. Phil was a trailblazer; a community advocate; a campaigner for AIDS prevention across government, political and community sectors for more than 40 years; and the founding president of Thorne Harbour Health, formerly the Victorian AIDS Council. Phil was, quite simply, a pioneer in exceptionally difficult circumstances. He was the first openly gay man employed by the Victorian health department to support AIDS prevention and an inaugural member of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. He was awarded the Order of Australia in 2015 for his dedication to public health, particularly for people living with HIV. He was steadfast in his commitment to these particular passions of his and advocated staunchly for equality. My condolences to his husband Ian, his friends, his family, his colleagues at Thorne Harbour Health and beyond and anyone who was lucky enough to connect with him.

#### Director of Public Prosecutions

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:42): (463) My question is again to the Attorney-General. Attorney, I refer to the now regular referrals by the Director of Public Prosecutions of respected judges to the judicial college and ask: does the Attorney-General concede that judicial independence is inevitably compromised when an activist DPP is in a position to threaten judges who may criticise a prosecution case, or simply a judge she dislikes, with referral to the judicial college?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:43): First of all, I think it is disgraceful that you would reflect on the DPP in the manner in which you have. Also, you have got your facts wrong. I do not think there has been a complaint made to the judicial college – that I am aware of – because they do not actually have any responsibility for accepting complaints because they are an education body. I assume you are referring to the judicial commission.

Obviously I am aware of the complaints; they have been well ventilated. One of those judges has resigned. The commission has to cease the investigation because they are the rules as they currently stand. I understand that in relation to the other complaint that has been public that is an investigation that is ongoing. I do not know about any other existing complaints, but I think that when we as leaders make statements that discourage people from making complaints, that is a really dangerous path for us to be on. I endorse the Law Institute of Victoria's statements which raised concerns about criticism about anybody making a complaint about inappropriate conduct or any conduct at all. The fact that you describe somebody as 'respected' – I have the title of 'Honourable'; I do not even really like the title, but that does not entitle me to be protected because I have a title. If I have done something wrong, a complaint should be made about me, and that should be the same for judges. I do not care who makes the complaint. If you have an experience with the court – whether you are the DPP, a member of the OPP or a junior barrister – you should not be discouraged from raising those complaints with the appropriate forum, which is the judicial commission.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:45): I therefore ask: does the Attorney-General have full confidence in the DPP given her now regular referral of judges to the judicial commission, sometimes secretly?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:45): Full confidence.

**Medicinal cannabis**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:45): (464) My question is for the Minister for Health, Minister Thomas in the other place. This March is Endometriosis Awareness Month, a time when we are encouraged to talk about endometriosis, the pain it causes and how we can support those living with it. Slowly but surely, endometriosis is getting the attention it deserves. Currently this government is supporting Deakin researchers to explore the potential use of medicinal cannabis for pain management in people with endometriosis instead of addictive and harmful opioids. Medicinal cannabis could be the answer to pain from endometriosis and so many other health conditions. So my question is: will the minister make it easier for patients who would otherwise be prescribed opioids to have the option to instead receive medicinal cannabis?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (13:46): I thank Ms Payne for her question, and I will be very happy to pass that along to the Minister for Health for a written response in accordance with the standing orders.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:46): I thank the minister for the referral. By way of supplementary, every single one of the 63 participants in the three-month-long trial will be unable to drive simply because they are medicinal cannabis patients. They are sacrificing their time to help improve government-supported endometriosis research. They will be constantly monitored and taking their medicine as prescribed, yet this government continues to ignore the research and discriminate against medicinal cannabis patients in a way that is unique from every other prescribed medication. Will the minister commit to ensuring that medicinal cannabis patients in medical studies such as these are empowered with medical exemptions to allow them to drive safely?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (13:47): I will also pass along Ms Payne’s supplementary question for a written answer.

**Ministers statements: South Sudanese Australian community**

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (13:47): I rise today to update the house on the Allan Labor government’s ongoing commitment to and investment in early intervention and diversion programs that make us all safer. An important part of this is supporting our vibrant South Sudanese Australian community, including young people, through the latest round of the South Sudanese Australian community grants program. In the upcoming financial year we will be allocating a further \$400,000 towards projects designed to address the challenges faced by our South Sudanese Australians and provide them with a positive pathway. We are doing this in partnership with local community organisations, helping to develop their capacity and to improve their communities.

This round of grant funding will ensure that crucial initiatives continue to thrive and make a real difference in the lives of our young people. We will be providing funding to organisations that have shown tremendous success to date, such as the African Youth Initiative, Nas Recovery Centre, NextGen Unite and Stand Out Youth Empowerment. These organisations have already engaged almost 500 South Sudanese Australian young people, and this funding will help them reach even more. We are committed to working closely with these organisations to build the sustainability and effectiveness of these programs. That includes providing essential training for these community organisations to ensure they can make the best use of the resources provided to them.

As Minister for Youth Justice I remain steadfast in our commitment to the wellbeing and empowerment of all young South Sudanese Australians. Together we can build a future filled with promise, opportunity and prosperity for all youth, whatever their background. Tackling the root cause of offending at the early stage is a key part of keeping the community safe, and as a government we will always prioritise this.

**TAFE funding**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (13:49): (465) My question is to the Minister for Skills and TAFE. Why won't the minister divulge the number of students who have completed a free TAFE course in the five years since the introduction of free TAFE?

*Members interjecting.*

**Gayle Tierney** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (13:49): Yes, it is five years. It was 'Happy birthday' last parliamentary sitting week. I have received a number of questions, and I believe that I have answered these questions. The fact of the matter is, and I will repeat it again, that there have been completion rates that are 10 points above the national average in terms of certificate IV and diplomas. In terms of the completion rates that you continue to be obsessed with, they are in relation to certificates I and II. Again, for the sake of those that just are refusing to listen and to hear, the fact is that certificates I and II mainly deal with preapprenticeships to give kids an opportunity, a taste as to what it might be like if they did take that next step and undertake an apprenticeship. It is for things like English language –

**Evan Mulholland**: On a point of order, President, on relevance, the question was very narrow. The minister was asked how many completions there have been.

**The President**: I will bring the minister back to the question.

**Gayle Tierney**: Thank you. I believe I am answering this, because what the opposition is attempting to do is to conflate and mislead the house. What they are really wanting to do is to say that certificate I and II completions lead to jobs, and we have already said that that is not necessarily the case. What it does is it leads to further study. We are very proud of what we have been able to do in this area. 157,500 Victorians have enrolled in free TAFE, and we know that the completion rates, particularly at the higher end of the AQF level, have been very high and are in line with university retention rates.

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (13:51): Is the minister refusing to provide the number of course completions because the numbers do not look good for the government and free TAFE?

**Gayle Tierney** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (13:52): Absolutely not.

**Animal welfare**

**Georgie Purcell** (Northern Victoria) (13:52): (466) My question is for the Attorney-General. An explosive investigation from Farm Transparency Project aired on the 7.30 program last week. It revealed a 30-year-old man had been charged with bestiality involving a pig at Midland Bacon in northern Victoria. This man clearly committed multiple forms of sexual abuse in the vision; however, only his final act of penetration is considered illegal. Currently in Victoria the definition of bestiality is shockingly weak and does not capture all forms of sexual abuse against animals. Last year I asked the government to update our bestiality laws to be consistent with states such as New South Wales and Tasmania and ban any act of sexual contact with animals. In light of this evidence, will the government now finally do it?

**Jaelyn Symes** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:53): I thank Ms Purcell for her question. I will refrain from reflecting on an individual case, but obviously and appropriately acts of bestiality are illegal in Victoria and covered under the Crimes Act. I am aware of the issues that you raised previously, and you have cited an example today. I am certainly open to ways that we can more appropriately respond to this behaviour through the Crimes Act.

**Georgie Purcell** (Northern Victoria) (13:53): Thank you, Attorney, for your response. We know that there are people not only committing these sexual acts on animals but watching them too. Over 3000 sadistic videos of this material are for sale in Australia, including videos of the crushing to



death, burning, drowning and impaling of kittens, puppies, baby chicks, ducklings, pigs and rabbits. An open-source investigation revealed Victorians are consumers of these sexually perverted videos on dark web pornography sites and crush-specific websites. It is impossible to know just how big the problem is, but we certainly know that it exists. Will the government also make illegal the production, dissemination and possession of bestiality and crush materials?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:54): Ms Purcell, I appreciate you bringing this to my attention and your call for action. I cannot go as far as giving you a firm commitment about exactly how to address this, but it is repugnant. We should act, and I am pretty happy to work with you on ways that we can address the concerns that you have raised.

#### **Ministers statements: early childhood education**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (13:54): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's continued commitment to offering children the best start in life. This week is National Playgroup Week, a week all about celebrating and promoting the benefits of playgroups for children, families and communities. I was thrilled to visit the Maidstone Child and Family Centre yesterday for their National Playgroup Week celebration. Families from multiple local supported playgroups, as well as community playgroups, were in attendance, and it was fantastic to join in their celebrations, particularly the dancing. Parents spoke to me about the benefits playgroup sessions are having for their families.

Every year our government invests more than \$11 million to enable around 17,000 parents and their preschoolers to attend supported playgroups in 79 local government areas across the state, with local councils like Maribyrnong being the main providers. At supported playgroups children from birth to school age and their parents enjoy a range of fun play opportunities and activities. Parents also find out about the local services and support networks that exist in their community.

Supported playgroups are an evidence-based approach developed by the Parenting Research Centre through an \$8 million Victorian government investment. They are proven to improve outcomes for children, to support parents and to strengthen the early home learning environment for families, in particular those who are experiencing a form of disadvantage. Some sessions are delivered in language, and there is an opportunity for parents to practise strategies in their own homes with one-on-one coaching. The workers even spoke to me about the strategies that they have developed with families who may intermittently attend these playgroups and how they can teach them in their own homes to play and learn with their children.

There is no more important job than getting children off to a great start in life. Our world-class program, developed right here in Victoria, allows parents to help their babies and toddlers to develop language, forge social skills and become engaged and immersed in the world around them. The Allan Labor government is proud to give parents the help that they need close to home and when they need it through supported playgroups in places like the wonderful Maidstone Child and Family Centre.

#### **TAFE funding**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:57): (467) My question is to the Minister for Skills and TAFE. Victorian TAFEs have been the worst funded in the country for almost a decade. While class sizes have increased, student learning time has been cut from courses and teacher preparation time has been reduced, conditions the Productivity Commission marks down as inefficient. What does the government plan to do to increase the efficiency in vocational education and training?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (13:57): Again, I refute what has been alleged on a number of levels in the question, but in terms of what this government has been doing in relation to building a skills and training system

in this state, which was left in ruin by the previous government, is for everyone to see. What we have been able to do is invest in capital. There is hardly a TAFE campus right across this state that has not been rebuilt or significantly refurbished. We have also of course hired significant numbers of TAFE teachers – the TAFEs have done that – as opposed to what those opposite did, where they sacked over 2000 teachers.

We have also made sure that what is being taught is a lot more relevant to students, and teachers are reaping the benefit of that too because they can see the relevance of their professionalism at work every day. We are making sure that we have got a very effective system that delivers the skills that are required in the labour market. We are making sure that teachers are assured that the TAFE system will continue to be effective, and of course we have the election commitment that 70 per cent of government funding will be directed towards the TAFE system. This is a government that is very serious about the structure and the system of a skills system in this state that delivers the skills that are required not just for the economy but for the individual and provides individuals with qualifications that act as a passport for jobs and careers into their future. We are really, really proud of what we have been able to do. I think it is just another case, getting all these questions, that they have not given up their agenda. They continue to despise TAFE, and they are not interested in vocational education and training in this state.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:59): Will the minister for TAFE ensure that student learning time, teacher preparation time and appropriate class sizes are restored in TAFE courses?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (14:00): Well, I am certainly not going to restore it to the level it was when those opposite were in government. What we are about is making sure that we have got good, fair, healthy workplaces where people are contributing in terms of the delivery of their skills and their intellect and that the education that is delivered is of a very high standard. We will continue to do that. It is in our DNA. It is certainly not in the DNA of those opposite.

#### **Drug harm reduction**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:00): (468) My question today is to the Minister for Mental Health. I think we all watched with concern as many festivals and events took place recently over that extremely hot Labour Day weekend. As you are no doubt aware, there were multiple serious suspected drug overdoses and hospitalisations across these events, and tragically one young man has died. In the light of so many drug overdoses at festivals in just these first few months of this year, what will you do to reduce drug harm at music festivals in our state beyond what you are doing now?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (14:01): I thank Mr Puglielli for his question. At the outset can I offer my condolences to the family of that young man. I cannot imagine the heartbreak that they are dealing with right now, and my heart goes out to the family and the loved ones of that young man. I do want to just caution the member, though, in respect to attributing any cause of death in this circumstance, because it is not for any one of us in here to do that. This is a matter that is being referred to the coroner for investigation, and it is important that we let that process take its course.

Of course the government is very concerned to ensure that our investments and our policy settings are going to have the most impact when it comes to harm minimisation. We have demonstrated that through our record investment in alcohol and drug services right across the state, including a program that I know that the member is very well aware of, DanceWize, which is about making sure that people understand the inherent risks associated with taking drugs but also takes a very educative framework out to our festivals and our major events throughout the year.

I think it is really important to note also that extreme heat can be an additional risk factor, and the Department of Health does issue from time to time, where they see it as appropriate, warnings about heat stress and how that can interact with taking particular forms of illicit drugs.

As the member is aware, the government has consistently indicated that at this point in time we are not looking to change our settings, but we have sought additional advice from the Department of Health, particularly in light of some of the issues that have arisen during this festival season. We will continue to take that expert health advice about how we can do everything we can to minimise the risk for all Victorians. We want people to be able to participate in our very rich festival season, but we want them to do it safely, and we will continue to be really focused on how best to achieve that outcome.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:04): I thank the minister for her response. The minister referred to DanceWize in her contribution just now, an organisation that was very active during the weekend I referred to in my substantive question. By way of supplementary, I begin by acknowledging that DanceWize do amazing work, mainly off the back of volunteers. They need a significant funding boost if they are to be able to do more. While we are talking DanceWize, I have seen this personally at music festivals: people will approach DanceWize volunteers, asking them if they can test their drugs. I know that you have been seeking advice on these matters, as you referred to in your contribution just now, so in relation to this advice, when will you report back and offer this government's response?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (14:05): I thank Mr Puglielli for his supplementary question. In relation to the funding that the government provides the DanceWize program, it is quite significant. It is \$21 million for that program, so I do not think it is completely accurate to describe it as a volunteer-based program. It does of course have really dedicated volunteers involved in the program, but it is also provided with support from the government so that it can undertake its important work. In terms of the question around when we will report back on the advice, I am not in a position to give any indication about a time frame today. What I can say is we understand the seriousness of the issues. We are working assiduously with our department on those matters, and we will take that advice. When the government has considered that advice I will provide the response accordingly.

#### **Ministers statements: WorldSkills competition**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (14:06): I rise to update the house on a significant achievement for some of Victoria's top apprentices, trainees and students. Twelve Victorians have been selected to represent Australia at the WorldSkills international competition. This is a fantastic achievement, as students and their teachers are recognised for their incredible skills, hard work and dedication. As members of Team Australia, commonly called the Skillaroos, they will join 1500 participants from over 75 countries in France this September. Over four days, competitors will complete practical tasks set by industry and skills experts, who will assess their knowledge, competence and employability skills, competing against and learning from the best of the best. From traditional trades, such as plumbing and carpentry, to emerging industries, including cloud computing, mechatronics and graphic design technology, Victoria is producing the top apprentices and trainees in these fields.

Victoria proudly hosted the WorldSkills national championships in Melbourne last year, and I had the pleasure of meeting so many incredible skilled and young Victorians. This included Star, who will be representing Australia in 3D digital game art, and Gervase, who is Australia's first representative in the category of additive manufacturing. Talking to Star and Gervase, their passion, skill and dedication for their trades was undeniable. I am so pleased that they will get to join 10 fellow Victorians in shining on an international stage. This is further proof that Victoria's vocational education sector is delivering world-class skills. Congratulations to our Victorian Skillaroos. I hope that they bring home the medals, and of course there will be lots of hard work leading into the competition at Lyon.

**Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (14:08): I thank Minister Stitt, who will get both the supplementary and the substantive answers for Ms Payne from the Minister for Health.

*Constituency questions*

**Eastern Victoria Region**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:08): (743) My question is for the Minister for Planning in the other place. Eastern Victoria's identity is strongly linked to the natural environment, especially along its coastal areas. These coasts are home to beautiful beaches and stunning national parks and are amazing places to live, work and explore. Last Friday I attended the Mornington Peninsula shire's coastal round table at Safety Beach. This event, organised by Cr Sarah Race, was a fantastic opportunity to hear how governments and industry are preparing for future challenges to our coastal environment. Mayors and councillors from right along Victoria's coastal councils were there, including our Eastern Victoria shire councils of South Gippsland, Wellington, East Gippsland and of course Mornington Peninsula. I want to thank Cr Sarah Race and the Mornington Peninsula shire for organising the event to discuss the important issue. Sea level rise will impact insurance costs, the frequency of and damage from severe weather, land values and where new homes should be built, and we need to be prepared to mitigate and adapt to these effects. Minister, how is the Victorian government ensuring that our coastal communities remain resilient well into the future?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:09): (744) My matter concerns a property development inside Southern Metro, at 173 Burke Road, Glen Iris, for the attention of the Minister for Planning. The Minister for Planning has got in place a development facilitation program, and in this case a group, Glen Iris Devco Pty Ltd, have put in an application on the land around 173 Burke Road, Glen Iris. It was dealt with by the Stonnington council and by VCAT. On 9 May 2022, less than a year after the initial application, VCAT affirmed the council's decision to refuse a planning permit. There has been no undue delay, no concern with the process, but now the government is using a speeded development process to override effectively the council and the court decision. So I ask the minister to intervene to make sure that the court's position is upheld and not undermined.

**Western Metropolitan Region**

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (14:10): (745) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My constituent lives on the Mambourin estate in Wyndham Vale and is very concerned about the total lack of lighting on the overpass on Black Forest Road. There is in fact zero lighting. The overpass is one of the two main entry points to the estate, and the fact that it is pitch black at night makes it dangerous for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists alike, but with an added element of creepiness for pedestrians. So my constituent asks: when will the minister provide urgent funding to install lighting on the overpass?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:11): (746) My question is to the Minister for Planning. It is in relation to the Barak Road housing project. Last week I met with residents in Barak Road. They live next to the site of the redevelopment of the Barak Beacon estate – part of the government's Big Housing Build. They conveyed a number of concerns about the handling of this project, highlighting a lack of consultation with them, including in relation to density and height limits. They have pointed out that these towers are very large and will be quite significant in that area. They also referred to the removal of trees, the provision of playgrounds and recreation spaces and the traffic flow and pedestrian safety, and they fear the loss of amenity of the neighbourhood as well as the impact on the heritage status of their homes – they have a heritage overlay with which they have to comply. Residents have described walking past the site when workers in hazmat suits were spraying water to

settle asbestos dust as a result of the demolition works only last week. This project will have a significant impact on the local neighbourhood, and locals' feedback has not been considered. So I ask the minister to meet with the local residents of Barak Road as a matter of urgency.

#### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:12): (747) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. I raise again the plight of the Pavilion School, in my electorate, which supports at-risk students to re-engage with education. The school desperately needs to expand so they can assist the 40 students who are languishing on their waitlist without somewhere to go to school. Thank you, Minister, for your previous responses on this matter, but unfortunately the issues have not been remedied by the government's actions to date. The school continues to be underfunded and in urgent need of more space. There is plenty of unused, spare land near them at Melbourne Polytechnic, but it is estimated to cost \$6.9 million to develop. The school is already struggling to pay rent, and the department has refused to help with any expansion plans. This is despite having funded expansions of similar schools in Richmond and Brunswick. The Pavilion School is vital for students around Epping who would otherwise be without access to school. Minister, will you fund the Pavilion School sustainably and give them funding to expand?

#### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:13): (748) My constituency question is directed towards the Minister for Environment and concerns illegal dumping of rubbish in the northern suburbs, which is rife in my community, particularly the outer suburbs. People contact me exasperated that seemingly nothing is done about it by either the local council, government entities responsible for the sites or the state government. A stark example of illegal rubbish dumping is a water-filling station on Mount Ridley Road in Craigieburn. It is consistently used as a dumping ground for all manner of household waste. Many locals believe it should be fenced off by the state government so that it is not used as a free tip. While locals do not believe it adds to any local amenity, I am sure it is enjoyed by a large number of rats. Will the minister investigate fencing off the site at Mount Ridley Road in Craigieburn, and what is the government doing to stop disgusting run-off into waterways and creeks in the northern suburbs?

#### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:14): (749) My question today is to the Minister for Education. Satria Arbai is Maroondah's Young Citizen of the Year for 2024. He is a young person who lives with cerebral palsy and who has embarked on a mission to create a more inclusive environment for everyone with a disability by helping people become better allies for people with disabilities. One of his goals this year is to educate as many people as he can on what they can do to create a more inclusive environment for everyone with a disability. He is looking to run workshops on disability inclusion and specifically wants to focus on schools and educating students and staff about disability and about inclusion. My question is: what is the best way for Satria to get involved in delivering disability inclusion work within our state school system?

#### Western Victoria Region

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (14:15): (750) My constituency matter is for the attention of the Treasurer, and it is on behalf of a resident who lives in Linton in my electorate. My constituent raised with me a concern they got with a land tax notice recently. In essence, they have got a property and the property is split into two titles: one title is essentially the house and the other is essentially the garden. They have received a land tax bill of nearly \$1000 just to have a garden. It seems completely bizarre, but that is the truth of the matter: my constituent is being taxed to have a garden. My question to the Treasurer is: I ask the Treasurer to review these arrangements to ensure that these sorts of matters are not caught up in land tax, so that we can have a fair and equitable system for all and so that people are not charged tax just for having a garden or any other sort of ancillary item adjacent to their property.

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (14:16): (751) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. I represent Northern Victoria, where residents have raised concern about the devastating impact of the proposed VNI West overhead transmission lines, which will impact families, businesses and local communities. As Victoria's population and demand for electricity continue to grow, along with an ever-increasing state debt, it is critical that the government spend money on projects that will achieve the best outcome and long-term value for money. Last year the minister made a commitment to review the proposal put forward by energy specialists Professor Bruce Mountain, Simon Bartlett and Darren Edwards, which presents an alternative plan to the costly VNI West route. Their plan B uses existing easements to maximise electricity transmission and increase capacity. The government was to provide a response to this report last October. Securing Victoria's energy supplies is critical, and I ask the minister to deliver on their response to the report and urgently share the findings of the government's review.

**Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:17): (752) My question is for the Minister for Environment and concerns his appalling decision to abolish control of wild dogs and dingoes in north-western Victoria. My constituents, especially in the wool-producing heartland of the south-west, are shocked. This retrograde choice will take us back to the bad old days of savage attacks, huge stock losses and financial and mental anguish for the farmers, who just want to protect and raise their sheep. How short are our memories? Wild dog control programs were introduced little more than a decade ago in response to truly traumatic circumstances. It is despicable this decision was taken without consulting farmers whose livelihoods depend on their animals. Minister, will you release the research underpinning this decision, tell us who sits on the unprotection review panel and assure my constituents that this desperate stupidity will be extended no further?

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:18): (753) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Minister, netball players at the Kyneton Football Netball Club have no dedicated change facilities and are currently forced to change in a sheep shed that has mould on the walls, has no showers and is infested with rats. A master plan for the redevelopment of the facilities at the Kyneton showgrounds has been adopted by the Macedon Ranges council, but I am informed that unfortunately an objection has been lodged with VCAT. Minister, even if VCAT rules in favour of the master plan, that will not assist the netballers this season, and it is possible that the redevelopment could be several seasons away from completion. Poor change facilities are often a barrier to young females' participation in sport, and we must do everything we can to encourage their involvement. Minister, will you provide funding for a temporary portable change facility that will service the netballers until the redevelopment is completed and that could be then used to assist other clubs as they work towards the redevelopment of their own change facilities?

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:19): (754) My question is to the minister for sport, and I ask: will the government provide the additional funding for a custom-built gymnasium and subsidise the rent required by CYC Gymsports, home of the Cheltenham Youth Club, in order to prevent the club from being forced to close as the club's projected rent is said to be increasing by \$100,000 per year very soon? The club, which has been in operation since 1956, championed Commonwealth Games gold and silver medallists and Olympic medal gymnastic hopefuls like Kate McDonald and world age-group trampoline champion Brock Batty. Seventy-five per cent of the club's members are women, 98 per cent are under 18 and 77 per cent live in Kingston. The gym facilities are used by local schools, and it employs 45 staff and coaches. Additional funding is needed to provide the minimum roof height of 10 metres, a suitable viewing area for parents and additional parking and peak-hour drop-off.

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:20): (755) My constituency question is for the minister for sport. Promoting recreational boating and angling, the Corinella Boating & Angling Club has over 220 members. With no clubhouse, president Murray Wannan and his committee have for years worked hard to bring this project to fruition. The club has already invested \$45,000 on plans, permits and approvals, and the Bass Coast shire has been assisting the club with grants and also by making a financial contribution. But it is going to cost around \$750,000. Labor provided an election commitment of \$200,000, but there is a shortfall of around \$410,000. This overdue facility is not just for the boating and angling club, it would serve as a broad community club and facility. So will the minister provide an additional \$410,000 in the upcoming budget?

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:21): (756) My question is directed to the Minister for Creative Industries. Last week I was fortunate enough to attend a beginners ballet class at the Box Hill Ballet company hosted by the marvellous Jan Turner – and apparently I was a very good student. The ballerinas at Box Hill, like every other community arts organisation, should be worried that community arts funding is at risk. The Labor government have cut funding to the Melbourne Youth Orchestras, so what is next? The Minister for Creative Industries seems disinterested in arts funding and would rather quarantine a quarter of a trillion dollars for the Suburban Rail Loop. Will the minister give a guarantee that community arts groups will not be given the same treatment as the Melbourne Youth Orchestras and there will be no cuts to community arts funding?

### Western Metropolitan Region

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (14:22): (757) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police regarding the safety of my constituents in Wyndham. What I am particularly alarmed about with this matter is the continuation of repeat break-in attacks on my constituent Mr Nguyen and his home. Mr Nguyen and his family no longer feel safe, having experienced three brutal attacks on his home by the same offender. Could the minister please update my constituent on what is being done to keep his family safe? There is no restraining order, and from the recurrence of violent attacks there appear to be no bail conditions. If there are, they are not protecting him. It first happened on 17 August. The offender broke into his home and was arrested and was sentenced to a 12-month community correction order. On 16 January this year the same offender broke in again with a wooden pole and stole jewellery. The offender was arrested the following day and released on bail. On 8 March the same offender reattended whilst on bail, broke in, was arrested and was again released on bail. Can the minister please update my constituent on what is being done to make him feel safe?

### *Papers*

#### Homes Victoria

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

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (14:24): I move, by leave:

That Homes Victoria's *Project Summary: Ground Lease Model – South Yarra, Prahran, Hampton East and Port Melbourne* be tabled.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 4*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:24): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 4 of 2024, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.***Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Financial Management Act 1994 – 2023–24 Mid-Year Financial Report (incorporating Quarterly Financial Report No. 2), March 2024 (*Ordered to be published*) (*released on 8 March 2024 – a non-sitting day*).

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule No. 5 (*Gazette S122, 14 March 2024*).

Murray–Darling Basin Authority – Report, 2022–23.

Parliamentary Budget Office – Operational Plan 2024–25: Priorities and protocols.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of the –

Bass Coast Planning Scheme – Amendment C164.

Kingston Planning Scheme – Amendment C206.

Latrobe Planning Scheme – Amendment C147.

Queenscliffe Planning Scheme – Amendment C39.

Stonnington Planning Scheme – Amendments C332 and C337.

Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendment VC256.

Wyndham Planning Scheme – Amendment C268.

Yarra Planning Scheme – Amendment C323.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Legislative Instruments and related documents under section 16B in respect of Waterways Protection Model By-Law 2024 under section 287ZB of the Water Act 1989.

Proclamation of the Governor in Council fixing an operative date in respect of the following act:

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

*Petitions***Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain***Response*

**The Clerk:** I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: minister's response to petitions titled 'Stop the hydrogen energy supply project', presented by Dr Mansfield.

**Payroll tax***Response*

**The Clerk:** I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: minister's response to petition titled 'Stop the introduction of payroll tax on contractors, including doctors', presented by Ms Crozier.



**Port Melbourne public housing***Response*

**The Clerk:** I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: minister's response to petition titled 'Stop the demolition of the Barak Beacon public housing estate to save \$88 million', presented by Ms Copsey.

*Production of documents***Bus network**

**The Clerk:** I present a letter from the Attorney-General dated 15 March 2024 in response to a resolution of the Council of 6 March 2024 on the motion of Mr Luu relating to Victoria's bus network plan review. The letter states that the date for production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

*Business of the house***Notices****Notices of motion given.****General business**

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:42): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 20 March 2024:

- (1) notice of motion given this day by Georgie Purcell on wildlife rescue;
- (2) notice of motion 340, in an amended form, standing in my name, referring matters relating to public housing to the Legal and Social Issues Committee;
- (3) order of the day 8, resumption of debate on the second reading of the Human Rights and Housing Legislation Amendment (Ending Homelessness) Bill 2023;
- (4) notice of motion 339, standing in David Davis's name, relating to overdue production of documents orders;
- (5) notice of motion given this day by Georgie Crozier on budget management; and
- (6) notice of motion 268, standing in Trung Luu's name, on new rail lines to Melton and Wyndham Vale.

**Motion agreed to.***Motions***Middle East conflict**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:43): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that since the Council's resolution on 17 October 2023, which recognised Israel's 'right to defend itself', the state of Israel has deliberately bombed schools, universities, hospitals and refugee camps in Gaza;
- (2) acknowledges that since this resolution, a staggering 85 per cent of the total population of Gaza, 1.9 million civilians, have been forcibly displaced and made to evacuate by the state of Israel to areas that continue to be indiscriminately shelled by the Israel Defense Forces; and
- (3) agrees that we need an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

**Leave refused.**

*Members statements***Energy costs**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:43): Today we have seen the government release the default offer on electricity. What is clear with the default offer is that energy costs, electricity costs, are up on what they were just two or three years ago – in fact they have gone up 17 per cent, or \$240, since 1 July 2022. Announcements have been made over the last three years, and it has gone up 17 per cent, or \$240 – that is what people are paying. Bear in mind that the default offer is not the full story; that is only a relatively small number of people – around 13 or 14 per cent of Victorian domestic consumers and perhaps 20 per cent of small businesses. But what is clear is that the St Vincent de Paul and Alviss Consulting work which was done actually looked at what people were paying at the end of last year, and they found that Victorians paid the highest increases – a 28 per cent surge in the cost of electricity, a 22 per cent surge in gas. In the case of small businesses there was a very significant increase. On average it is 8 per cent higher across the rest of Australia, but 17 per cent in Victoria for small businesses. And gas bills are up a massive 31 per cent in Victoria. These costs are very significant, and they come on top of the tax and charges of this government, the huge regulations –

A member interjected.

**David DAVIS**: Actually, I tell you what, it has gone up, up – slightly there, and it is all up over that period. It is up. People are paying – (*Time expired*)

**Linda White**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:45): The death of Senator Linda White is a huge loss to Labor, the union movement and the people of Victoria. Linda died on 29 February following a short battle with cancer, tragically serving only 18 months in the Senate. Linda's impact on our state was felt over her life of dedicated service to the trade union movement, on many boards, such as ACMI, the MCG Trust and the botanic gardens, and to Labor and the federal Parliament. Her memorial service was held last Thursday at ACMI. It was full of people with stories of tears and laughter and love for Linda and all that she gave.

She was the longest serving female member of the Labor Party's national executive and was one of the few in such roles who had an utter dedication to running our party well. Linda believed that only a well-run party and one that reflected the community we sought to serve could win elections, and she was right. Labor would not have achieved gender equality in this Parliament without her efforts on affirmative action. She was a champion for female-dominated industries. She served in the Australian Services Union, securing equal pay for community sector workers. She fought for bread and for roses too. She supported our city's great cultural institutions and worked to make them more accessible and relevant to the community. We served together on the board of the Chifley Research Centre for a decade, and she never stopped thinking about where to next for Labor's ideas.

Linda was smart and fierce and loyal. She was a friend who was always just a phone call away. I will miss her dearly, as will many. Vale, comrade.

**Greta**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:47): People often say you do not appreciate what you have until it is gone, so today I rise to talk about Greta. Every morning Greta would wake the house up with a jarring bark. The time changed every day, but it was always before 7 am. Sometimes it was 5 am. Every now and then she would decide a little bit earlier that she needed breakfast and she needed it now. After she spent the majority of her life on a puppy farm, deprived of love and kindness, who was I to say no? I would set my alarm every day, but I knew I did not actually need it – I had Greta. But then Greta suddenly and unexpectedly died the night of the government's decision to not ban duck shooting.

In the days and weeks that followed, I really found myself questioning my purpose. I would wake up in the morning and ask myself 'What's the point?' I had put everything I had into something only for it

to fall apart. With that, I struggled to get out of bed, and it made me reflect on how I would have no choice at all if Greta was still around. Now I regret all of the times that her jarring bark in the morning annoyed or even angered me; I would do anything to be rattled by that sound again. These are the ways that animals give us purpose in a way we often do not realise, sometimes not until they are gone. If you have a furry member of your family, please appreciate every little moment that you have with them.

#### **Solar Homes program**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:48): Last week I had the opportunity to join the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place Minister D'Ambrosio in my community of St Kilda East, and that is where I met Shane. Shane is transitioning his home to be all electric, and he is already seeing the savings. The Solar Homes program is a \$1.3 billion program that began in August 2018, and its hot water rebate is one of the three main offers. From the \$1400 solar rebate program and the \$8800 interest-free solar battery loan, more than 20,000 Victorian households have already installed hot water heat pumps through the program. It was great to join the minister to celebrate this milestone. I want my community of Southern Metro to know that the program is offering eligible households a rebate of \$1000 towards the installation of a heat pump or solar hot-water system. I know firsthand how good these are – my house has a solar hot-water service, and the savings are real. To find out more, visit [solar.vic.gov.au](http://solar.vic.gov.au).

#### **Neighbourhood houses**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:29): Victoria has over 400 neighbourhood houses employing more than 5500 staff and 6900 volunteers. The manager of Cheltenham neighbourhood house in my electorate outlined for me the essential community services and programs that neighbourhood houses provide: addressing poverty and disadvantage, combating social isolation, and improving mental and physical health and wellbeing. As funding has not increased in real terms for many years – that is, kept pace with inflation, wages and population growth – the sector has a funding crisis. With the sharp cost-of-living crisis, there is a rapidly growing demand for food and material relief. Neighbourhood houses have stepped up, and now, unfunded, they distribute 10 tonnes of food per day across Victoria. As demand continues to rise, without urgent support they will have no choice but to start turning away people in need.

I ask the Minister for Carers and Volunteers to advocate for allocating \$18 million to the sector. This is not additional funding, it should be noted. Rather, it will reinstate funding parity that has been eroded over past years. It will fund food relief distribution, it will restore the neighbourhood house coordination program and it will continue adult and community further education programs. This is a modest ask with a great return on investment. The community value report shows that for every dollar invested neighbourhood houses return \$6.80 in community benefits. We only wish that all government expenditure returned as much.

#### **Nepalese community events**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:51): After the last sitting week I had the pleasure of joining members of the Nepalese community to celebrate Maha Shivaratri at the Australian Nepalese Multicultural Centre in Diggers Rest alongside my Liberal colleague Trung Luu. The great night of Shiva, the Maha Shivaratri, commemorates and celebrates how we can overcome darkness and ignorance in our lives and in our world. This wonderful occasion would not have been possible without the hard work of ANMC president Ghandi Bhattarai, ANMC secretary Dr Tilak Pokharel and members of the ANMC and other Nepalese community organisations, including the Nepalese Association of Victoria, the Craigieburn Nepalese community and the Doreen–Mernda Nepalese community.

One of my earliest memories as a member of Parliament is joining the Nepalese New Year celebration as we rang out the year 2080, and they did not mind as my three-year-old son tried to attack the balloons on the podium. At Australia Day earlier this year I celebrated with members of the Nepalese

community at Coburg Lake Reserve at an event organised by the Far Western Nepalese Society of Victoria – and yes, I did dance the yoda. I want to thank all my friends in the Nepalese community for once again warmly welcoming me into their festivities and into their community. I have been blessed to receive briefings on the plan for the centre. The Liberals at the 2022 election committed \$2 million for the centre, and we will keep working hard to make sure that centre receives the support it deserves.

#### **Preston Reservoir Bowls Club**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:53): Being the granddaughter of a former coach of the Australian women's lawn bowls team, I pride myself on knowing a thing or two about the sport and the clubs. So let me just say bowls clubs are some of the most important local infrastructure we have. They are not just sporting grounds; they are community hubs that bring one of the most accurate reflections of locals, and I have got to say they bring these clubs to life. Preston Reservoir Bowls Club is no different, and last Friday I was invited to speak there in support of their Save Our Bowlo campaign. The Darebin council wants to hamstring local community clubs like this with shortened leases, slowing investment and affecting the clubs in a really bad way. I just will not stand for it. Darebin needs a council that is genuinely reflective of the community interest. A big thankyou to the local community, in particular Cr Emily Dimitriadis for standing up for this club and so many in our community. You are always such a staunch advocate for Darebin residents, and I was so happy to join you on this occasion. The turnout to the campaign launch on Friday was phenomenal, from seasoned bowls professionals to new families with their kids, young people giving bowls a go for the first time – some good, some not so good – and so many others. I look forward to continuing the fight alongside the Darebin community to save our beloved bowlo.

#### **Stalking law reform**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:54): In 2020 a beautiful 23-year-old girl by the name of Celeste Manno was stabbed to death while she slept in her bed in her home, which should have been her safe space. She was murdered by an obsessed stalker, who meticulously planned her death. His planning included monitoring her movements, stalking her online and studying the floorplan of her house. Despite this he was sentenced to 30 years non-parole. By the time the sentence was handed down he had already served over 10 per cent of his sentence. This has left her grieving family tormented, knowing that he will walk the streets again. There has been no justice for Celeste. Her mother Aggie will not give up. She wants to see the 45 recommendations from the Victorian Law Reform Commission's inquiry into stalking implemented, and she wants to see tougher sentencing for murderers. So on 24 March, which is this coming Sunday, she is running a peaceful walk, not a protest, to stand against injustice. Please join us on the steps of Parliament at 12 pm on 24 March.

#### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:56): The Australian dream has always been to own your own home – somewhere the kids can play, and you can know your neighbours – and in fact the presence of a backyard and a front nature strip and plentiful sports facilities is a technology that supports stable families and good citizens. My generation inherited a way of living from our parents, and I am ashamed to say that we will struggle to pass that on to our children. Victorians want the Australian dream, but this government, through their vanity project the Suburban Rail Loop, want to take that dream away from Australians and lock future families up in high-rise apartments. The Suburban Rail Loop Authority has released property overlays that consume whole suburbs, forcing residents to sell up or accept that they will have to live next to high tower blocks. Land ownership as a dream will continue to be the preference of Australians, no matter how the government would prefer us to live. In my electorate, suburbs like Glen Waverley and Box Hill have been earmarked for radical development, and residents are rightfully scared. Labor would rather push Victorians into concrete boxes as the expedient solution to a problem that they themselves have caused. As a society we will deeply regret this. This is not the solution for the housing crisis, it is not the solution for state debt, it is not the solution to cost of living and it is not the solution for lower taxes. The SRL should and must be paused.

### **Ballarat Gold Mine**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (14:57): I rise to speak on a rather sombre and very serious matter. Last week in Ballarat there was a tragedy at the mine where a man, Mr Kurt Hourigan – he was just 37 years old – lost his life in what many people are describing as an utter tragedy. It really is a tragedy, because by all accounts he was a community man, someone that a lot of people looked up to and a colleague and a trusted friend to many. I pay tribute to all the first responders that were at the situation, dealing with Mr Hourigan, the 21-year-old that was caught under the rocks and also the 20-odd extra mineworkers that were caught underground as well, who were able to make it to one of the safety pods.

### **Ballarat community**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (14:58): It is on top of another set of circumstances around our local community – the fires, we have had Samantha Murphy and the tragedy around that and we have had tobacco stores that have been in flames through gangland wars. I say that the Ballarat community have absolutely stood together in solidarity with each other and supported each other to really show how much of a resilient community we are, despite all the challenges that we have been through. So to the Ballarat community, well done to you, and to the first responders, thank you so much. We hope that none of these tragedies happens ever again.

### **Family violence**

**Samantha Ratnam** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:59): Sixty-four women were killed by violence in 2023, researchers from Counting Dead Women Australia at Destroy the Joint have documented. In 2024 the count is already at 14. The latest casualty in Victoria in the devastating scourge of family violence was Chaithanya Madhagani, affectionately known as Swetha. The community that loved her described her as active, energetic and involved in the community. She was a devoted mother and daughter and a friend to many. Her death has rocked the Point Cook and broader culturally diverse community of Victoria. News of her death came just days after International Women's Day and a powerful event hosted by the Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence in this Parliament to raise awareness of the need for more funding and other support for culturally diverse communities being impacted by family violence.

In the days after Swetha's death the alliance issued a statement highlighting how they had been calling for an increase in funding and capacity for culturally responsive family violence services. Could Swetha and her family have been helped by such a service? Would it have made a difference if faith leaders and community leaders had spoken out more openly about the social and personal tragedy of family violence? Would it have made a difference to Swetha's family if political leaders and policymakers paused before denying funding?

For years our culturally diverse communities have been raising the alarm about the rise in family violence and its deadly consequences. We have been told many times that the government wants to mainstream culturally specific services, but it is not working, and while we wait for decision-makers to listen, more women are dying. If we want to prevent more deaths like Swetha's, we need to do things differently.

### **Rutherglen bypass**

**Wendy Lovell** (Northern Victoria) (15:00): Last Friday afternoon the people of Rutherglen held their collective breath as a very large low-loader truck travelling on Main Street left the road, wiped out a parked Kia Stinger GT, knocked over a power pole and crashed into the verandah of the Other Place cafe. Fortunately no-one was hurt as there were no pedestrians on the footpath, but had it been a few minutes earlier or the Friday before, when the Tastes of Rutherglen festival was on, it may have been a very different outcome.

Main Street, Rutherglen, is narrow and dangerous. It is a road that was established in the days of the horse and cart and is not suitable for use by the 500 trucks, including B-doubles, that rumble along it each day. Rutherglen needs a bypass. Only last sitting week I raised this issue in the adjournment because, as part of the Albanese government's infrastructure investment program review, the federal Labor government withdrew the funding that had been allocated by the former Liberal government for the Rutherglen bypass study. The withdrawal of this funding is short-sighted and shows how little regard Labor has for regional communities like Rutherglen.

Last sitting week I asked the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to outline what is happening with the state share of funding for the Rutherglen bypass study. Surely last Friday's accident must be enough to show the minister that the Rutherglen bypass study must be prioritised and that immediate safety measures must be implemented in Main Street, Rutherglen, to ensure further and possibly worse accidents do not occur.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:02): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 221 to 325, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Bills*

#### **Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023**

#### **State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023**

#### *Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motions of Harriet Shing and Ingrid Stitt:**

That these bills be now read a second time.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:03): I will speak on this on behalf of my colleague Mr Davis, who will be back shortly. I want to speak on this cognate debate, but I also want to first note, like my colleague Mr Davis did, the shambolic nature of the government in providing timely briefings to the opposition. It took over 100 days after the bill was first introduced and many, many requests for the opposition to receive a briefing on what we are voting on here. I have to say some other ministers are quite good at offering detailed briefings to the opposition, but seemingly with this Minister for Energy and Resources that is not so. If we are coming in here and being asked to make a decision on a policy but also a permanent change to our constitution, one would think that all sides of the Parliament should be well briefed on such a change, the government's intention, the policy detail and the reasons behind it, so I want to put on the record the opposition's deep disappointment in the government for that.

I know Mr Davis has done quite a bit of consultation with regard to the SEC, and we will propose an amendment to the SEC bill – not the constitution amendment bill but the policy bill. Mr Davis has put forward that we propose to amend the bill to ensure annual reporting on residual issues from the old SEC, and I am happy for those amendments to be circulated in Mr Davis's name.

**Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.**

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** The fact that we are debating this together with the constitutional amendment I find a bit bizarre, because I think they are two separate pieces. They are asking different questions. One is a policy commitment, and the other is to put a piece of policy directly into the constitution to hamstring future governments in a quite undemocratic way. We know that the government has form on this, but I think it is really quite disappointing. I do not think it should ever

have made it past the thought bubble. This is what happened, because I know that this is how it happened: Daniel Andrews announced the SEC proposal during the election campaign, put it on his jacket – put a logo on a jacket – and then wanted to create an extra news story on it, so he decided he would announce late in the campaign that ‘Not only are we going to implement the SEC, we’re going to also put it in the constitution.’ He was trying to make a double announcement. It never should have made it this far.

The Victorian constitution is a serious and fundamental document. It is the most important legal document in Victoria. It provides a framework for democracy and responsible government in this state. It sets out rules relating to the Crown, the Legislative Council, the Legislative Assembly, local government, the Supreme Court, the executive, ministers and the public service. It is what gives Parliament the power to make laws, and it also sets out things such as the number of members to be elected, when elections must be held, who can be a member of Parliament and who can vote in elections. It is a serious document that provides a serious framework for a responsible government. But that is the problem with Labor – they are not serious about doing what is in the best interests of all Victorians, and they are not serious about responsible government.

Labor is treating this most important legal document as its plaything. The Victorian constitution is a fundamental foundational document. It is not the place for policy. It is not the place for some kind of constitutional graffiti put in the constitution to hamstring future governments from taking democratically elected positions on policy. They are demonstrating their contempt for Victorian voters and Victorian democracy. With this bill they are saying Victorians do not have a choice in the policies at the next election – that is what they are saying – and every other election after that. They are saying they do not trust Victorians to support their position. They do not trust future governments with democratically elected mandates to be able to change the policy positions of the government of the day. This does not just apply to the SEC. The principle of putting things in our constitution is constitutional graffiti. It should not belong in our foundational document. They have to take it off the table for future governments by essentially making it impossible to repeal some of their policies.

Labor’s position is illiberal, undemocratic and at odds with centuries of Westminster parliamentary practice. In Victoria the Parliament is sovereign. This principle was received from the United Kingdom and dates back to the Bill of Rights of 1689. Being sovereign, the Parliament has the right to make or unmake any law within the legislative scope of the state Parliament, and no person or other body, including previous parliaments, has the right to override or set aside the legislation of the Parliament. Binding future governments by preventing the amendment of statutes is antithetical to these fundamental principles of parliamentary government and undermines the democratic process, but that is exactly what this government is trying to do.

We got a press release from the Premier on 15 November last year. It states:

The Allan Labor Government is enshrining the State Electricity Commission (SEC) in Victoria’s Constitution – preventing future governments from destroying it ...

They are trying to prevent a future government elected by the will of the people implementing policies Victoria wants. The only conclusion one can come to is that those opposite do not trust Victorians to want their policies. It seems like they will do anything to lock in policy, even if it means destroying the principles of parliamentary democracy. Preventing voters from electing representatives that may want to change their policy positions is fundamentally autocratic and illiberal.

I would ask those considering voting in favour of this bill to consider a few things. Would you be happy to see something you did not support put in the constitution? That is the precedent we would be reinforcing as a Parliament. Would you be happy to know a policy, perhaps one that you fundamentally disagree with, is virtually impossible to repeal? That is the precedent this house would be reinforcing. What if it was a ban on unions? What if it was a ban on renewable energy? What if it was a ban on marijuana or a constitutional protection of greyhound racing? It could be any of these things, because this government has set a precedent. I say to Mr Limbrick: what if it was a ban on

vapes being put into the constitution? I think all of my parliamentary crossbench colleagues understand the seriousness of what we are debating here and the contempt the Labor Party has for our foundational document. It is not a place for policy positions of the government of the day, it is a rulebook. It is a place for serious rules governing how we make rules in this state.

This particular example is a little perplexing. Labor are attempting to enshrine what is essentially a reborn shell of an entity that was privatised almost 30 years ago. These days the SEC seems to consist of a few mugs, show bags, jelly beans, pens, jackets with the SEC logo. Almost 40 per cent of Victorians were not even born when the SEC was privatised. An FOI request by the opposition showed the Allan government spent a total of \$380,593 on SEC merchandise, including \$2172 on Minnesota canvas colour tote bags, \$820.45 on 300 wooden yo-yos, \$924 on 100 Campster mugs, \$4193 on strategy launch canvas tote bags, \$3231 on booklets and postcards, \$7062 on branded templates and visual guidelines and \$791 on 100 calico tote bags.

**A member:** Who are they for?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Exactly. We saw an event at Parliament with all the show bags and jelly beans and everything else, and we even saw it at the Melbourne Show. The government spent a bucket of money to have a stall at the Melbourne Show for the SEC – really? While power prices are going up, while Victorians are feeling the pinch, we see the government branding of the SEC, which is doing nothing to reduce power prices for all Victorians. It is contemptuous.

Here we are on the other side of the house. There are yo-yos, show bags. We are in a massive budget position; we are going to have massive cuts. I spoke last sitting week about how maternal and child health services in the western suburbs could not be funded past eight weeks because this government has not got the money to invest in them. In my electorate people are suffering from a serious lack of public transport because this government has not got the money to invest in that. But it has got the money for show bags, it has got the money for jelly beans, it has got the money for yo-yos. It is a contempt of this place and a contempt of the Victorian people that it is slashing, and it will slash, in the upcoming May budget – we know from the outgoing Treasurer that it will slash and have a horror budget – while it is spending money on yo-yos. These people should be embarrassed – absolutely embarrassed. And who is at the helm of this? Of course the member for Mill Park.

I was pleased to join my colleague Mr Welch in Mill Park at the Whittlesea festival on the weekend. People there do not have too high an opinion of their local member – well, I do not think she actually lives there – because their energy prices keep going up, because she is not listening to the concerns of residents in regard to her electorate and because she is spending money on yo-yos. We know the government also promised – and Daniel Andrews promised this during the election – full government ownership, majority government ownership, as part of the SEC. We know this is not the case. You are not making even majority investments in different projects. You are in fact contributing to projects that already have finance. So that is a broken promise. Now you want to put what is a proposal that you have already broken promises on permanently in the constitution – forever. Seriously, this is amateur student politics by those opposite and shows a contempt for the Victorian people and the Victorian constitution.

We know what the speaking notes of those opposite will say, because Labor claims that it was us on this side of the chamber that privatised the SEC. That is true, and we are proud of it. Not only did it significantly contribute to the budget repair after finances were destroyed by those opposite, it also lowered electricity prices for Victorians. That is not me saying that; that is Tony Wood, an energy expert at the Grattan Institute. In the decade following privatisation, prices were generally low. Additionally, Victorian power networks delivered electricity at a lower cost than government-owned counterparts in New South Wales and Queensland. If you hated privatisation of the SEC so much – and all of your talking points will say that – why on earth did the Bracks and Brumby governments do nothing to renationalise the electricity market? Would any members following on the other side like to offer an excuse as to why they left it as is? Would they like to offer an excuse or maybe an apology



on why the government did not renationalise the energy network if they hated it so much and thought it was so nasty?

I wish we could take all the credit for privatising the SEC, but we know if we check *Hansard* – and I did – it was the Kirner Labor government that began the process of privatising the SEC. I want to thank my friends at the parliamentary library for some information on this, which I would love to educate my colleagues on. There is actually a media release here, a news release, ‘Loy Yang B bill passed by Parliament’ from 11 June 1992:

Legislation paving the way for an historic partnership between the Victorian Government and U.S. power company Mission Energy passed through State Parliament late last night.

The Loy Yang B Bill authorises the Government to enter into a contract with Mission Energy for joint ownership of the new Loy Yang B power station in the Latrobe Valley.

The Premier, Ms. Joan Kirner, said the successful passage of the Bill provided the framework for an exciting future in Victoria’s power generation industry.

‘Loy Yang B will be a state-of-the-art power station,’ Ms. Kirner said. ‘It is required for the energy requirements of Victoria in 1993.’

There you go. So you have got a great history of privatisation. You started off privatising the SEC. You started the whole process. You should all be very proud of it. You should all be very, very proud of your great history of privatisation. Often members opposite do not actually know these facts. They will go out with Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan and Lily D’Ambrosio and say, ‘Well, it was the nasty Liberals who privatised the SEC,’ yet it was Joan Kirner who got the ball rolling on this. It was, and they know it. *Hansard* knows it. The parliamentary library knows it. Maybe stroll across the hallway there and have a look for yourself before repeating such lies. And now you want to put this into the constitution. It is just ridiculous from this government.

With the rhetoric that I am sure is to come, because they have all got it in their speaking notes, it would make you think that the Victorian Labor Party and the Australian Labor Party hated privatisation. I am here to tell you they do not. It is actually in their DNA, and I have brought receipts. In 1990 those opposite flogged off the State Bank to Keating in the form of the Commonwealth Bank, who then sold it off. In the 1990s the Keating government sold countless entities. There was Aussat, which was sold to Optus. There was Australian Airlines. There was Aerospace Technologies, there was Qantas, there was CSL, there was the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corp, and who can forget the Gillard government, which sold the Commonwealth’s last remaining shares in Telstra?

But there is also your own Labor government. Labor’s history and love of privatisation runs deep in this current government. You leased the Port of Melbourne for about 99 years. You sold off your share of the Snowy Hydro scheme. You love privatisation so much you even privatise genuine government departments. You sold the Land Titles and Registry office in 2018; the outgoing Treasurer described this as a great result. You have essentially partially privatised VicRoads in a 40-year deal for \$7.9 billion. Those on the other side of the chamber love the privatisation of prisons too. During the Bracks Labor government, under the Partnerships Victoria policy, new prisons were built under a PPP model. Contracts were for 15 years, with competitive retendering every seven years. Contracts included design, construction and financing of the facility, including maintenance and security. You love partially privatising our prisons too.

There is a wealth of history of privatisation that runs deep in the Labor Party – the Moomba–Sydney pipeline by the federal Labor government in the 1990s, as I said. Removals Australia was another Labor privatisation. I think I mentioned the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corp. There was Australian Defence Industries, the Australian Industry Development Corporation and of course the Commonwealth Bank. The Labor Party absolutely loves privatisation, but in all their speaking notes that I know are to come, because they read them word for word, they will decry that the Liberals and the Nationals love privatisation. No-one in this chamber loves privatisation more than the Labor Party. It runs deep in Labor history, and they should defend it. They should absolutely defend their history

of privatisation. They love flogging things off. Do you know what they also partially privatised? Federation Square. You guys loved selling that off. They absolutely love selling things off – anything for a dime – especially in their current situation. Do not, as you will do, decry us for privatisation when you love privatisation probably even more than we do.

This is what we will get from this government in their approach to policy. They want to decry us even though they got the ball rolling on the SEC. But more seriously, as I mentioned, they want to trash our foundational document with a kind of constitutional graffiti, and I think hamstringing future governments and the ability of future governments to make decisions is completely illiberal and undemocratic. You want to tie down future governments with the policy positions of today.

Returning to the heart of this bill, I want to talk about legacy for a second. I think all of us in this place, when we leave, want to look back and see the positive change we have made. Supporting this bill, which tarnishes our democracy and our parliamentary system, will tarnish your legacy and the legacy of anyone who would support such a proposal. You will be responsible for cementing a bad precedent, and you will be responsible for undermining democracy and increasing autocracy in our state. I hope that Victoria is going from strength to strength hundreds of years from now. If it is, people will look back and read your name in *Hansard*, and they will know that it is despite you, not because of you. How anyone could support this bill in good conscience is beyond me. Those opposite should hang their heads in shame, because this is one of the most shameful pieces of legislation that has been brought into this place. I urge the Council to reject this amendment.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:26): I rise to speak on the two bills before us today regarding the State Electricity Commission, which we are debating cognately. The bills fulfil a clear election commitment of the Andrews – now Allan – Labor government to bring back the SEC and to enshrine it in the constitution.

Bringing back the SEC is a transformative development in our energy landscape. It signifies Victoria's firm commitment to renewable energy and the community's repudiation of the Kennett-era attitude of privatising at all costs. I do apologise; I know Mr Limbrick was excited for me to praise privatisation, but I am not going to do that in this contribution today. It is a repudiation that the Victorian public has clearly demonstrated of the mindset of privatisation no matter the long-term costs.

The election results do speak for themselves. The privatisation of the SEC has failed. It has cost the public and the state a great deal. People are concerned about climate action, the cost of living, energy bills and other rising costs. Communities across Victoria want the SEC back. They want that investment in renewables and that focus on reliable energy delivery and service over the profit of private multinationals. The public was promised better service and cheaper prices when the SEC was sold. What Victoria got was increased power prices and sacked workers, with profits going offshore.

The SEC will increase the amount of energy and competition in the market by investing in new renewable energy and storage. This will push more energy into the system, putting downward pressure on wholesale power prices and delivering benefits to all Victorians. The bill covers a number of objectives for what the SEC will deliver, including:

- to support Victoria's transition to ... net zero greenhouse gas emissions ...
- to generate, purchase and sell electricity in Victoria;
- to own or operate or participate in the operation of –
  - renewable energy generating systems ... and
  - ... energy storage systems and facilities;
- to develop or support, or participate in the development of, or invest in –
  - renewable energy generating systems and facilities; and
  - ...
- to supply energy-related products or services to energy consumers in Victoria.

The SEC, enshrined in the constitution with these objectives, will help Victoria to achieve our target of net zero by 2045 in the long term and help to reach that 95 per cent renewable energy target by 2035.

I normally do enjoy being the first speaker after my colleague Mr Mulholland because he normally gives me a lot of things to respond to, but I was struck today in that he actually did not give me much to respond to. I am not sure if he mentioned climate change in his speech once. It is not part of their thinking at all on this. I also do not think he mentioned at all the future generations of workers that the SEC will train, build up and support – no mention of that at all. He also barely, if at all, touched on power prices themselves. We had the bizarre contribution by Mr Davis earlier today. Only the Victorian Liberals could get up in this place on a day when we have seen a decrease in the Victorian default offer announced – a decrease in the energy prices that all Victorian residents and businesses will be eligible for – and say this is terrible and that prices are going up when quite plainly they are going down. Even if they do not welcome that relief of pressure on cost of living for everyday Victorians, I do welcome it. I particularly welcome the fact that this will mean a decrease in bills of \$112 for households and \$266 for small businesses, on average, for Victorians who are on the default offer.

Mr Davis made a rather bizarre point in saying that because something in the order of 80 per cent of Victorians are not on the default offer, they would not get it, but he seems to have overlooked the fact that we have an energy system where people have that choice. Again I would remind people that they can go to the Victorian Energy Compare website. It is a free tool. It is not going to lead to power companies starting to spam you with emails, because it is a government-run website. It will show you, matter for matter, fact for fact, the best power deals for your particular situation, and it is a really good resource that all Victorians have access to.

It was quite striking then to see Mr Davis put forward this amendment, which was circulated by Mr Mulholland:

3. Clause 4, page 4, after line 20 insert –

“(2) The purpose of this Part is not to restrict the ability of Victorians and Victorian government entities to choose who will supply electricity to them.”.

That is already the case, and Mr Davis should know that. He should know that Victorians do have that choice. For him to imply that Victorians do not have the choice – do not have the option of accessing that default offer – is frankly misleading and playing into a narrative that, desperate though those opposite are to build it, flies in the face of the fact that today’s announcement is very good news indeed for Victorian households right across the state, and Victorian small business owners as well. This is good news. It is money back in the pockets of over half a million Victorian families and over 58,000 Victorian small businesses.

The main driver for this decrease in the Victorian default offer rate is a reduction in wholesale electricity prices by 22 per cent. That has not happened by accident. That has happened because of our record investments in renewable energy in this state, because renewable energy is the cheapest form of new-build energy that there is. It is quite interesting to note that the default offer as proposed today will still be better than the default offers applied nationally and in other states, so once again, despite the fire, fury, rage and empty yells from those opposite, Victorians under this default offer are going to be not only better off than they are currently but also better off than people in any other state.

I certainly welcome today’s announcement with the draft Victorian default offer. Again, it is a reflection of the fact that this is a government that invests in renewable energy, with over 38 per cent of our power now coming from renewables. That does not happen by accident, and it does not happen if you have a government that has no clear direction on energy policy. This is a government – under the former Premier and under the current Premier – that has a clear, singular vision for reducing this state’s emissions and reducing the cost of power for Victorians. That is done by hard work, that is done by investing in renewables, and that is exactly what we have done.

It stands in stark contrast to those opposite, who when they were last in power federally, not so long ago, had something in the order of 14 or 16 – I do not know how many power policies they had. They had so many different energy policies. They would come to an agreement after great struggle and then they would get a new policy the week after. They had absolutely no direction and created such incredible uncertainty for the sector, which contributed to worsening power prices across Australia. No state operates in isolation from the national network – certainly not where we are in Victoria anyway – and that absolute failure of leadership that we saw from the Nationals’ and the Liberals’ federal counterparts directly contributed to that situation, that uncertainty of delivering certainty, which this government will be providing, the certainty that this government will be providing not only by legislating the SEC but also by enshrining it in the constitution, because in Victoria we are committed to delivering the renewable energy that is going to provide cheaper, greener, cleaner electricity for all Victorians.

They seem to have another policy once again. I am still waiting to hear from those opposite if Mr Pesutto – or perhaps I should not be asking him about this. Perhaps I should be asking Louise Staley, since she seems to be the spokesman for him these days – certainly he is afraid to talk to his caucus without having her in front of them, it seems. Perhaps she can come out and give us a clear answer about whether the Victorian Liberal Party supports the roll-out of nuclear reactors in Victoria. Perhaps they do, perhaps they do not; we do not know. Their federal leadership certainly seems keen on it. They are even going so far as not to rule out nuclear power reactors in the seat of Dunkley. Mr McIntosh covers the Mount Eliza section of that seat; I cover the Frankston area. I do not think people in that area are too keen to have a nuclear reactor on their doorstep. We also had the contribution, I note, of our new member Mr Welch. In his maiden speech he spoke heavily in favour of renewables when he pirouetted his way into the debate on nuclear energy. Perhaps you are John Pesutto’s last dancer here.

Nuclear power is frankly not the solution. It is going to take decades if not longer to set up. It is going to be more expensive as well. To get an example of this we can look at a current project that is underway in the UK, in Somerset, the Hinkley Point C project, which is a brand new nuclear power station that is being built over in the UK. That is a country of course that already has an established nuclear network and has been operating them for quite a long time, so you would think that it of all countries should be able to easily deliver such a project, because it does not need to set up a whole new sector from the start. But that project, Hinkley Point C, is currently under construction. It has been under construction since 2017 – it will be 12 to 14 years by the time it is finished. And not including any potential future blowouts, that project is currently estimated to cost anywhere from £31 billion to £35 billion – that is 60 billion to 68 billion Australian dollars in today’s conversion. All of that will deliver, they estimate, 3.2 gigawatts of electricity, which is broadly comparable to Loy Yang A and Loy Yang B combined – a decent amount, sure, but nowhere near enough for nuclear to be a viable option. If this one project is costing almost \$70 billion – and that is in a country that already has the capabilities – you cannot come to the Australian public with a straight face and say that this is going to be a viable option for Australia, because if you do, you are implicitly telling them that you are prepared to spend tens and hundreds of billions of dollars on nuclear energy when you could achieve much more by spending much less on renewables. To put this solution forward just shows once again that those opposite have no solutions – they have no clear answers either.

Whilst I acknowledge that some members, like Mr Welch and others, have spoken passionately in favour of nuclear energy, others, such as Mr McGowan and others in the Assembly as well, have spoken just as passionately against it. So what do we know? If they were in power, we know that rather than having a clear, direct way forward and providing this certainty for Victorian residents and businesses but also critically for investment into electricity networks – that certainty is so important for investment – we would have more of the same of what we saw in their nine years in Canberra, with almost twice as many different policies in that time as they had years in office. That would be complete dysfunction and chaos. We know that they cannot all agree to vote in the same way on any of these bills as they come before the house; we saw that in the last sitting week. Imagine if they were

in government. You cannot trust a party like that, which has no clear direction, which is tearing itself apart – in more ways than one of course, but in this case particularly on the nuclear energy issue. We will have people over there pushing it forward at the same time as we have others pulling against it, and all that will mean is more dysfunction, chaos and disunity. That would lead to higher and higher power prices, just as we saw as a result of the completely failed energy policies of the Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison Liberal governments. It was an absolute shambles, and we know that is exactly what would happen over there.

Over on this side of the house of course we do believe in providing reliable, safe, clean energy to Victorians at the cheapest price possible, and that is exactly what the two bills before us today will seek to do. They are a very important part of our setup of the SEC. Victorians know – because Victorians emphatically voted for the return of the SEC as it was put to them by this side of the house at the last state election – that this is an SEC that will deliver for generations to come as a result of what we are talking about today. Again, even if Mr Mulholland is not talking about it, we are talking about the strong, reliable jobs for the future. We are talking about climate change, and we are also talking about lowering power prices, not trying to add two and three to make 17 and throwing up things into the chamber and saying that power prices are going higher actually, in spite of today's announcement that the Victorian default offer will go lower. This is a government that delivers. Today's default offer announcement is actually an example of what you get when you have these policies, when you invest in renewable energy and when at last we have a federal government that seems to be swimming in the same direction as well, not having 70 players of the same swimming team swimming in all different directions and punching each other. This is what you have when you have a clear, unified direction. This is what you have after 10 years of a state Labor government that has been working on delivering renewables for Victoria, and it is what you have with the SEC and what you will see more of with the SEC as this comes into play.

This is a very important bill. It is one of the more substantial things that we are talking about in this chamber this week, because it is going to have such an impact on so many people. It is going to have an impact on mums and dads in my electorate, in regional Victoria, in inner-city Melbourne, wherever you may be. It is going to have an impact on them paying their power bills, having them as cheap as they can reasonably be. It is going to have an impact on the hundreds of thousands of small businesses that operate in this state, and it is going to provide the clean, safe, secure jobs for the future as we rebuild a strong, publicly supported energy network. I commend the bill to the house.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:41): I also rise to speak in this cognate debate on two bills today. The first is the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023, which I will not comment much on other than to say it effectively amends the State Electricity Commission Act 1958 to abolish much of the old SEC and transfer assets and makes other amendments to give effect to that. This is of less concern to me. The other bill that we are debating in this cognate debate is the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023, and I will confine my comments to it.

This bill combines a number of really bad ideas and puts them all together in one place. Let us go with the first bad idea. The first bad idea is entrenching policy positions into the Victorian constitution. We saw this in the last term of Parliament with the fracking ban, where the government, and the opposition I might add, supported putting that particular policy in the constitution. Whether or not I supported fracking or whether or not I supported the SEC, even if I loved the idea of the SEC, I still would not support putting it in the constitution because that is not what constitutions are for. I am glad to hear the Liberal Party now talking about constitutional graffiti. I share this view; in fact I spoke about it at length when the fracking ban went through and called it 'constitutional graffiti' and 'undemocratic' et cetera. The government does not want to put it in the constitution because they think it is a good idea to put it in the constitution; they want to put it in the constitution because it requires a special majority to put it in and a special majority to remove it in the future – to override and rule from the grave, so to speak.

Some time has passed between the fracking ban and now, and my team has done a bit of research on this topic. The special majority required to remove it may not actually be required. In fact one of the things that determines whether or not you need a special majority to pull something out of the constitution is the determination of whether or not the entrenchment in the constitution meets the manner and form of the powers and procedures of the Victorian Parliament. To my mind this clearly does not; it has got nothing to do with the powers and procedures of Parliament. In 1996 the Queensland Parliament repealed an entrenchment in their constitution for section 14(1) concerning the appointment of secretaries, which was entrenched by section 53 of their constitution. The advice that they received from the Queensland solicitor-general was that the provision did not concern the constitutional powers or procedure of the legislature and that they could remove it with a simple majority. So there is some good news for the Liberal Party in the future: if one day you ever come into government and you want to get rid of this constitutional entrenchment, have a talk to the solicitor-general and maybe they will come to the same conclusion that Queensland did and what the Labor Party is doing today will be nothing more than signalling to no real effect.

That is the first bad idea: entrenching policy in the constitution. I would say that the other bad precedent that we set here by putting things in the constitution is people will question the government, and maybe even the opposition from now on, about whether they really believe something, whether they really care about something unless they put it in the constitution and make it absolutely permanent forever. I hope that whoever gets into government next, whoever it may be, will look at repealing this constitutional graffiti.

The second idea put forward by this constitutional amendment bill is the formation of the SEC itself, and what we are talking about here is what was originally planned to be a company majority owned by the state. I believe there are now amendments to make the government the sole owner. If you are trying to set up a competitive market and get private investors to come into that market, create competition and all the things that capitalism does – lowest prices, increased productivity, all of those things that normally happen in that sort of market – the number one thing that you could do to terrify everyone involved in that market is say, ‘I’m the government and I’m going to start competing in this market – and by the way, I also set all the rules in that market.’ So we have this situation where the government have tried to encourage competition in the market, and now they are stepping in and saying, ‘Well, we’re playing in this market too now, and we’re not even going to have other shareholders – we’re just going to be the sole shareholder.’ I am glad to see that there was some interest in privatisation and this sort of thing. This is reversing that. This is state ownership of the means of production. Look it up – it is the dictionary definition of ‘socialism’. It never worked. It never will work and it never has worked. It is always a mess. ‘Maybe socialism will work this time’ – that is what they keep saying, but it never does.

I also question the method through which the government came up with this announcement that they are going on about this morning of the reduction in the default offer. I would note that again this is centralised price setting, and I question whether this is actually sustainable. As we all know, price caps equal shortages. We have spoken about this, and the government understood this. When we spoke about this in the supermarket debate, the government understood this concept. To their credit, they understood markets, they understood that price caps equal shortages, and they did not want to set up food shortages like the Greens were proposing. They wanted to starve everyone. They do not tell people that they want to starve people, but that is the end result. You end up with food shortages and people eating their pets, like has happened in countries that have instituted government controls on food. But then we come in today and we have price controls on electricity – a cap, a default offer.

Now, shortages in the electricity market are arguably just as dangerous as in the food market. Although they will take a lot longer to flood through the system, ultimately we will end up with problems here. If I was an investor, I would be very concerned about going into competition with the government, because the government itself makes the rules. You do not want to go into competition with someone

that makes the rules of the competition, because they always rig the competition. So that is the other big problem here.

I do not support the entrenchment of the SEC in the constitution, and I also do not support the resurrection of this zombie SEC that the Labor Party and others seem to have these fond memories of. I do not think, once it is resurrected, it will have all these desirable qualities that they seem to remember from the past. So I will be opposing this constitutional amendment bill, and I urge all others to oppose this constitutional graffiti.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:48): I am pleased to rise to speak on the cognate debate on the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 and the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023. One of these bills seeks to abolish the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) established in the State Electricity Commission Act 1958 and transfer all powers, functions, property rights and liabilities to the minister; the other one seeks to enshrine this new sham of a policy into the state's constitution. I know that there are some amendments on the table. The Nationals and the Liberals seek to amend the former to ensure that there is annual reporting on residual issues from the old SEC, and whether or not those amendments go through, we will be opposing this bill. Indeed the latter – putting the sham of the SEC into the constitution – we believe just deserves to be flushed down the proverbial.

Enshrining the SEC mark 2 would be to enshrine a sham of a policy that ultimately does not serve to lower electricity prices for Victorians or Victorian businesses. It will not create reliability, affordability and security. I will go into some of my rationale behind that – indeed not necessarily my rationale but that of learned experts in the field. You have a revised logo and you have a few media releases, and this is what the government is calling reliability, security and affordability. Nor will this new enshrinement or repeal of an old piece of legislation do anything to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Let us look at the historical context. We know that the SECV was formed just after World War I, and we know that Sir John Monash was integral and the hero in that story about creating power, overwhelmingly from the Latrobe Valley, for our state and indeed parts of our nation, keeping the lights on, providing competitive electricity on the domestic front. What we had then was good wages, because we need to have good wages in this country, but we had cheap power, so those input costs were cheap, and therefore we had a recipe for prosperity over years. That was really also driven by those European immigrants that came out postwar and created the most wonderful country indeed in the valley with that wonderful breadth of skill and knowhow, and many of those are still here today. Move forward to 1958, and we see the current act that the government is seeking to amend today.

Very briefly, my grandfather worked for the SEC. He came from being a butcher. He became an electrical engineer and worked in the valley initially. Then he worked as a regional manager and opened up power – poles and wires – right across Rochester, Lilydale, parts of Gippsland and Koo Wee Rup when he retired, and in that he had to budget to the nth degree. He had to budget poles, wires, transformers and insulation devices, and if he did not get down to the right absolute micromanagement of that, he would be asked to please explain. He was astute, and he did that. I am very proud of his work. He retired, and the chap up the road from him worked at the SEC, so worked in the power station, and his back shed was full of tools that he had acquired from the store that was known as the State Electricity Commission. Actually – and this gentleman bragged about it – his toilet rolls came from the SEC.

Things certainly needed to change, and how did they change? Back in the day I was certainly starting to learn about politics in the 1980s and the 90s, and we had the Cain–Kirner governments. It had to start to sell off things. It sold off the state bank for \$1.6 billion – this is on record – at the time to try and scramble out of the dark hole that Victoria was falling into. Pyramid, Tricontinental and the Victorian Economic Development Corporation are all names that send a shiver up the spine of people older than me. Next came Loy Yang B, and we saw Joan Kirner's Loy Yang B Bill 1992 pass the

Parliament. I know my colleague Mr Mulholland has read considerable amounts of this in. I will just keep this brief:

Legislation paving the way for an historic partnership between the Victorian Government and U.S. power company Mission Energy passed through State Parliament late last night.

The Loy Yang B Bill authorises the Government to enter into a contract with Mission Energy for joint ownership of the new Loy Yang B ...

It goes on to say:

There are enormous benefits for Victoria as a result of this sale ...

In that part, let us just put the cards on the table in relation to privatisation. Privatisation certainly has merit, and we have seen the government do it in all sorts of contexts. I mentioned the state bank, and we have seen it in other contexts as well.

Come 2022 we saw Daniel Andrews come to the Latrobe Valley, where I was busy working supporting my lower house candidate at the time Martin Cameron, who is now duly elected. There must have been a brainstorm. 'Let's reinvigorate the SEC,' they said. To what end? Victorians still struggle to pay their power bills – at record levels – and this government, the Allan government, has wasted almost \$400,000 on SEC-branded merchandise. We see canvas tote bags, yo-yos, mugs, postcards, booklets, templates and visual guidelines. Is that what this Victorian population, mothers and fathers, deserve from the government, who have – talk about DNA – wasting money in their DNA? This is the government that is the gold star of this. One of these bills must abolish that so that they can go on using that logo legally.

Now, to my point, Martin Cameron won that election. We have heard from the Labor Party on that side that it got carte blanche support – that it was fantastic. Well, that was not from the people of Latrobe Valley, where this government through the tripling of the coal royalties tax back in 2016 forced the closure of Hazelwood. It was always going to close, but they forced an early closure. It could have been a staged closure, like Bracks and Brumby actually put to the lower house. But they forced the closure of it, and that started the loss of jobs in the Latrobe Valley. If you want to talk about jobs and jobs in the Latrobe Valley, this government has used people in the Latrobe Valley as a kicking ball, and it is not fair. At the moment we also see – I hate to say this; it is sad to say – that Morwell unfortunately has an unemployment rate over 10 per cent. Indeed it was very interesting when the Commonwealth Games inquiry came to the Latrobe Valley last week. There were some really captive and raw comments from many people. One particular business owner said she was gutted, it was cruel, this government had abandoned the Latrobe Valley. Some of those I am quoting approximately.

My colleague bought from his own money, his own purse, caps that said not 'SEC' but 'Soaring energy costs'. That is what this means to the people of Victoria. Indeed clearly the Australian Bureau of Statistics has come up and said that in the past 12 months electricity has gone up 25 per cent. Gas has gone up 27 per cent. If this government is fair dinkum about a positive transition, we will see the closure of mines and we will see the closure of power stations. I have been out to Yallourn power station on a number of occasions, and we know they are slated to close in 2028. They are making those plans and working with community and their workers, and I appreciate that fact very much. They will close. I actually had a conversation with the CEO of Loy Yang A the other day, and they are working very closely on their plans to close, I think it is in 2035. The government has come to them and said, 'We need to make sure that you're not going to shut your power station down before we have adequate supply in the system.' Not only do we need adequate renewable supply, but it also needs to be able to be transmitted. There need to be those poles and wires – the proper transmission.

Just finishing off on Martin Cameron, the people of the Latrobe Valley walked backwards on their Labor vote. It bombed, and that is no reflection on the very lovely lady who was put up to be their candidate. But this policy of the SEC stunk in the eyes of the Latrobe Valley. They lost 6 per cent of the primary vote, so if it had been a winner, it should have been a winner there, but it was not.



What we also see is a vague pledge from the former Premier about a billion dollars – there are no independent costings, and experts say it is woefully inadequate. If they are going to take over the reins of the transition to renewables – we hear from experts – then \$320 billion is required. These are absolute facts that have come through from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings, where my colleague Danny O’Brien quizzed the Premier at the start of 2023.

But the Premier in 2022 said offshore wind, not offshore profits. I will say it again: offshore wind, not offshore profits. But what happened when Mr O’Brien quizzed the then interim CEO of the SEC? He asked if the SEC would preclude foreign investors? No, they will not. He also said that we had the Premier at the time talking about the government being a major stakeholder in any renewables. In estimates Danny O’Brien asked the minister to clarify what proportion of the electricity generation sector the SEC will control by 2035, with a target of 95 per cent renewables on the table. The answer was that out of 25 gigawatts the SEC will control 4.5 gigawatts – less than one-fifth of the generation. Somehow, with the government entering into this play, it is going to get costs down. Well, we know that that is absolutely not the case. We have seen that.

We also know that Tony Wood from the Grattan Institute is an expert in this field, and he has done a lot of research over time and has communicated in Parliament and to the Nationals and the Liberals on a number of occasions, and he has got a lot of reports and research out there. He said in June 2023 in the *Age* that the government had made some ‘big statements’ about the SEC’s ability to provide more renewable energy and push prices down. He said:

I can’t see anything that says the SEC is going to do something that the private sector wouldn’t have done.

This then brings us to that complex nature of a competitive neutrality. This legislation speaks about competitive neutrality. Well, you are in the playpen and you have also got your hands on the reins of pricing and tendering. So how can there be competitive neutrality when you have actually got your hands on the reins of tendering? So there is not necessarily going to be competitive neutrality. It is not going to serve people.

The other thing that is of most interest to people in my electorate is: what does it look like to have that renewable matrix? There will be a renewable matrix; it needs to be important. We have seen that solar panels on rooftops are going gangbusters not only in Victoria but across Australia. We see solar plants either up or in the pipeline, and we have got to watch out for the planning issues and the importance of retaining good agricultural land and not impacting on our agricultural land. We see wind turbines; I was down in Bald Hills at Tarwin Lower only on Sunday and saw them ticking around gently. We see the offshore wind energy, the potential of that. However, we also see Tanya Plibersek from the feds saying it is a no-go zone for the Hastings renewable terminal hub there. So you have got the feds pulling, and the state has not pushed well. We also see VNI West; that is going to be a debacle. And we have got other good examples. We heard from professors Mountain and Bartlett only recently about their plan B around the VNI West using existing easements. There is a lot of this to go forward, and this government is not planning for a good transition. It is not planning, it is scrambling for energy production. Rather than proper planning and bringing people along with consultation, we are seeing yo-yos, logos and tote bags. I absolutely oppose these bills.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I would like to acknowledge that we have former member Fiona Patten in the room.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:04): I rise to speak on the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 and the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023. It gives me the opportunity to endorse a future that provides workers with confidence and security by enshrining our State Electricity Commission into our state constitution. By enshrining the SEC into the constitution we can protect it from future privatisation efforts and ensure its provisional responsibility stays with the government of the day, like our water services. By doing so the SEC will be safeguarded with a super-majority guarantee in the constitution and a special majority if the coalition ever decide to go for broke. There are various reasons for doing so, but I think fundamentally it boils down to the

devastation that was wrought upon not just Victorian consumers but workers by the last multiterm Liberal government.

I want to talk about some of the people affected by the SEC shutdown, and I have been around long enough to know a few of these people. Graham Watson was affected by Kennett's privatisation. The electricity commission and the whole sector was gutted by Kennett. Graham talked to his two kids about his career in the electrical trades. He saw it as a sector on the decline, with more and more jobs lost to redundancy. He knows about the devastation. As Graham said, in just a few years the privatisation led to a devastation of jobs, from 22,000 to 7000 in a short period of time. This lasts a generation.

The SEC is now an essential element of our path to net zero as we work to meet the gap left by the departure of the multinationals from the market. It was the state government, not the private companies, that incurred the risk and coughed up the money to build our power plants. But after the Liberals were done, it was the private companies making the profit off the assets built by the taxpayer. The privatisation of our power assets was a mistake that has seen over \$23 billion in profits going overseas, skyrocketing energy bills and of course the loss of thousands of jobs across the state.

Everyone in this chamber has a story of a friend, a family member or a loved one that was impacted by the privatisation of the State Electricity Commission. Take Ray, a former SEC worker. He described the privatisation as an act of decimation on the community – shops closed, businesses and work dried up. The money stopped flowing. He said that before privatisation a Friday night in Morwell felt alive, bustling with customers on night-time shopping sprees at 9 pm. Now that is all lost. Instead of people socialising and rushing to grab food late at night, he felt like his community had dried up. Instead of being a busy atmosphere, he saw closed shops, he saw people out of jobs, with no work to go around. The SEC kept the communities and businesses alive, and with the privatisation of the SEC went alternative job prospects for people. Under the Kennett government thousands of workers were laid off, businesses went under. All the while the Liberals butchered the SEC and sold it off like scrap to the multinationals, power bills skyrocketed and these companies raked in billions in profit while leaving workers on the wayside and ripping communities in half.

In 2022 former mineworker Ron Bernardi spoke to the *Age* newspaper about what happened when they started shedding jobs. In his words, after privatisation Morwell felt like a Sunday every day. Whether people knew it or not, the SEC was helping keep local businesses alive by providing stable, well-paid employment to their workers, who could go out and spend in their local community. After privatisation the shops went out of business, communities that were once bustling and busy were empty and withering, and trainees and workers were left to rot by the Liberals. Ron rejected the narrative that the SEC was what they called 'slow, easy, comfortable' and spoke the truth: the SEC in public hands gave good, stable jobs to workers and helped keep local communities alive. In their absence came empty shop floors and people wandering around looking for any job that they could find. Workers and young people were disregarded by the Kennett Liberal government, which was more focused on money than the people and the community.

One story that echoes this well is told by Mick from the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), who in 2022 recounted what the SEC was like before privatisation and the community that it fostered that the Liberals destroyed. There are some even in this place who are quick to cast the old SEC as a rusty old unproductive drag, but stories like Mick's tell a different tale. He described the workforce as being closer to a tightknit family, with over 100 apprentices a year coming out to work in the sector. The program did not just give these apprentices an opportunity to work, it gave them a strong community that they could rely on and that would help them prosper. These workers were the backbone of our energy sector, maintaining and powering the grid for all of us to benefit, not just for the benefit of profiteering companies. Unfortunately, with the privatisation of the SEC not only were these jobs axed but those apprenticeship programs were also wound up, draining talent from the SEC and leaving those apprentices alone looking for work. To quote Mick, it felt like a piece of him had been taken away.

It is easy for some in this chamber, particularly for those opposite, to look at this as a mere issue of immediate finances. For them, privatising the SEC was not about a social impact, it was about improving the budget bottom line. They did not have any regard for the businesses they bankrupted along the way or the families they destroyed. It was all about the money, not the people. On top of that, the privatisation of the SEC damaged the workforce even after the deed was done. There are workers such as Damien, who started working in the sector 14 years ago, after privatisation, who can attest to the hardship. The SEC gave apprentices and workers job security, and with its sale they were thrown on the streets and were jumping from one contractual gig to another. That insecurity makes life planning hard. Damien spoke to the ETU about his experiences and how that insecurity made it tremendously difficult to plan with finances. Taking out a mortgage, planning for a family – all that gets called into question when workers do not know where the next job or stable income will come from.

Privatisation did not just destroy the lives of people who worked in the energy sector at the time, it ruined the sector for years after, and they struggled to find work. It is why after the privatisation of the SEC so many workers were left wandering, doing anything and everything they possibly could to fund what choices they had. The Liberal government was out to get them. Under their watch the new firms had bounty clauses in contracts where bonuses were distributed to employers should they meet certain targets for the number of workers laid off. While thousands of workers were walking home with redundancy payment slips, Kennett and the Liberals would kick back knowing that their multinational executives were walking home with generous bonuses for sacking hundreds of workers each. It is difficult not to be troubled by the sheer brutality of what happened in the 1990s to these workers.

Take Cliff, another former SEC worker. Cliff remembered how there were nearly 200 apprentices a year when the SEC was in public hands. He watched all of that dry up as the SEC was broken up and sold to massive companies who then started taking the profits overseas rather than reinvesting in Victoria or in Australian jobs. Having taken the package offered to sack workers, Cliff said that there was no work to go around. For nearly 10 years he was wandering the joint with basically no work to do. He eventually found that instead of finding 10 years worth of work, he found maybe four years worth at most. Make no mistake, this was a Liberal war on workers and a war on Victorians.

Take another worker, like Shannon, who worked in the same sector for some years after the privatisation of the SEC. What they saw from job to job was struggling families and pensioners. Jobs were being cut left, right and centre after privatisation, and the effect has continued to this day, with the enormous profits going overseas to these multinational companies. While the Liberals were cutting workers out, industry executives were making money hand over fist. With the Liberals, the SEC, which helped give people dignified, well-paying jobs, was dismembered and sold off to multinationals that raked in billions in profits off the back of sacked workers and hardworking Victorians copping absurdly high fees.

I am a union man. I know the importance of a hard day's work and the importance of dignity at work and a job that will provide for you and your entire family. Take Andrew Haughton. Andrew worked at the SEC and recalls the scale of the community trauma wrought by the privatisation and decommissioning of the SECV in the 1990s. He described 14,000 workers being sacked, their jobs pulled from right under them. What happened to them? He recalls what felt like nearly 20,000 people affected as manufacturing, clothing and other businesses dried up across Morwell and Traralgon and workers were tossed over a payout. Their homes went bust, their businesses dried up and those that survived had over a third of their turnover wiped out. Even former workers who used their pay to buy out newsagencies watched it shrivel up as the money stopped flowing. It was and still is a traumatising era in Victorian politics and has scarred communities forever.

Before us now is an opportunity to make sure something like this cannot happen again. Through a constitutional amendment we can protect the SEC from being sold off again. We know that the Liberals will get into power some day. Who knows when that will be. The Liberal philosophy for a number of years has been to find anything state owned that is not nailed down to the ground and sell

it off. It is the nature of the coalition to break up and sell off the state assets and leave workers aside. This constitutional amendment will make sure that the SEC is nailed to the ground.

In 2003 we enshrined our water authorities in the state constitution. We understood then that water is an essential service and should be safeguarded from the Liberal Party. In that tradition, we now stand here ready to protect our power assets and services in the same way. The SEC should never have been privatised, and we want to make sure it does not happen again. You cannot undo the hurt and suffering that Kennett and the Liberals unleashed on this state, but what you can do is start investing, not just in the renewable energy future but in our workers and apprentices, and make sure that something as essential as our energy assets cannot be sold off. We want to make sure that these workers have the dignity and job security they deserve, and we want to make sure that when the Liberal Party try to they cannot start breaking apart an essential service like electricity and selling it off for quick cash, like they did in the 1990s.

The revived SEC is set to create nearly 60,000 jobs; 6000 of those will be apprenticeships and traineeships. Victorians will stand to benefit from that kind of investment not just in their jobs and skills but in their own future. It is nothing to roll your eyes over when thousands of apprentices can train and work in a community that supports them, just like Mick talked about with the old SEC. A former SEC worker is Wayne, who started out as one of the many apprentices in the commission. Like many others, he saw unemployment rocket up to nearly 20 per cent as future jobs in the industry fell off a cliff after privatisation. He said that no larger industry came in to fill the void and now he sees multiple applicants for every possible job to be found. The devastation, in his eyes, destroyed the industry's reputation as a haven for good. As a result, every business suffered and everyone in every industry was struggling to find work at all. That was tens of thousands of workers who could have had job security and a stable income so they could plan for their dream of owning a home and starting a family.

It was amazing to see Victorians throw Kennett's legacy in the bin in 2022 in favour of our positive plan for Victorians and the energy sector. In between seeing Kennett on the news talking about the Hawthorn Football Club and donating to the member for Hawthorn in the other place's legal fund, we have seen Kennett bringing back the big troops of the 1990s. But thankfully, we have chosen a different path. Former mayor of Latrobe City Council Cr Graeme Middlemiss used to work in the power industry. He worked in the sector during the era of privatisation and watched not just the economic downturn but the drain on Morwell. He saw hardworking Victorians with good skills packing up and leaving. The opportunities were gone, and with them went people's hopes and dreams of staying in the region. Many sold their homes and moved out, while thousands of workers who had non-transferrable skills could go nowhere. Over time he watched the people eventually find work, but it was never what they once had – never as lucrative as the high-earning power jobs.

When I think of people like Mick or those many workers I have talked about today, I think about a community working together for the good of their community and how the coalition smashed that environment. They smashed the SEC to bits. I want workers like Damien to have an opportunity to have secure work and a stable income so they can plan, get a mortgage and own a home. I want pensioners and working families to not break their backs over energy bills. I want Victorians to have a fair go and for Victorians to move towards net zero emissions and keep the lights on. With these bills today we can do all of that. Make no mistake: you are going to hear all sorts of things about this today – about the market, the market, the market – but we need a well-regulated market. Without competition there is a monopoly, and Victorians deserve better.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:18): I am delighted to rise and talk today on the rebirth of the SEC. I believe that there is no better way to politicise an industry than to embed it in the constitution, and that is exactly what this government is trying to do. This is a desperate move to signal to the community that they are doing something about the cost-of-living crisis and the energy crisis that they created.

I have listened to many of the contributions from the other side, and it has been interesting. To be honest, they have been quite feel-good contributions because they have been completely based on feelings and not fact. Occasionally it pays to actually look at the facts, because if you are making decisions for a state and you are refusing to look at the facts, you can run the risk of becoming no more than a propaganda unit. This government has lost control of the budget through big spending and big cost blowouts. Their actions have driven this once great state to an economic edge, and they have Victorians in a financial chokehold. They are now claiming that they are going to bring down the price of electricity through the SEC, yet history shows that whenever the government gets involved, things tend to get worse.

If you claim to reduce energy prices through renewables, I think it would be really good to actually look at the facts. I am not anti renewables; I am pro renewables. What I am anti are false narratives and misleading the public. When you actually look at the facts, those nations with the lowest share of wind and solar renewables have the lowest energy prices. These are places like Saudi Arabia, Russia, Korea, India and China. I do not think that they are the benchmark for energy at all. In fact I believe they do a whole lot wrong. But the fact is that this is the cheapest form of energy. Those nations with the highest renewable share have the highest energy prices, and those nations are Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and Spain. So why are we telling the public that they are going to save money through renewables when all of the facts point the other way?

Wind and solar are both very good energy sources to have in the mix. However, they are only commercially successful when they are the recipient of a subsidy, and only a state that actually has some money can afford to give a subsidy. Victoria was once the jewel in the nation's crown; yet now we are the most highly taxed state in the nation, we have the highest debt in the nation and Victorians are paying more for their energy than anyone else in the nation. Historically it was our cheap, reliable baseload power that allowed Victorians to prosper. Victoria was a place where you could come and get ahead. Victoria was a place where you could come and start a business, build a home and see your dreams fulfilled because it was Victoria that had the resources to provide cheap, reliable power.

I was interested to hear during my colleague in the other place Danny O'Brien's contribution that the government stifled debate on this bill. They restricted it to only 2 hours of debate despite the fact that these are amendments to our constitution. For such a monumental change I believe that that is shameful. He also said that during a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing last year he asked the minister for clarity. He asked, 'What proportion of the electricity generation sector will the SEC control by 2035?' Just remember that 2035 is when we are going to have 95 per cent renewables. I was really shocked to hear that it was less than one-fifth. Less than 20 per cent is what the SEC will control. Why are we hearing that the government is a major stakeholder when it is going to be in control of less than 20 per cent? It is just another misleading piece of information.

I think it is absolutely crazy that we are telling the public we are going to save money by going to renewables. Renewables I believe are part of the recipe that is going to be the way for the future. But saying that you are going to save money is like saying, 'Oh, come shopping; we're going to save some money.' It is just completely ridiculous. It sounds really good, but it just does not work. This government talks big yet delivers little. The decisions made in this place impact the lives of every Victorian, so we really need to do better. I think it is time for us to drop our ideology, come back to practicality and look at what this state actually needs.

I read an article recently that said the biggest threat to our way of life and our standard of living is the cost of energy, and that is something that we must take into consideration. Victoria is so rich in natural resources, yet we are in a manmade energy crisis. I think that we are all aware that the rebirth of the SEC is a political stunt and will not bring down the cost of energy, yet they will most likely spend a whole lot of money in the process, trying to have a narrative that shows they are doing the opposite. And guess who will foot the bill? The Victorian taxpayer. On a more local level, the Latrobe Valley in terms of jobs has not recovered from the closure of Hazelwood. Up to a thousand jobs were lost.

We were promised a transition to renewables, and we have transitioned to absolutely nothing. Yet here we are being asked to trust the government again.

It seems like we are years behind the rest of the world. Many European nations experimented with renewables, and now they are actually turning back to coal. Across the world there are actually 350 new coal power stations being built right now. Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Austria were all flying the flag for renewables a few years ago, and they are turning back to coal. China and India are mining almost double the amount of coal Australia is. If the Victorian government believes that we are going to make any difference in the global emissions by forcing us into renewables while sacrificing jobs, driving up the cost of living and getting rid of reliable power in the process, I think we need to be a bit smarter than that. If renewables were both cheaper and reliable, I would be completely supporting this, but the fact is right now the data says they are not.

In the meantime the government has completely abandoned coal without considering the improvements that can be made to the industry. We never have adopted best practices, and that is a real shame. We have not ever applied the latest pollution control technologies, and that is a real shame. And there is no political will to improve this industry. It has just been exited altogether while the rest of the world seems to be moving ahead. In fact with the money that the government and industry is spending on work packages and site rehabilitation at Hazelwood we could have built two new state-of-the-art coal stations and protected a third of Victoria's energy supply. Regardless of this, the government has cared more about the narrative than it has for the truth, and Victorians deserve better. I urge the chamber to reject this bill.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (16:27): I rise to speak today on the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 and State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023. Despite some concerns about these bills, particularly the former, following constructive discussions with the government regarding amendments, the Greens will be supporting them. My colleague Dr Tim Read in the other place has outlined in detail the Greens perspective on the role of a state-owned electricity commission.

There are a couple of points which are important to revisit because they are missing from the debate in this chamber. Whilst the announcement to reinstate a State Electricity Commission was a key pillar in Labor's election campaign back in 2022, this new SEC in fact bears little resemblance to the SEC of the 1900s. Now, I do not mean to romanticise the SEC of old, especially given it was originally established to tap into the vast coal reserves of the Latrobe Valley, but the proposed SEC before us today will not manifest in a publicly owned electricity commission that can sell clean power directly to Victorian households, nor will it actually ensure that the projects it invests in are majority publicly owned. It is a real shame, because the Greens are big supporters of this government's efforts to bring in more renewables, but these need to be matched by genuine government ownership of essential services. We are not sure that the proposed SEC will be effective for achieving either of these goals.

For decades governments, Labor and Liberal, as highlighted by Mr Mulholland, have sold off and outsourced essential services to big corporations. This includes electricity services. Labor and the coalition take donations from big corporations whose primary objective is to profit, not to meet the needs of the population. The reliance on the market to meet essential needs is fraught. It relies on strong and enforced regulation to prevent inequity, which in turn can often lead to greater costs for the government. Market failure is apparent everywhere in the energy sector, and Victorians are paying for it. Rather than giving millions of dollars to private corporations, this money could ensure that public services are properly funded and delivering for everyone, not just shareholders. Further, there is nothing in this bill to prevent future governments from selling off SEC assets, just as we have seen in the past. This is disappointing.

Whilst Labor's efforts to re-establish an SEC are welcome, the Greens urge that a swift transition to renewables still requires a clearer path for what Victoria's future electricity grid and renewable energy generation mix will look like, further industry and consumer regulations and incentives to electrify the

state and a detailed jobs and housing plan to make sure that Victoria actually has the workers to build the renewable projects that are being approved. While I have said many times in this place that Labor has set some ambitious and welcome renewable targets, we are still lacking detail about how they plan to achieve them. A \$1 billion investment is a start, but it is really a drop in the ocean compared to the scale of the transition required and a pittance compared to what this government is willing to spend on things like toll roads. As Dr Tim Read in the other place pointed out, there are mountains of renewable projects stuck in the planning pipeline with seemingly no pathway for them to be realised. We need a plan to get these moving and adequate funding to support them.

To address some of our concerns, when the constitution amendment bill returns to Parliament, we will be introducing a number of amendments. Firstly, linked to our concerns about public ownership and to ensure that the SEC is a significant player in the renewable energy market, we will introduce a renewable energy generation amendment. This amendment establishes that the SEC must, by 2035, own, operate or participate in the operation of generating systems that have a combined capacity to generate not less than 4.5 gigawatts of electricity by utilising renewable energy sources or converting renewable energy sources into electricity. In the process of re-establishing the SEC, we must ensure that future governments do not reduce or abandon the current government's stated commitment to the minimum amount of renewable electricity that will be generated from SEC projects. Constitutionally enshrining an SEC that does not own anything or do anything is not really getting things done. This amendment ensures that the SEC actually produces some renewable energy and reports transparently on this.

The Greens will also be moving a constitutional amendment to ensure that the SEC's profits are always directed into further investment in renewable energy projects and cannot be ripped out of the organisation by a current or future government in the form of dividends. We know that governments frequently like to pull billions of dollars out of public corporations – for example, the TAC – but for the SEC to fulfil its stated function of consistently accelerating renewable investment it cannot be used as a piggy bank whenever a government is strapped for money. Absurdly, a government could in theory even direct any dividends received from the SEC into funding new fossil fuel projects.

A key government promise at the time of the announcement was that all SEC profits would be invested back into more renewables, but there is currently nothing in the bills before us to hold it or, importantly, future governments to this commitment. The Greens amendment fixes this oversight. I sincerely want to thank the minister's office for their time and willingness to have a constructive dialogue about this amendment, and I look forward to keeping the door open for future conversations about our shared climate goals.

Finally, I will seek to move an out-of-scope constitutional amendment which would ensure that no future government could construct new fossil fuel projects. This would cover the mining, burning, storing, transmitting or refining of fossil fuels. It is an essential step if we are to protect our communities and environment from any future government who may wish to derail the progress of the current renewables transition. It is all well and good that the SEC does not invest in fossil fuels itself, but this government has numerous coal and gas projects on the go that sit outside the SEC. Further, while the SEC logo might not be able to be used on a new fossil fuel project, nothing in these constitutional amendments prevents future governments from investing in fossil fuel projects outside the SEC. What is the point in having an SEC investing in renewable energy while at the same time opening a new fossil fuel project; for example, the coal-hungry hydrogen-to-energy supply chain project or a waste incinerator? Climate action is about actually reducing emissions overall.

To avert the worst possible impacts of climate change, we must keep fossil fuels in the ground and rapidly move to 100 per cent renewable energy while supporting people and communities as we do so. We look forward to members supporting our amendments, which I would ask be circulated now.

**Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.**

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** We hope that these amendments will make sure that the current bills before us, particularly the constitution amendment bill, are more than just symbolic acts and that there are some meaningful outcomes with respect to our climate and renewable energy goals. The Greens will be supporting the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill as it goes through committee today. We look forward to seeing the constitution amendment bill return to Parliament at some stage as well as ongoing constructive work with the government to move Victoria rapidly to 100 per cent renewables.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (16:35): I am delighted to talk quite specifically on the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023, because this bill is about the future – our future. It is about future jobs, it is about affordable energy and, overwhelmingly, it is about the future of this planet and the urgency of curbing global warming. Right here, right now we must take action to prevent a climate disaster. I can tell you that the Allan Labor government is determined to continue Victoria’s transition to renewable energy. Victoria is currently at 38 per cent renewable energy, and we have committed to achieving 95 per cent by 2035.

This is why the Allan Labor government is reviving the SEC. The new SEC’s role is to support and hasten the decarbonisation of our economy. It will attract more investments, it will create thousands of jobs and it will reduce energy bills and emissions. This bill amends the State Electricity Commission Act 1958 to abolish the old State Electricity Commission of Victoria. It makes amendments to the Electricity Industry (Residual Provisions) Act 1993 and other acts to remove or clarify remaining references to the old SECV. This is so there will be no confusion between the pre-existing entity and the new SEC in the statute books. The bill will transfer the small number of remaining assets and liabilities to the state for these to be managed by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. The Minister for the State Electricity Commission will be the responsible minister.

The new SEC as a government-owned renewable energy company will primarily have the following roles: firstly, to invest in renewable energy and storage projects to ensure the transition to renewables and deliver commercial returns; secondly, to support households to go all electric to reduce their energy bills and emissions; and thirdly, to build the renewable energy workforce our energy transition requires. The new SEC will partner with the industry for further innovation and investments in renewables. Critically, this includes an initial \$1 billion in funding to be used to deliver 4.5 gigawatts of power through renewable energy and storage projects. These are investments being made right now with the overarching goal of our state reaching carbon neutrality.

Victoria’s privately owned coal-fired power stations are run down and reaching the end of their operational lives. Regardless of climate change, we see their owners progressively announcing their closure. These private sector closures are both a risk and an opportunity for our state. The risk is if we do nothing and let the coal plants close without any plan for the future, we will then end up in a worse situation than what we had after the last Liberal government, with unreliable electricity supply and increasing prices for families and businesses. We must ramp up renewable energy to keep the lights on, we must invest in renewable energy to meet our climate targets, we must invest in renewable energy to protect our climate at a local and a global scale and we must invest in renewable energy to make energy affordable.

We are decarbonising through new renewable energy across our state – wind, solar, batteries and of course our nation-leading plan for offshore wind generation in Victoria. Offshore wind offers a critical and unique contribution to Victoria’s future energy mix. The consistency of wind offshore provides for a baseload type of energy supply. This is why the Victorian government is committed to offshore wind being a part of the future energy mix, and I support the federal government’s recent declaration of an offshore wind zone in the Southern Ocean off south-western Victoria. Contrary to some misinformation, this zone will be at least 15 kilometres offshore from Warrnambool. On some days it will be visible on the horizon, depending on the weather.



As reported in the *Age* newspaper on 5 March 2024 in an article written by Broede Carmody and Mike Foley:

The final zone will sit about 15 to 20 kilometres off the coast of Warrnambool and could generate 2.9 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind energy – the equivalent of keeping the lights on in more than 2 million homes.

The article goes on to say:

The scaled-back area responds to pushback from environmental groups, which had urged the Commonwealth to avoid marine life hotspots, particularly around the Bonney Upwelling, which lies between Portland in Victoria and Robe in South Australia.

This offshore wind zone will support Victoria's target of at least 2 gigawatts contributed by offshore wind in 2032. To reassure the previous speaker, it will also reach 4 gigawatts by 2034 and 9 gigawatts by 2040.

Every stage of the project's life from planning to construction, operations and decommissioning will include a robust consultation process with local residents and with traditional owners and rights holders as well as a strong evidence-based review of environmental considerations. The Allan Labor government will ensure alignment between Victoria's renewable energy objectives and its environmental objectives. This is why we are strengthening our understanding of offshore wind through an integrated and coordinated whole-of-government approach. To ensure projects comply with strong environmental protections, we are engaging and learning from international jurisdictions.

To reduce risk to whales and other marine animals, offshore wind energy projects employ technology considered to be less invasive than those used for offshore oil and gas. The use of high-energy seismic surveys are not necessary for offshore wind. Instead, high-resolution geophysical surveys are a much less intrusive alternative. These sound sources are much lower energy than the seismic airgun surveys typically used with oil and gas.

It is reassuring that offshore wind in Australia is emerging within a highly regulated environment at both state and federal levels. Offshore wind projects will be assessed under the Australian government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. This includes construction, operation and decommissioning of wind turbines, cables, substations and all other associated infrastructure. It maintains Australia's obligations under numerous migratory bird conventions and treaties, and there will be continued public consultation and feedback as projects progress.

Offshore wind is an established technology in other parts of the world. I have seen thousands of offshore wind turbines in Europe, in particular in the waters off Copenhagen. I have also seen the development of offshore oil rigs and offshore gas infrastructure off my own community in Port Campbell. We have all heard the horror stories of fracking coming from other states in Australia and around the world, and we know that people living near nuclear power plants in Europe, particularly in France, are given iodine tablets in case of a meltdown. I know what I would rather see: a clean, safe renewable offshore wind energy industry that respects the marine environment and saves our planet.

I thank the Minister for Energy and Resources for her leadership in guiding our state towards our renewable energy future. It is a complex and nuanced space, and I have absolute confidence in our government's ability to bring us through to the other side. We are navigating the transition with the highest level of responsibility and accountability – the same commitment we are applying to the SEC. The Allan Labor government is working for a healthy, prosperous and enduring future for all Victorians, and I commend this bill.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:46): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to these two bills in a cognate debate: the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 and the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023. Let me just first be very clear: we think this is very bad principle and we will be opposing both bills.

I will start with the simpler bill first, the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill. It abolishes the old SEC Victoria established under the act, transfers the functions of the abolished body to the minister, transfers all property rights and liabilities and changes the name of the act to the Former SEC (Residual Provisions) Act 1958. This bill is in effect a non-bill. It is really about symbolism by the government. It is a bill that we will oppose because we think it is focused on the strange activities that the government is doing with the other bill, and I will come to that in just a moment. We think if anything there should be some annual reporting requirements around this bill so that whatever is left of the SEC in the original shell will actually be reported as part of the activities of the department when it is sent to its new home. But the bill in itself is very much a non-bill, a bill that does not achieve terribly much at all.

More important, though, is the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill, which requires that the state always has a controlling interest in the SEC and provides for the objects of the SEC to constrain the power of Parliament to make laws repealing or altering it. This is basically the entrenchment of the so-called SEC. But let us ask a question: what is the government proposing to actually entrench? It is proposing to entrench a private company. It has established a private, proprietary limited company, a \$20 company. The company is now going to manage a billion dollars of government money, and the company is now able to go out and do deals. But it has got to retain majority ownership, the government says. It has got to maintain a controlling interest, the government says. But let us be clear here: we are entrenching in the Victorian constitution a private, proprietary limited company. That is actually what we are doing with this today. It is a slightly bizarre outing.

We have heard the government members go into rants on privatisation and so forth, but we know that state Labor governments have privatised a whole series of things, starting with Joan Kirner and Mission Energy in 1992, and in the recent period the titles office –

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Well, you know the titles office has been privatised. You know that the motor registration branch has been privatised. You know that there are private interests controlling those now, and that has been the action of the Labor government that is currently in power. Ten years into its cycle it has privatised and flogged off all sorts of things, and now it wants to claim that it is more pure than the driven snow. Well, nobody believes it. It is complete and utter nonsense.

We did consult widely. We found very few people who actually thought this was a good idea. We know that the state government's energy policy is in a catastrophic mess. We know that the state government's energy policy has seen –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** We have one too, and it is to reverse the bizarre changes that have been made on gas. Let me just say also: today we saw the energy default offer come out. The price of energy is 17 per cent up on what it was two years ago, \$240 per household on the default offer, and more on what most people are actually paying. If you look at the St Vincent de Paul tracker, it shows a 28 per cent surge in electricity costs and a 22 to 23 per cent surge in gas costs. And it is the same for small businesses: very significant increases for small businesses. To the question of what this SEC body would do for all those energy costs, it would do absolutely nothing. Would it bring down energy costs for families? No. Would it bring down energy costs for businesses? No. Would it drive them up? Probably. There is no evidence at all that it would in any way do anything constructive.

We have seen the government's offshore wind proposals end in catastrophic failure. The place where they were going to assemble the offshore wind was Hastings. The federal minister has just ruled it out – crossed a line through the Port of Hastings option. So we were going to do offshore wind – 'We've got these targets; we're steaming forward towards these targets' – and there has been a hit below the waterline of the 'SS Hastings'. That particular option for assembling and building the large offshore wind facilities has been lost. Where will they be built? Nobody knows. I asked the minister

here on that bill that went through a week or two ago where on earth they were going to build the offshore wind farm, and she could not tell me. She could not tell me when they would be doing it. She could not tell me when the first wind farm would open.

**Lee Tarlamis** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I can tell you what, it is absolutely catastrophic. Let me go further: the enormous tax charges that are imposed by the government on consumers in this state through the long high-tension powerlines and the levy of land tax on them are a straight pass-through.

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** You pay it every year. Everyone pays it. Every small business pays it. It is just a straight pass-through into your bills, just to be very clear here.

The Labor Party wants to entrench a private company called the SEC proprietary limited into the constitution. It seeks to put these entrenchments there; it will require 60 per cent of the vote. It seeks to bind future parliaments and say, 'Actually, you can't do this.' Tony Wood from the Grattan Institute made clear the SEC's role. He said in June that the government had made some 'big statements' about the SEC's ability to provide more renewable energy and push down power prices. He said:

I can't see anything that says the SEC is going to do something that the private sector wouldn't have done.

That is the truth of the matter. On the government's plan going forward, I read the strategic plan, and I must say I am slightly worried. The SEC is to begin by servicing government electricity requirements. I am nervous about one of the early things an entrenched SEC would do. The government would mandate that every single government agency – every school, every hospital, every agency – use this SEC.

We know that on reliability and security of supply the Australian Energy Market Operator, AEMO, has become increasingly worried that Victoria will have insufficient gas supply during the winters of 2023 to 2026, and we know that that is a problem. We know that there is a risk that we are going to see uneven and uncontrolled falls in supply on certain occasions, and we know that there is a real risk that we will lose reliability of supply. We have already seen that the firming capacity has been inadequate. We have already seen the system under stress; it has not been able to cope. There is a really clear point here. We cannot guarantee security of supply on the one hand, but we have got surging prices on the other, massively surging prices for small businesses and for households – up, up, up. That is actually what they have been doing.

Then we start to look at what we are going to do to bring on renewables – to actually look at a proper way forward to see renewables play a legitimate and significant role in the market. Well, we have got problems with onshore wind. Mrs McArthur will be very clear about the problems with onshore wind –

**Sonja Terpstra:** Can't wait to hear.

**David DAVIS:** Well, she will have a lot to say – and on the failure of the government to consult. It wants to steamroll over local communities, that is what it wants to do, and that is what it is doing right across the state. It wants new planning changes – that was announced in the last week – where it is going to strip out the right of people to go to VCAT. You will not be able to go to VCAT if you have got problems with planning that is put in place or proposed for a new renewable project. They want a fast-tracked system, even though when you look at renewable projects there are dozens of them on the ministers' desks at the moment – and the planning ministers, plural, have had some of those proposals on their desks for more than five years. So let us be clear.

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** How do I know? I have actually put together the list. I have actually got a list. I will give you the list, if you would like. I can provide you the list.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Where are they? Name them.

**David DAVIS:** Well, they are all over the state, actually.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Whereabouts?

**David DAVIS:** I can give you the exact list, but I can tell you that some of them have been on the ministers' desks for more than five years. So much for a quicker system. The government says it is going to have a stripped-down system. The slowness in the system – it is often the planning minister and it is often the energy minister themselves who are actually providing the break, the stop, the difficulty.

I do want to go to the central issue here about whether it is wise to entrench a private company in the Victorian constitution – a private, proprietary limited company. I should say that this private company will not be FOI-able. This private company will try to stick beyond the reach of profit scrutiny, and that is why we have drafted a series of important amendments, which would hold the government to account on that. One of the points we will say is:

The purpose of this Part is not to restrict the ability of Victorians and Victorian government entities to choose who will supply electricity to them ...

We say that if you are going to have the SEC there, the choice must be with Victorians. They must not be compelled to choose any provider. We talk about storage and the importance of gas storage, because we know that we actually need to smooth out the supply of electricity. We know, further, that there is a risk that the SEC will behave anti-competitively, so an amendment that we have drafted says the SEC is to:

... comply with State and Commonwealth competitive neutrality requirements

The SEC, if it is entrenched, will need to comply and cannot go around and monster with special advantages and special arrangements and work against the choices of consumers. The SEC must:

... comply with all requirements of a Registered participant in the national electricity market

I think one of the risks here is that the state government will try to exempt the SEC from the normal rules. They will try and have one rule for their SEC that is entrenched in the constitution and different rules for other providers.

We also make the point that the SEC body – whatever its shape is, whatever future version the government puts in place – will be able to be FOI-ed. We say the SEC must not prevent consumer choice in the provision of electricity in Victoria and people must be able to choose who will supply electricity to them.

That includes government bodies. They will need to table an annual report. We need to make sure there is an annual report for this supposedly – this is what the government wants to do – entrenched body. We need to make sure that an annual report is required, and that it cannot be cut out by the government through some release out of Financial Management Act 1994 requirements. The SEC must:

... publish information about Victorian domestic customer electricity consumption costs and greenhouse gas emissions produced by Victorian domestic customers

If the SEC is going to achieve so much, it needs to report on what it is achieving on the consumption costs and the greenhouse gas emissions. We need to see those figures put out closely and regularly. And the SEC must:

... annually publish information about the amount of electricity supplied to Victorian consumers of electricity

We want to see all of those transparency measures in place, and we want to see those behavioural mechanisms in place so that this new SEC will not behave in the way the old SEC did many years ago.

We know the assessments of the old SEC were not favourable. The old SEC actually had a low reliability factor. Some of us are old enough to have been around and remember the electricity strikes in the 1970s. We had the whole Latrobe Valley closed down. We had the SEC, the State Electricity Commission, closing down and saying, 'We're not going to provide electricity to households in Victoria or to businesses.' People were put off work because of the actions of the old SEC. It had low reliability in the 1970s. Yallourn and Loy Yang B and so forth – massively more efficient now, massively more reliable than the old SEC ever was. So one of the things here is that Labor started the privatisations and now they seek to claim, 'Oh, no, no, no, no, we want to entrench this as a public thing.' Well, what is it? It is an entrenched, private, proprietary limited company in the constitution – *(Time expired)*

**Adem SOMYUREK** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:01): I rise to make a contribution and speak to both the bills before the house today. When I first saw the press release, I think it was – or it could have been a tweet – by the government in October last year during the election campaign that the government was committing to putting the SEC in government ownership again, I immediately thought this was a manifestation of the newfound confidence in the Socialist Left takeover of the Victorian branch, Socialist Left takeover of the party, Socialist Left Prime Minister and Premier – who had been in charge for a number of years, but he had some checks and balances on him in the strong right. I thought this was the Socialist Left getting a bit mad at that point.

In the 1980s it was the Hawke–Keating governments' market-based macroeconomic reforms that repositioned and transformed the Australian economy and made the Australian economy more efficient and indeed more globally competitive. Before the Hawke–Keating macroeconomic reforms, Australia was pretty intellectually lazy, let us say. We were happy to get by on the sheep's back or sit back and think that it will always be okay because we have got an abundance of natural resources. But thanks to the Hawke–Keating governments – by the way, soon after the Hawke–Keating governments we had globalisation – the fact that we had efficient industries and we had gone through macroeconomic reform held us in great stead to make sure the Australian economy was globally competitive.

What is happening now in Australia is that we have been able to increase our living standards – despite some pretty rough periods of time in the global economy – because of the reforms of the Hawke–Keating governments. But it was not easy for Hawke and Keating; they had the Socialist Left to contend with. It was only after a couple of leftie – not in the Socialist Left – independents in the Labor Party ministry flipped, and then flipped a couple of their Socialist Left senior ministers, that the Hawke–Keating governments was able to bang these reforms through the party room, through the cabinet and through Parliament. Australia has benefited ever since.

Like I said, we have gone through many, many global economic crises, but Australia has not gone into recession. It has managed to be globally competitive, it is efficient, and we are a bit of a powerhouse as far as the economy is concerned. I think we owe that to the Hawke and Keating governments – although I wish Mr Keating would stay out of public debate these days; I like to remember him as the reformer that he was in the 1980s. Soon after the Hawke–Keating governments – well, during that time but soon after the major economic reforms – we had the collapse of the Soviet Union. The collapse of communism was equated with the collapse of socialism. We had a period of time when the Socialist Left were very, very cynical about the market. They had to distance themselves from that cynicism, but it was a latent issue with the rank and file.

Fast forward to today and to that press release. I am going to support this bill, but I was cynical. Like I said before, I was cynical. I thought this was the Socialist Left getting carried away with themselves and wanting to refight the Cold War. I am still a little bit suspicious, but I see enough merit in this bill to support it. I believe in the market. I believe the market is the most efficient way of allocating a nation's or an economy's scarce resources. I believe when a market is going well, intervention in that market creates a deadweight cost to the economy. I am in favour of government intervention. I support the welfare state. I also believe that markets fail, and I think that is what we have got here.

I support the government's housing policy because we have got a housing crisis. We have got a housing crisis because there is market failure. We have got huge demand but we have got private enterprise that will not meet that demand, so we have got market failure. My interpretation of market failure is a lot more liberal than the right's, but I see that we have got market failure in housing as well.

When I was the Minister for Local Government one of the things I took up was the cause of the 16 or 17 isolated small rural councils which were having problems with financial stability. They had a very low revenue base. Their population was low. They occupied vast spaces of territory, and again because of market failure private industry could not deliver some services – and I presume they still cannot deliver services – which councils should not be providing, so the councils, even though they were all cash strapped themselves, had to deliver them. I was an advocate for those small rural councils because there was that market failure there as well. In fact this has been a problem with Australia's history. Again, with the sparse populations and vast amounts of territory, Australian governments have had to fill the void by delivering services that private enterprise should be delivering. That is why we have been a mixed economy throughout our history.

When we come to this particular bill, notwithstanding all of the other things that the government has talked about, I think this bill is about addressing market failure in a key service area. What we have got here are generations-old, decrepit, unreliable coal-fired power stations that are falling apart, yet the owners of those facilities are not willing to reinvest – rightly so – in the upkeep of those facilities. We have got the perfect storm of exponential increase in demand for energy and then we have got private enterprise not stepping up to the mark. Again, we have got huge demand and we have got private enterprise that cannot fulfil that demand, so what we have got according to my interpretation is market failure. We have got market failure in a very, very important industry. It is the essential service of essential services – energy. So I am glad the government is stepping in to ensure that we do have a reliable source of energy. It is very important for our state, needless to say, so I will be supporting this particular bill.

Another benefit of the bill – and I am not sure that the government intended it this way – is that after this bill passes I think the government can no longer duck and weave and hide for cover when the lights go off or when the air-conditioning goes off in 40-degree heat. They are directly accountable – this makes the government directly accountable. I am not sure if this features in the talking points of the government, but as far as I am concerned this makes the government directly accountable for the lights staying on and the air-conditioning system staying on in 40-degree heat.

If I can talk about the entrenchment of this bill into legislation, I do not like entrenchment. This place is a majoritarian system – if you have got 50 per cent plus one in the lower house, you form government; it is a winner-takes-all institution. Parliament is sovereign for those that have been elected into this place. We as members of this Parliament have got a mandate to legislate, but I am not sure that that mandate extends to the next Parliament. I think it is pretty cheeky for us to assume that it does. I am going to support this one, but I would urge caution for future governments to be very, very judicious with the exercise of this tool, because I think it will be susceptible to a High Court challenge, and I think there is some principle along those lines. So I am just urging general caution.

If this is a legitimate tool to use, I think this is a good time to use it. I do understand that if we are arguing that we are not getting enough investment from private enterprise, we do need to send a signal to private enterprise that their investment will not be buffeted by the whims of the cut and thrust of politics and that their investment will survive a change of government. They really do not know as much as I do about parliamentary procedure and parliamentary theory, or the theory of this place, but I think it is important to send a message to private enterprise, if we are having a hard time getting them on board to invest, that their investment will be safe. Private enterprise – what do they want? They want a robust regulatory regime, they want strong infrastructure, they want good infrastructure, they want an educated workforce, but they also want their investment to be secure. This will at least give the perception that their investment will be secure, and it will go a little way to attracting more private

investment. Notwithstanding that, I support both bills based on the arguments I have mentioned in my speech. I will not entertain any amendments to the bills.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:13): I rise to make a contribution in regard to the cognate debate on the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 and the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023. I was watching the debate from outside the chamber, but I decided to come up here and sit in the chamber so I could listen more intently to the contributions that are made by everybody. I note that Mrs McArthur is going to be speaking after me, and I am a bit disappointed; I would have liked to respond to some of the things I know you are going to say about nuclear, Mrs McArthur. But nevertheless I will make some comments and observations about the debate, because we seem to have traversed a wide range of subjects today. We have talked about privatisation, we have talked about renewables, we have talked about market failures and of course we have talked about nuclear as well, so there is a lot of ground to cover. Also I note Mr Davis's contribution in regard to the SEC itself, and I want to put some of these remarks on the record and correct some of Mr Davis's scare-campaigning tactics about what the SEC actually is.

I will start my remarks by saying I was a young union official when, as I recall, the Kennett government was privatising the SEC. I note that Mr Berger also made some contributions earlier about the workers – very personal stories of workers and how they were affected. I remember at the time what the unions were saying, and this is true of any privatisation story, really, about the devastation and the damage that privatisation causes not only to the entity that gets shut down and sold off to private companies who want to extract billions and billions of dollars in profit but to the job losses and the downstream effects that then occur to local communities, schools and local businesses when workers move away and find other jobs potentially. That impacts communities, and the effects of that reverberate for generations to come. We can still see that in the Gippsland area. That is why, on the privatisation of the SEC, I note that unions were very loud and very vocal, and there were big campaigns and lots of protests around that. That is something that left an indelible mark on me as a young union official and as a person watching the devastation that that has caused not only for people who were directly affected but for generations to come.

In terms of the SEC itself, we have committed to bringing back the SEC as a publicly owned, 100 per cent renewable, active energy market participant. On 25 October 2023 SEC Victoria Pty Ltd was registered with ASIC as a proprietary limited company under the Corporations Act, so what Mr Davis said in that regard was correct. However, on 14 November 2023 the SEC was declared a state-owned company under the State Owned Enterprises Act 1992. The Premier and the Treasurer each hold one share in the SEC, and the SEC will always be a government owned or controlled entity. This is reflected in the bill's requirement that the state will always fully own and control the SEC. Now, this is important, and the reason why it is important is, as I said before, that we watched and we saw a Liberal government under the Kennett regime privatise a state-run asset. I have heard other people talk about this before. When you talk about essential services, you talk about electricity, water, sewerage and those sorts of things. These really are essential services that should never be privatised, because what we see is, and we have seen it happen, that billions of dollars in profit have been siphoned off to overseas companies, not retained here in Australia or in Victoria so that Victorians could benefit from it.

In fact we also hear arguments about why privatisation is good. We hear the same old rhetoric – things like 'The private market can deliver this better. Government is inefficient and too slow to do things, and that's why we needed to break up these government-controlled entities.' But what all of that is code for is that those opposite wanted their mates who are involved in big corporations to make money, to profiteer at the expense of Victorians. Mr Somyurek mentioned earlier about market failure. Absolutely there was a market failure because what the companies that moved into the electricity space wanted was to profit, and that meant that prices for electricity went up.

We also got a lot of rhetoric during the 1980s and 90s. I remember Professor Hilmer did a paper on competition policy in the 90s, and there was a lot of discussion around those sorts of comments, about competition supposedly driving down prices. But what we saw in fact with electricity prices under

private corporations is that they profited and electricity prices in fact went up and went through the roof. Of course we need to have government intervention when private companies get in there and muck it all up. Those opposite do not want to hear us talk about those sorts of things, because the truth hurts. The truth hurts in the fact that when all of this pressure was brought to bear about allowing the private market to intervene, it stuffed it up. So of course what happens? It takes a state Labor government to intervene in the market to correct it, because we have got people who cannot afford to pay their electricity bills. We have seen massive profiteering –

**David Davis:** They've gone up massively.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** No, we have had massive profiteering. Again this is why the government has had to step in and make sure we are bringing electricity prices down, and I am not going to have enough time to talk about all the stuff that is going on. I could talk about the Victorian default offer as of 19 March 2024. For example, Victorian households under the Victorian default offer will pay \$370 less on average for their electricity than those on the default market offer in New South Wales, South Australia and south-east Queensland. And you know what? Even better for small businesses, it is going to be \$1328 less. Those small businesses will appreciate that \$1328 that is going to stay in their pockets, no thanks to those opposite, because the Victorian default offer will mean that there will be downward pressure on electricity prices. Not only that, but the fact that we are increasing our mix of renewables into the market means that we will continue to drive electricity prices down.

It is hilarious. I watch all the banter and the stuff that is going on on Twitter and other social media sites about nuclear energy. Honestly, I think the only people that are talking about nuclear are Sky News. Someone mentioned earlier that electricity prices in the UK are expensive. They are expensive because they have got nuclear, and nuclear energy is horrendously expensive. Those opposite talk about the fact that renewables are going to drive electricity prices up. There is no basis to say that.

What we have seen is private companies profiteer, so it is kind of laughable to try and listen to those opposite and others in the chamber – there are lots of things that have been said today – talk about socialism and all this kind of rubbish. Honestly, like I said before, when you have a market failure, it takes governments to step in and fix that failure. People talk about socialism, but the bottom line is markets do fail. They are not perfect. I do not want to give everyone a treatise on economics, but I can talk about what we saw come in with Reagan and Reaganomics. This is what started it. We were all promised the trickle-down effect of economic reform would mean that people would benefit more from it. It is utter rubbish. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The divide between rich and poor is widening and widening. We were all sold a pup with this idea that trickle-down economics was going to benefit everybody. Truth be told, the rich are just hanging on to the things that they have got, and they have benefited from arguing that we should not have government intervention in these things because they were going to deliver a better outcome for everyone. We have been sold a pup, we have been lied to and we can see this now with markets that are failing and the massive profits that are getting ripped off and being sent overseas.

In terms of the Constitution Act amendments, I heard Mr Davis earlier talk about why this needs to be in the Victorian constitution. It is because we want to protect it. We want to enshrine it in the constitution so future governments, like any future Liberal government – goodness forbid that we might have a Liberal government at some point in Victoria – will be prevented from selling off the state's energy assets. We want to protect thousands of jobs for future generations. We want to make sure that this will be protected and baked in so that it can never again be sold.

I reflect on my earlier remarks. I said there are essential services that should never be sold. That includes electricity, that includes water and that includes sewerage. I know Kennett had plans to privatise sewerage. I know that, and they started to do it with water. They started to privatise water as well. Could you imagine if we had privatised sewerage operation? Oh, my goodness. We had it with electricity. You could just see this is where this would go. It is important that we as a Labor government protect this to make sure the wreckage and the carnage that were caused by the Liberal government



under the Kennett regime can never, ever happen again. It was outrageous. The destruction and the devastation that were caused by the Kennett Liberal government privatising and selling off and breaking up the SEC was a disgraceful chapter in Victoria's history, and we never want to see that again.

As I said, in October 2022 the Victorian government committed to reviving the SEC to help accelerate the energy transition, a point that is lost on those opposite. As part of this commitment we stated it would be enshrined in the constitution to prevent a future government from selling off the state's energy assets – I will say it again: the state's energy assets – and to protect thousands of jobs for future generations, and this bill delivers on that commitment. We said what we would do, and we are going to deliver on that commitment. Enshrining the new SEC in the constitution will help ensure that Victorians can continue to rely on the new SEC to invest in renewables, support households and help create training and work opportunities for generations to come.

The bottom line is that when we do something like this not only are we making sure that the SEC as an entity cannot be sold off, but we are also making sure we are going to bake in jobs for locals. That is what got taken away under those opposite when they sold the SEC: local jobs for people in Gippsland. There were generations of people and their children and their family members who all worked at the SEC, all taken away by those opposite. With a stroke of a pen they completely disregarded generations of people who lived and worked in the valley and relied on those jobs for their families and for their children who went to school there. All of those things were lost and trashed. That is the legacy of those opposite. That is the legacy of the Liberal government, because you know what, they hate anything that is publicly owned. They hate TAFE. They hate anything that is publicly owned. They hate public schools. They hate public hospitals. I could go on; the list is indeed long. It is a very long list. Anything that is publicly owned and publicly funded they hate. So we are going to deliver on our commitment to protecting the SEC and to making sure that this can never happen again.

What is lost on those opposite is that we actually have ideas and we have policy. That is something they do not have over there. They are too busy arguing about who is going to be leader. Who is it this week, I wonder – because last sitting week I was told who it was going to be, but it might be somebody different this week.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, Acting President, I think the speaker is straying from the bill into a silly attack on the opposition, and I ask you to call her back.

**Michael Galea:** On the point of order, Acting President, this has been a very wideranging debate, which started with Mr Mulholland's contribution earlier today.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Can I bring the member back to the topic, please.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Of course you can, Acting President. Thank you very much for your ruling. As I said, this is an important debate. There are two important bills in this matter and, as I said, whilst we are getting on with the job of delivering our policy ideas, we have ideas. Those opposite do not. They are too busy arguing amongst themselves about who is going to be leader. So again, whilst we are over here delivering on our policy initiatives and making sure we deliver on our election commitments, because they are critically important to the Victorian people, we want to make sure we deliver and let people know that the state's electricity assets are in good hands for future generations. There will be jobs for Victorians, and we will do everything we can to drive electricity prices down. That is our commitment to the Victorian people, unlike those opposite – all they want to do is hate on each other and argue about who is going to be leader this week. I will conclude my contribution there.

**Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:27):** In rising to speak on this bill, or rather these bills, I cannot help but think how little things have changed since that day in September when our former Premier finally announced he was quitting. These bills were brought in without briefing of the opposition for an unprecedented period, and apparently even the belated briefing occurred only at the behest of the departmental officials, not the Labor ministers. They have been subject to guillotine

motions, like the bills in the Andrews era, and the tactic of playing politics with the constitution is pure Andrews – pure old Labor. I spent some time on this when we debated the absurd and unnecessary constitutional ban on fracking in the last Parliament. It is nothing more than playing politics with our constitution. It is vandalism.

**Nick McGowan:** I think we supported that one.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Yes, that was really clever. Legally it is likely to be little more than constitutional graffiti, but again that does not matter when politics trumps all else.

Still, you have heard all my reflections on this before, so I would like to turn to some new matters, namely the SEC itself. I have looked at the three pillars of the SEC strategy for the next decade, and they are:

... investing in renewable energy generation and storage, supporting households to go all-electric, and building the renewable energy workforce we need to drive Victoria's energy transition.

It is so clear to me that the government has got it wrong on all of these. There are a huge number of flaws I could pick on, but I will just go for the biggest two: transmission and the problems inherent in an over-rapid over-reliance on renewables. None of the priorities of the SEC can currently be delivered, and however much Labor try to bash a square peg into a round hole, their policies are never going to work. I have always maintained a neutral stance on energy technologies. Our focus should be on increasing the country's energy supply rather than reducing it, and Labor's obsession with the soon-to-be constitutionally enshrined SEC has done nothing but undermine our energy security. Unfortunately their nirvana of 95 or 100 per cent renewables not only remains difficult to achieve – we are actually going backwards. So that makes other low-carbon energy options less appealing – possibly making nuclear an indispensable choice, especially if achieving net zero emissions continues to be a political goal.

Building renewable energy sources theoretically seems straightforward, but practical and recent challenges have diminished their appeal. Onshore wind projects face significant hurdles due to noise complaints and environmental concerns, as exemplified by the Willatook wind farm's legal precedent and the broilga breeding season construction moratorium, which have severely impacted the wind energy sector. In fact it would be amazing if that project ever proceeded.

Offshore wind is encountering difficulties as well, with increased scrutiny over its impact on marine life – we will be worried about the whales in Warrnambool with the current proposal that is offered – construction effects and the fishing industry consequences leading to substantial public opposition and even governmental resistance from South Australia, and the catastrophe of the Port of Hastings installation project is the icing on the cake. If we cannot install offshore wind, we cannot operate it. The infrastructure and logistics supply chain is inconceivably complicated, and it cannot be created by government fiat.

It is not just offshore wind installation infrastructure they have got wrong. The requirement for new transmission infrastructure to support a 95 per cent renewable energy goal involves constructing 10,000 kilometres of new transmission lines nationwide, as estimated by the Australian Energy Market Operator, AEMO. My support for nuclear power stems partly from its compatibility with existing grid infrastructure, advocating for a holistic environmental impact consideration of both generation and transmission technologies. The current separation in impact analysis, especially overlooking the comprehensive costs associated with transmission line impacts, is problematic. Victoria's renewable energy investment has plummeted due to grid inadequacies, with AEMO projections indicating significant energy wastage from wind and solar sources due to insufficient transmission capacity deterring institutional investors.

The land usage for renewable projects should not be overlooked, with nuclear offering a less intrusive option. The significant land requirement for achieving a 95 per cent renewable target through onshore wind and solar would drastically transform Victoria's landscape, consuming up to 70 per cent of its

agricultural land, as outlined in the state government's offshore wind policy directions paper, a paper so embarrassing it has now been officially removed. It has been removed from the website – deleted. You are so embarrassed about it you have deleted it. The escalating systemic challenges facing renewable projects, including rising capital costs and inflation in construction expenses, highlight that renewable energy cannot single-handedly meet Victoria's energy needs, thus making the case for nuclear power stronger due to its smaller footprint and compatibility with existing grid infrastructure alongside its reduced environmental impact from minimised mining requirements.

The SEC and Labor's whole energy policy are misconceived. It is idealism over reality – too little too late; government led, not industry led; and absolutist and centralist, not market driven. The damage will be incalculable. To enshrine it in the constitution is crazy. All we can hope is that the monument of reckless stupidity it becomes will be a lesson for decades to come.

I should comment on Ms Terpstra's comments where she waxed lyrical about the job losses in the Latrobe Valley. Now, let us be realistic about this. Who caused those job losses? You did, because you applied royalties to the power generators, deliberately rendering them unviable – so it is you who has taken away the jobs of workers in the Latrobe Valley. You have closed down the power plants and you have rendered the workforce jobless. You did the same thing in the timber industry in that area – shut that vital industry down and rendered those workers jobless. In the meantime we import timber from areas where we have no idea about the environmental impacts. That is clever – not. We all know your side hate the private sector, but those taxes that the private sector generates are what keep people like you on that side of the fence in a job and keep your burgeoning public service in a job. You are taxing hardworking Victorians out of existence like never before, and you are taxing the very workers you claim to support.

I would also like to go to how you are investing in the whole energy space. The *Age* revealed on Thursday that the state government would provide \$245 million for the 600-megawatt Melbourne renewable energy hub, giving the SEC a 38.5 per cent stake in that battery project. Now, the battery project in my electorate down near Lara has gone really well – it caught fire. They could not put the fire out. But ownership is not spread evenly across the MREH's three large batteries: two are 70 per cent owned by investor Equus and 30 per cent by the SEC. The third and largest battery is 49 per cent owned by the commission, but a binding contract gives the SEC 100 per cent control over its capacities. Anyway, this was an election pledge, and we have got these batteries. Equus and the SEC are jointly investing in the Melbourne energy renewable hub and Equus is a global fund, so who knows where their capital comes from? You know, a substantial investment from the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. This is foreign investment that will make money, no doubt – why else would they be in it? It is all very well saying the SEC is going to be there for the people of Victoria, but you are investing without majority control in investments that could well end up with the profits going offshore. So I would say this whole proposal – these two bills – is nonsense. It is something that we should not be doing. You should never introduce policy issues into the constitution for generations to come. It will be difficult to take them out, and that should not be the case at all. I will leave my remarks there.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:38): A brief contribution, if I may, on the exceptionally important legislation before us today – legislation that goes to the heart of the path that Victoria can take to its energy and economic future. The bills before us today will establish and entrench a pathway that is built on renewable energy, on clean energy, and that delivers to Victorian consumers the confidence that they have got a government that both believes in renewable energy and is willing to take action to make sure it succeeds.

The other thing that the bills before us today do in creating the new State Electricity Commission, the new SEC, is recognise that we on this side believe that government can and should be an active participant in this journey and not merely at best a bystander that watches things happen or at worst someone who actively flogs off our energy assets. The SEC that the government is bringing back will help Victorian consumers realise the benefits that arise and the cheaper cost of living that arises from

electrification, and it will help us build our renewable energy infrastructure. That is what this SEC is about, that is what its objectives are and that is what the legislation before us is designed to do.

Earlier in the debate I think Mr Somyurek made a very apt descriptor of what the alternative is, and he said that the alternatives before us are things that are old, decrepit and unreliable. Of course he was referring to the state's coal-fired energy assets, but he just equally could have been referring to the opposition's energy policy, such that they had. That policy is unreliable, it relies on decrepit foundations and it is searching back to the kinds of old technologies that are not the path to Victoria's energy future. This debate is fundamentally about whether we support Victoria and the Victorian people having a say and a stake in a renewable energy future. I fundamentally think that we do, and I absolutely support this legislation.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:41): I rise on the cognate debate on both the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 and the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023. I have got only short remarks also, to everyone's relief. I endorse everything that has been said on this side of the house. But the thing that I find absolutely wild about this proposition is effectively what Labor want to do is enshrine a venture capitalist (VC) into the constitution. This is a body that will go and pick winners that might produce energy at some point, so they are going to pick winners and losers – just like the Breakthrough Victoria fund at the Department of Premier and Cabinet, a \$2 billion fund that, again, goes to pick winners, and just like SRL, where a third of the cost is being extracted by speculating on what tax you can extract out of property prices coming out of it.

The Labor government, having run out of its own money and then run out of the ability to borrow even more, has decided to get into speculation. That is what this is. The SEC is not the SEC you are talking about that we all have a sort of a romantic heritage of. It is not going to hire any apprentices, it is not going to train anyone and it is not going to build anything. It is going to speculate on whether it can find partners to deliver energy. It is a VC. Here the doyens of socialism are buying into 'Yes, let's put VCs into the constitution, and maybe we can bet on a winner that might reduce climate change.' If it was not so tragic, it would be hysterical. But it is tragic because you have so little comprehension of what you are talking about and the fact that you love to cloak yourself in this virtuous cloak of the SEC, which is a brand looking for a concept. I would simply like to say it is a ridiculous idea, but it is sort of humorous that you want to institutionalise a VC into our constitution.

With that said, to the other piece of legislation, the SEC amendment, I would like to move an amendment, and I would ask that that amendment be shared. It is a reasoned amendment, probably very reasoned, and I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with 'the bill be withdrawn and not reintroduced until the government includes annual reporting on property, rights and liabilities of the former SEC into the bill that requires the Treasurer to ensure that every report of operations and financial statements of the Department of Treasury and Finance under part 7 of the Financial Management Act 1994 separately accounts for the property, rights and liabilities of the former SEC that became property, rights and liabilities of the state under that part of the act.'

That completes my contribution.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:45): I too will make a short contribution to this debate. I think it all comes down to values that inform principles that then inform policies and investment. The values on this side have informed and delivered investment that has seen a 42.7 per cent drop in emissions in Victoria from a peak around 2010, 38.6 per cent renewables in our grid and just today a 7 per cent drop to consumers and small businesses in electricity prices. The Liberals are ideologically driven, and they actually do not care about outcomes for Victorian households and businesses using electricity. For decades they have fought against action on climate change, they have fought against policies to drive down our electricity prices and instead they have advocated for or pushed issues around fossil fuels like fracking farms for gas and now of course the very expensive and slow to build nuclear reactors. So whilst they are using the politics of fear to try and divide the nation, voters, when

they go to the polls in Victoria, have a clear, demonstrated action of values, principles, policy, investment and action from the state Labor government that has seen electricity prices coming down and is seeing clean energy – as I said, 38.6 per cent currently in our grid. We are training the next generation of workers because you cannot take your hands off the wheel and expect trained workers to be here for our state to deliver what we need. We will provide tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of investment, and in doing so we will reduce our emissions and ensure a quality of life for this generation and future generations to come, continuing to improve on that which came before.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:47): Today I rise to inform the house of a very important matter – that is that the SEC is back. But it is not just back, it is better than ever, because the new SEC that is being delivered by the Allan Labor government will be run entirely off renewable energy. With this bill before us we will entrench it within the state's constitution. We have fulfilled our commitment for a 100 per cent renewable-powered publicly owned energy retailer, an election promise that this government has stuck to and achieved.

Just last year in mid-November the SEC was declared as a state-owned company with the Premier and the Treasurer each holding one share, and it is a requirement that the state will always fully own and control the SEC. In fact the first project of the SEC is already under construction. For families wanting cost-of-living pressure relief, cheaper energy bills and a renewable state-run energy provider, this government is in fact delivering. Construction has already begun on the SEC's very first project, the 1.6-gigawatt-hour battery in Melton with Equis Australia. It will power over 200,000 homes across our state and will be one piece of the puzzle of the new infrastructure we need to modernise our grid.

If there is one thing that this government knows how to do, it is building things, let me tell you – because we are doing that, and it is happening sooner. Sooner it is going to be bigger, it is going to be better, and we are going to get it done to the highest possible standard. You see, we smashed our 2020 emissions target of a 15 to 20 per cent reduction – we achieved 29.6 per cent. I recall speaking about this very recently, in fact in the last sitting week. In 2021 we achieved a 32.3 per cent reduction. You see, we do not just talk about climate action, we are in the business of delivering on it. We have the strongest climate change legislation in the country, and Victorians voted overwhelmingly for the next step in our ambitious agenda. Our targets of a 75 to 80 per cent reduction by 2035 and net zero by 2045 in fact align Victoria with the Paris goals of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. We have become the first state or territory in the nation to set a 2035 target, and our new net zero target of 2045 is one of the earliest anywhere in the world. It is a testament to this Allan Labor government that we are not just leading the country in our climate targets but indeed leading the world.

Along with our ambitious and achievable target of 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035, we will create jobs – thousands and thousands of jobs. That number: 59,000 in total. We have staggeringly ambitious offshore wind targets of at least 2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040 – my goodness. But let me talk about energy storage targets. The energy storage targets that we talked about last week in a bill before us contained targets of 2.6 gigawatts by 2030 and at least 6.3 gigawatts by 2035. We are decarbonising through our new renewable energy across our state, whether that is wind, solar or batteries, and of course we have got our nation-leading plan for offshore wind generation in our state. In 2022 over 35 per cent of our energy came from renewables. This is more than three times the 10 per cent we inherited in 2014.

We have created 5100 jobs in large-scale renewable energy since we were elected, providing stable, secure work for Victorians. In this government we create jobs, thousands of them in fact, in the renewable energy sector. In the 2022 calendar year more than 510,000 households and 49,000 businesses received discounted energy-efficient products and services through the Victorian energy upgrades program. On average households and businesses that undertake energy efficiency upgrades under the program save \$110 up to about \$3700 respectively on their annual energy bills, and those are some really strong savings. It is a huge saving for Victorians and a huge benefit to the environment, but I need to say it is a big step up in our state's modernisation. Even those that do not participate will save on their bills, and there are many, many thousands of dollars being saved right

across the state. But that is not all. I want to talk a little bit about Solar Homes and how much we have got to do there. There have been 300,000 installations of solar panels, hot-water systems and batteries since 2018, and over 1.8 million homes have applied for the power saving bonus looking to come off some really rubbish deals, frankly. Good on them – they came off some really bad deals for their hip pockets.

Of course I love the fact that by 2025 we will power all Victorian government operations with renewables – in our new schools. We have been building hospitals like the new Footscray Hospital, our Metro Trains are going to be running through the tunnel and so much more. The new SEC will invest with industry to accelerate our transition to a more affordable, reliable and renewable energy system. This transition is centred around our commitment to providing Victorians with clean and cheap energy, which is exactly what we are doing with our commitment before us, to embed for a very long time the SEC in our constitution. We are getting on with the business of the SEC. We are putting power back in the hands of Victorians and accelerating our transition to cheaper, more reliable renewable energy.

I am sure that there have already been some contributions in this place talking about the life of the SEC in the 1990s, but let me just say, the SEC used to make many, many millions of dollars in yearly profit. It did not just make power for Victorians but made money too. ‘Where is that money going now,’ we must ask ourselves. Those very same private multinationals increased prices and sacked workers, and now it is Victorian families that have been paying the price, with \$23 billion in profits going overseas and counting. This is money that could have been in the pockets of Victorians. It could have been invested in our state, and we could be so much further ahead on the road to our renewable energy future. I have got to say, when I am thinking a little bit about nuclear – I know there have been contributions in here – I cannot help but ask myself: where are they going to go? This is a debate that I have been around for a great number of years. Is it in the Latrobe Valley? Is it at Anglesea or Daylesford? Is it in our beautiful pristine tourist areas? I do not know, and that answer has a giant question mark next to it. But what does not have a question mark next to it is the firm view of the Victorian people who have told me many, many times that they do not want nuclear here in this state. I know –

**Bev McArthur:** The majority want it.

**Sheena WATT:** I question that. It is not the survey I have been talking to. The people that I have been speaking to know that they want renewable energy in this state. They want a legacy of renewable energy in fact. They want an SEC. They want an SEC entirely funded by renewable energy. That is in fact what we took to the election, that question about the future of the SEC and its embedding in our constitution. I have got to say that is what the results showed us in November of 2022.

We need to accelerate the pace of investment in new electricity generation infrastructure. We know that the ageing coal-fired power stations are coming to the end of their operational life. When these coal-fired power stations go offline unexpectedly, the wholesale price of electricity shoots up because of course supply and demand become rather tight. But what we have seen is that as we bring new electricity supply into the market, particularly from the renewables sector, we are a lot more resilient as a state. That is just one reason why the SEC’s first investment in this state was in fact a Big Battery, to soak up clean renewable energy where there is surplus generation – how marvellous that is – and put it back into the system when supply is tight. You see, big batteries can respond to a power outage in seconds, keeping the lights on and keeping prices down. What a delight and how joyous it is to see that this state’s need for clean and renewable energy is met by the ambition and future of the SEC right before us in this bill today. Thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution, and I could not be more delighted to see that the SEC is back.

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (17:57): I too am rising to speak against these bills and for various reasons. First of all and most importantly these bills corrupt the purpose of our constitution for political gain. The constitution is supposed to serve Victorians, not the Labor Party or any political

party and their ideologies. As my colleague Mr Limbrick has said, they cannot make the rules and also play the game. Elections reflect the will of the people, and this current set of MPs entrusted to govern should not presume, quite arrogantly I might add, to have a mandate to govern beyond their elected terms. I actually struggle to think of a more arrogant, condescending and disrespectful assumption than that, and yes, that goes for the fracking ban too.

Secondly, it disempowers Victorians. Our charter of human rights tells us that every person in Victoria has the right to express their will in the conduct of public affairs through freely chosen elected representatives. But what have we heard from the government? We have heard Mary-Anne Thomas say that we must support this bill:

... because it is so vitally important that we protect –  
not the voters –

the SEC from the privatising inclinations of those on the other side.

...

... we want to do everything that we can to protect the SEC from those on the other side, should they ever have the opportunity to return to the government benches ...

They want to protect the SEC from democracy. The reality is that Labor is trying to insulate themselves and their mates from the will of the Victorian people. This is a direct attack on our democracy. If the government were so confident that they were acting on the will of the people, instead of against it, then they would be very confident to leave the SEC enshrined in ordinary legislation rather than corrupting the constitution. This bill does not just prevent privatisation of the SEC; it prevents changing the SEC's objectives, those same ideologically driven objectives that throw practicality to the wind. They do not care about actual outcomes or actual costs or actual delivery of promises. Yet again this is putting the cart before the horse.

This sounds to me like yet another government-funded workforce artificially created to be dependent on only those political parties who pursue government power and who, in order to get it and keep it, care nothing for the devastation that state debt, cost-of-living blowouts and non-delivery of promises have on our poorest Victorians. This is not going to improve energy outcomes. It is not actually going to improve anything. It is going to disempower Victorians, and this is the kind of precedent that can be abused, as we have already seen. It has been done so many times before.

### **Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023**

#### *Second reading*

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:00): I move:

That debate on the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Debate adjourned until next day of meeting.**

### **State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023**

#### *Second reading*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (18:01): I thank everyone for their very thoughtful and passionate contributions during the debate today. I of course do not want to go back over a lot of the ground that my colleagues have already covered, but this is a pretty simple proposition that is now before us in terms of the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023. We committed as an election commitment to bringing back the SEC as a publicly owned, 100 per cent renewable energy market participant, and this bill is part of delivering on that election commitment – something, I might add, that was strongly supported by the Victorian community.

The bill abolishes the State Electricity Commission of Victoria as it is currently constituted in the State Electricity Commission Act 1958 to ensure that there is no confusion between the new SEC entity and the pre-existing SECV in Victorian legislation, and it will also allow the new SEC entity to use the terms 'State Electricity Commission' and 'State Electricity Commission of Victoria'. So it is a very simple proposition that is now before the house. It certainly will make further amendments to clarify all remaining references to the old SECV.

Following privatisation of the Victorian electricity supply industry in the 1990s, legislation was enacted that has effectively limited the old SEC's role to managing any residual property, rights and liabilities from its previous operation. Currently, the SEC act provides that the old SECV consists of an administrator. This officeholder, currently the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, is responsible for the administration of residual assets and liabilities of the old SECV. The old SECV effectively has no employees and for practical purposes is no longer an operating entity under the State Electricity Commission Act. Abolishing the old SECV will allow the new SEC to operate without causing confusion between the pre-existing entity and the new SEC.

The new SEC will invest with industry to accelerate our transition to more affordable, reliable, renewable energy. It is interesting to see those opposite get all misty-eyed and sentimental about the SEC considering that they sold it off to private multinationals. Those multinationals increased prices and sacked workers, and it is now Victorian families that are paying the price for that in \$23 billion in profits going overseas – and counting. That is why we brought back the SEC: to deliver government-owned renewable energy to push down prices for all Victorians.

We have got our first project under construction. Those opposite have been running a bit of a commentary on this project, saying that it would have happened anyway. There is absolutely zero evidence for that. The project would not have happened today without the SEC. That is a fact. I want to be very clear: because of the SEC this project is happening far sooner, it is going to be bigger and it will enable more renewables to come into the system. We cannot really expect those opposite to be on board with that, but what I want to say to them is, 'Don't peak too early, because we've got a lot of energy legislation coming in the next few months.' We have got a big plan to transition to renewable energy, to give us that certainty of supply and to continue to drive down costs while doing the right thing by the climate and the environment.

Can I also just touch on the reasoned amendment in the name of Mr Welch and indicate that the reasoned amendment will not be supported by the government as it would duplicate existing annual reporting obligations. The annual reporting obligations set out in part 7, section 45, of the Financial Management Act 1994 will automatically impose an annual reporting obligation on the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action in relation to the property rights and liabilities of the former SEC.

Furthermore, the reasoned amendment would erroneously impose financial reporting obligations in relation to the former SEC on the Treasurer and the Department of Treasury and Finance, and this does not reflect the current administrative arrangements for the former SEC. The State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill will abolish the former SEC and transfer its property rights and liabilities to the state. Under the current general order the Minister for the State Electricity Commission and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action will be responsible for managing legacy issues associated with the former SEC and for reporting on the former SEC's property rights and liabilities in accordance with the Financial Management Act.

In summary, this is a very simple proposition that we are dealing with today in relation to the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill. We are delivering government-owned, renewable energy to drive down power bills, and I commend the bill to the house.



**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Welch has moved a reasoned amendment to the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023. The question is that the reasoned amendment moved by Mr Welch be agreed to.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (15):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

*Noes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Amendment negatived.**

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (23):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Adem Somyurek, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

*Noes (15):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (18:16): I move, by leave:

That the bill be now read a third time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The PRESIDENT:** Pursuant to standing order 14.28, a message will be sent to the Assembly informing them that the bill has passed without amendment.

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

*Council's amendments*

**The PRESIDENT** (18:17): I have got a message, speaking of the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Climate Change Act 2017** to change its title and to amend and bring forward emissions reduction targets, to amend the **Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017** to increase the renewable energy target for 2030, to introduce a new renewable energy target for 2035 and to introduce energy storage targets and offshore wind energy targets and to amend the **Planning and Environment Act 1987** to expressly require consideration of climate change when making certain decisions under that Act and for other purposes' the amendment made by the Council has been agreed to.

*Adjournment*

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (18:18): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**North East Link**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:18): (780) My adjournment is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Like many, many mega road projects, the North East Link is proving itself to be an expensive folly at a time when Labor is sacking public workers across the state and defunding services in a cost-of-living crisis. There is already a sad and sorry history to this colossal waste of Victorian taxpayers money –

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Ms Copsey, can you just stop for a second. Can we stop the noise other than Ms Copsey doing her adjournment, please. You are welcome to start from the start if you like, because I am not sure the minister heard it.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you, President. I will just continue.

There is already a sad and sorry history to this colossal waste of Victorian taxpayers money. In 2016 the North East Link road project was originally touted as costing \$10 billion, which two years later supposedly went up to \$15.8 billion. According to a 2021 briefing from the government's insurer and risk adviser, only obtained under FOI, it was supposed to cost \$18 billion. Finally the extent of recent cost blowouts was revealed in December 2023, when Premier Allan announced the total cost was actually now \$26.1 billion. It is an increase of 160 per cent from the original estimate.

That is the cost summary; now let us look at the benefits. What does \$26 billion actually get us? This project was submitted to Infrastructure Australia in 2018 and had a cost–benefit ratio of 1.3 to 1.4 based on a cost of \$10 billion. Shamefully, that cost–benefit ratio figure has never been publicly updated as the costs have blown out to \$26 billion. This analysis was always dubious at best, since the benefits assumed that the road would reduce traffic congestion. Half a century of freeway building has shown us that, in reality, building these mega roads just encourages more car dependence and induces demand, making traffic congestion worse.

Even if we accept that the initial project had the benefits that were claimed in the business case, those benefits have not substantially changed since 2018, but the price of building this mega road has more than doubled, from \$10 billion to \$26 billion. Logically it follows that the cost–benefit ratio of the North East Link Project must now be substantially negative. Minister, I request that you release an updated cost–benefit analysis and business case that justifies Victorians paying \$26 billion on this polluting mega road project.

**Home building industry**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:21): (781) My adjournment is to the Treasurer, and the action I seek is an extension of the liquidated builders customer support payment scheme to allow customers of Apex Homes to be included and have access to the scheme. On 6 March 2024 the government announced that customers of Montego Homes, Chatham Homes and Porter Davis Homes who were left without domestic building insurance – DBI, as it is known – through no fault of their own are now eligible to apply for the expanded scheme, which covers customers of builders that liquidated between 1 July 2023 and 20 February 2024. This includes Montego Home customers. However, many of my constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne entered into agreements with Apex Homes, which eight days later entered liquidation, on 28 February 2024. Consequently, customers of Apex Homes will not be able to access the support scheme. How is that fair, Minister? It is not right. The Liberal–Nationals believe that the scheme

should be extended to include customers of Apex Homes, who are in an identical situation to customers of Montego, Chatham and Porter Davis Homes. The customers of Apex Homes deserve a positive outcome. Dodgy builders need to be held responsible for their reprehensible actions to prevent a recurrence of these situations.

The government has been saying that new offences that were introduced last month into the Domestic Buildings Contracts Act 1995 would incur a penalty of \$96,000 for an individual and \$480,000 for a company. Apex, like other builders mentioned, failed to take out appropriate insurance on behalf of its customers, and it has left its customers exposed. Under the government's cut-off period, they have excluded people because the scheme has only been extended to the 20th. We believe the government should extend the scheme indefinitely, until the Victorian Building Authority can get on top of their enforcement of domestic building insurance requirements under law. Many constituents in the south-east are looking at losing figures of between \$16,000 and \$40,000, which they deposited in good faith with Apex Homes and now risk losing it all.

Imagine the hard work of these aspiring, hardworking people who have been losing their hard-earned money with no compensation. This will mean the end of their dreams of building their own homes. It is not fair, and it is not their fault. It is bad enough that this scheme has not protected innocent Victorians who have done all the right things, but then to allow certain extensions for some and not others because of the cut-off date is beyond belief.

#### **Coles enterprise bargaining agreement**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:23): (782) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Industrial Relations, and the action that I seek is that he support Coles workers in their current wage negotiations to ensure that they are paid a living wage that keeps up with the ever-increasing cost of living. Coles workers cannot afford to shop at Coles. I mean, many, many people are struggling to shop at Coles and Woolies, but when you have staff members who work close to full-time hours having to rely on charities to feed themselves, it should outrage us all. While Coles are boasting a profit of \$1.1 billion for the last financial year, they are offering their workers Coles gift cards as a sweetener to accept the current employer agreement, which erodes their conditions: 'Sorry, we can't pay you properly, but here's \$150 or \$250. Take the deal or else.' It has been reported that staff have been relying on the free fruit and cookies in the staff rooms for meals or skipping them altogether. Workers are only putting tiny amounts of fuel into their cars to get them to and from work and nothing more.

And the current agreement that will determine the wages and work conditions for the next four years does not offer much more than the gift cards. The junior rates, which apply to workers up to two years after they turn 18, are sticking around; split shifts are being introduced; and any pay rises will be tied to the Fair Work Commission's annual wage review, which sets the award rates. These important retail workers need a decent living wage. They need job security, better work conditions and safer workplaces. The Retail and Fast Food Workers Union are fighting to improve the pay and conditions being offered to Coles workers. I stand in solidarity with them. Join your union, and if you work at Coles or Woolies, join the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union.

#### **Land tax**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:25): (783) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Treasurer, and it relates to the bungling of Labor's land tax billing and administration. We know that Labor's land tax targets mum-and-dad investors, home owners and renters. This appalling tax was the brainchild of a government that cannot manage money. It is to pay off, supposedly, a \$1 billion COVID debt created by Labor's bungling and mismanagement when it locked up Victorians for over two years and destroyed the state's economy – well, it is even further destroyed now, and under Labor Victorians are forced to pay 52 either new or increased taxes, this being one of them. Make no mistake, this tax will drive property investment out of Victoria and lead to less rentals on the market and higher rents.

Your government's own estimates have admitted that the average Victorian household will be paying an additional \$1300 a year. This adds to our spiralling cost of living, further putting household budgets under pressure. Victorians actually pay the highest property tax in Australia, and the Property Investment Professionals of Australia have named Victoria as the worst state in the nation for renters due to the high stamp duty and the new land tax.

The final insult to Victorians is that the Allan government has completely botched its billing system. There are many, many errors in the land tax billing system. I have been contacted by a number of constituents in my Eastern Victoria Region who have been billed for properties that they do not even own. The bungling clearly breaches the privacy of many Victorians. After contacting the State Revenue Office and pointing out these glaring errors, my constituents were insultingly forced to give a verbal declaration that any information given by them would be the truth, and accurate, and told they would be subject to fines if that were proven not to be the case. How can the state government compromise personal data through somebody else receiving information on the billing of these terrible taxes? Sending out the details of other investors is just plain wrong.

Treasurer, given your land tax system is riddled with errors and causes great distress in the first place, the action I seek is for you to fix the bungling within the billing system to ensure that there is no further distress caused to these people receiving this additional impost.

#### History curriculum

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:28): (784) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Education, and my ask is that he commits to expanding history curriculums across the schooling system to reflect the diverse histories of the people of this state. I was prompted to put this matter to the government by a young constituent George Khoshaba. He is 18 years old and was born in Australia to an Assyrian father who fled Iraq as a refugee in the late 1980s during Saddam Hussein's rule. George has met many other Assyrian people at his school whose families faced similar instability in their home countries due to war and terrorism and who have come to Australia in search of a safer life. Over the years George has learned about the persecution, displacement and genocide of the Assyrian people and the struggles they continue to face for recognition. George tells me that he was extremely disappointed during high school as none of his classes ever mentioned the plight of the Assyrian people. This is despite the estimated 60,000 to 70,000 people of Assyrian heritage currently living in Australia and all the Assyrian students at his school.

George is not the only young person in this state who has felt alienated by the school curriculum. Victoria is an incredibly diverse state, and our multiculturalism makes us strong. People from all backgrounds should have the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the material being brought into their classrooms. They should be able to learn about histories and cultures that are representative of the diversity of our state. The Greens have long been calling for more First Nations cultural education, including languages, in the Victorian school curriculum. Following the Voice referendum, and with the divisive voices threatening the state's treaty process, this is more important than ever. Minister, the teaching of more diverse histories and cultures would bring students closer together. When students of all backgrounds feel seen in the classroom it makes for a more cohesive, inclusive and supportive learning environment, and ultimately when students graduate it makes for a more understanding and accepting society more broadly. So, Minister, my ask is that you broaden the teaching of histories and cultures in our school curriculums so that it is inclusive of multiple peoples and reflects First Nations cultures more prominently.

#### COVID-19 vaccination

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:30): (785) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to vaccine mandates. Naomi is a midwife who has been unable to work in Victoria's health system for more than two years due to the government's COVID-19 vaccination mandates in healthcare settings. Whilst I understand the issue around vaccination and keeping healthcare workers safe, I think this does need to be reviewed. Naomi

developed a reaction to her second COVID-19 vaccination, which also affected her ability to breastfeed her newborn son at the time, and she does not want to risk having another booster while still breastfeeding. Her condition does not qualify for an exemption from the mandated three doses for healthcare workers here in Victoria. Having only received two COVID vaccinations under the government's policy, she is deemed not to be fully vaccinated for the purposes of employment in the public health system.

While the Victorian government persists with this outdated requirement, Naomi could work as a midwife in any other state in the country. New South Wales and South Australia require two doses. Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia have ended vaccine mandates for their health workers. So there is a really big inconsistency here, and it is incredibly frustrating for these workers who just want to work. Naomi supported vaccines at the height of the pandemic and as a healthcare worker understands that patient safety is paramount, yet the government's policy to persist with COVID-19 vaccination mandates is out of step with other states and the views of experts. Leading expert in vaccination uptake Julie Leask AO said recently:

Given that we are now in a situation where most people have immunity from both initial vaccines and from COVID itself, and vaccinated people can still transmit COVID, it is very difficult to justify ongoing vaccination requirements ...

for COVID-19. She said that in the *Sunday Age* on 11 February this year. Last month the Queensland Supreme Court ruled in favour of police and paramedics who challenged the state's vaccination mandates for frontline emergency workers. They found that the mandates were unlawful and in breach of the human rights of those employees.

The lost income for Naomi's family has also taken its toll when cost-of-living pressures are going through the roof and the ongoing taxes are hitting her household, like all Victorians. They have even been considering moving interstate, which is also concerning when Victoria has a desperate shortage of midwives.

It makes absolutely no sense that this policy remains in place. The action I seek is that the policy on which the directions are made by the Secretary of the Department of Health be reviewed urgently and scrapped so that willing and capable healthcare workers like Naomi can get back to work and provide essential care for the Victorian community, that they can be consistent with other states and that we can have our midwives and nurses and other frontline workers like firefighters all supported in the work that they can undertake.

### Elective surgery

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:33): (786) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. The action that I seek is for the government to fund a clinical health school at Goulburn Valley Health and also for the minister to clearly articulate what measures the government is putting in place to ensure that the elective surgery backlog is cleared as soon as possible. There are 70,000 Victorians on the waitlist for elective surgery in this state, 70,000 people suffering daily with pain or a lack of mobility as they wait for surgery in one of the state's hospitals. This is an unacceptable situation, and the government should be doing everything it can to clear the backlog and ensure that Victorians who need surgery can get it within a reasonable time frame.

Each year hospitals sign an agreement with the state government committing to performing a certain number of units of medical treatment. The government then provides the hospitals with funding based on the number of activity units that they expect to complete that year. The Department of Health policy and funding guidelines state that if hospitals do not meet the agreed treatment target, funding is recalled for the activity units that were not performed. The funding recall policy was suspended during COVID, a time when hospitals were in critical need of reliable funding, and it has been reported that the suspension of the funding recall policy is still in effect. Analysis by the *Bendigo Advertiser* shows that the state's hospitals were falling short of their targets by the equivalent of 100,000 elective surgeries

in the last year. This means hospitals are not meeting their targets for surgeries and other treatments, but they are still getting the money from the government without doing the work. Clearly the backlog is not being created due to a funding shortfall.

Victorians pay the highest tax of any state, and the government has a duty to make sure that taxpayers get value for money. The Victorian community deserves to get the services that its taxes are paying for. Now is not the time to be taking money away from hospitals; however, funding treatments that are not being performed is not sustainable in the long term, and measures need to be put in place to ensure targets can be and are being met.

In my electorate, Goulburn Valley Health missed its target by 13,000 activity units, the equivalent of about 6000 surgeries, but they pointed out that a major reason for this is a significant health worker shortage in our region. That is why I have consistently advocated for a new clinical training school at Goulburn Valley Health. Our health professionals are doing the best they can, but they are overworked and fatigued, and our state desperately needs additional health workers. I urge the minister to put in place a plan to assist hospitals to meet their treatment targets, and that plan must include increased training of health workers and medical professionals. Too many Victorians have been waiting too long for elective surgeries, and the government needs to get serious about clearing the backlog.

#### **North East Link**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:36): (787) My adjournment is directed to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure regarding the North East Link. This is Victoria's costliest road project at \$26.1 billion, \$16 billion over the original estimate. North East Link was promised to be finished in 2027, with the government now promising that the North East Link will be finished in 2028 or beyond. There is no clarity. Inability to deliver a project without significant delays is just the start of this project's governance and ministerial oversight problems. The scope of the project also remains fluid. Watsonia residents are concerned at the constant changes to bridge and walkway coverage and to car parking promised and that any diagrams, illustrations or information days cannot be trusted to represent the true scope of the project being delivered.

In the case of the North East Link project, we do not know how much it will cost, we do not know how long it will take and we do not know how much resource it will take, so there is significant risk. In the private sector any project that loses control of cost, scope, time, resource and risk is rightly considered a delinquent project. When a project is delinquent, best practice requires that the governance structure above immediately intervene to take immediate control and arrest the failure and adopt close monitoring, effectively assuming direct control of the project to prevent greater loss until such time as it is no longer delinquent. A \$10 billion overrun does not accumulate overnight, so either the minister and the Premier knew in advance and failed to intervene in a delinquent project or the reporting is so lax that they have lost control. This is clearly a significant project governance failure within the North East Link either way, and the current reporting program is inadequate.

The action I seek from the minister is to commit to revising the reporting cycle and producing monthly public reporting of this delinquent project's cost, time scale, scope, resource and risk, as would be routinely available under any competent project governance structure, until such time as the project is no longer delinquent, or if not, to provide a guarantee to everyone that there will be no further changes to cost, scope, time, resource and risk in the delivery of North East Link.

#### **Royal Exhibition Building**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:39): (788) Tonight I want to raise a matter for the Minister for Creative Industries, and it concerns the Royal Exhibition Building. The building is a remarkable building. It was World Heritage listed in 2004, was built in 1880 for the Melbourne International Exhibition and was the site of Australia's first federal Parliament in 1901. But now the evidence is that Labor, in government now for 16 of the last 20 years, has mismanaged this important building. It is crumbling, and the murals inside, which are so much a part of the history of the building

and part of its World Heritage listing, are in a terrible state. As I say, it was World Heritage listed, and the ornate internal paintings were part of that. Parts of the murals from 1880 are still intact at this time, but they are crumbling now through the financial mismanagement of Labor; the museums board, which is responsible for the building; and indeed Heritage Victoria as well. There is a real risk that our World Heritage listed building will crumble and we will lose many of the murals and paintings inside.

The hall's interior, which includes stencils, murals and mottos such as 'Victoria welcomes all nations', was designed by architect John Mather with additions from John Ross Anderson for the ceremonial opening of federal Parliament on 25 May 1901. These are very significant in the history of our country and in the history of the world. That building typified the exhibition movement around the world, and it was one of the key reasons – the typification of those exhibitions around the world – that it was heritage listed. It is up to us to make sure that it is maintained in a suitable condition.

It is estimated that the restorations will cost \$50 million. The state government has spent, I am informed, \$1.2 million on the building over the last five years. So this is just typical Labor. They cannot manage money, they cannot manage projects and they cannot take responsibility for projects that are so significant. But it needs to go further. There is actually a responsibility of the federal government, but in the very first instance the state government through Museums Victoria needs to act, and that is the responsibility of the Minister for Creative Industries. So what I want him to do is to get off his tail and to make sure that this building is restored and protected, that the crumbling state of it is arrested and that the murals are not allowed to deteriorate to the point where we have lost them. Five million dollars is an urgent injection. I know the state government has got itself in terrible trouble with the budget. I urge him to act.

### **Rural mental health**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (18:42): (789) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Mental Health. It particularly relates to farmers and their mental health. Recently I attended the premiere of a movie called *Just a Farmer*, which was in Ararat in my electorate, and it stars and it was produced by a local named Leila McDougall. I want to acknowledge Leila McDougall for her tremendous work in putting together a Hollywood-style movie. That is the level that it is at, despite it being funded by a collection of great supporters of the rural community. It is certainly on par with something you would see as a blockbuster release in Hollywood, despite the fact that the subject matter is obviously very, very different and very, very close to a lot of our hearts here in country Victoria.

The action that I seek is for the minister to meet with me and Leila and other rural mental health advocates to talk about the real impacts that a lot of farmers face and continue to face when the reality of farming is very, very different to what it was some time ago. In particular, things that are faced are challenges like wind farms and how they can tear apart rural communities which have been very close in the past. Transmission lines have been a big, big challenge that have forced a lot of farmers into a very difficult space and caused a lot of struggle. But the ongoing viability of many farming operations and excess regulation and a duopoly in the supermarket sector have had an incredible impact on how farmers operate and indeed whether some farmers continue to carry on or not.

I really want to commend and congratulate Leila not just for producing a world-class film but for raising the issue of rural farmers' mental health. It is extremely important that we do not forget this. Farmers are the lifeblood of our country communities. They are the presidents of local footy clubs; they contribute on a Saturday morning on the sausage stalls; they serve on the show society committees. They are givers, and they also feed us and clothe us. They are remarkable, resilient people. For such pressure that farmers are under, I think this often goes ignored, and I really, really do want to thank Leila for shining a very unique light on that. I hope that if everyone has the chance to, they can go and see the film *Just a Farmer*, which has been released recently.

### Wallan road infrastructure

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:45): (790) My adjournment is directed to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and it concerns the Wallan diamond ramps. I seek the action of the minister to provide an update as to when the business case for the Watson Street interchange in Wallan will be released and update my community on the progress of the Wallan diamond ramps. Major Road Projects Victoria have consistently stated that the business case will be released and completed by early 2024. We are now in mid-March with no sign of a business case.

In 2019 the Labor federal member for McEwen claimed credit for the federal coalition government's \$50 million budget commitment for the Wallan diamond, but since then he has consistently peddled falsehoods that this \$50 million has been missing and held up the state government getting on with the project, despite the state government only making an election commitment with a dollar value in November 2022. The state government never actually provided a dollar during that period or undertook the necessary upgrades to Watson Street that were required.

We now see that Major Road Projects Victoria have contradicted the falsehoods of the Labor federal member for McEwen and have acknowledged the 2019 contribution of \$50 million from the former federal coalition government. So that is settled. But if you read the fine print in their documentation, it says that their commitment of \$130 million is inclusive of the federal government's \$50 million contribution. We never once saw Labor before the election state that their contribution was only \$80 million for this project. In fact they had big signs and billboards and made a big deal in the media about the contribution being \$130 million. The MRPV have contradicted this – an absolute lie by the Labor Party, who were clearly penny-pinching on projects. I think it is fair to say this project would never have been on the radar for Labor without the effort of my colleague Mr Welch, who was our candidate for McEwen and Yan Yean. As I have said before, I was shocked to see in the *Age* that five sources inside the government and construction industry have said that the government was forcing a rethink of projects that were in the planning stage, saying they only had the money to do the North East Link and the Suburban Rail Loop. It is deeply concerning for many in the Wallan community who want the state government to get on with the job and build the Wallan diamond ramps.

I seek the action of the minister to explain why the government promised \$130 million when it is delivering only \$80 million, to reassure my community that there will be no delays to the ramps and to release the business case and provide a time line for construction and completion of this very important project.

### Flood recovery

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:48): (791) It is 17 months since the October 2022 floods devastated many parts of northern Victoria, and my request is for the Minister for Emergency Services to support towns rebuilding and recovering from the floods and to address the challenges that I raise today.

I recently attended the 135th anniversary of the Salvation Army in Rochester. The service recognises the significant contribution of many locals who had gone above and beyond to assist residents impacted by the floods, which saw nearly every home in Rochester flooded. There are still hundreds of people living in caravans and sheds, using a portaloos every day. I was told that many of those still living in temporary accommodation desperately need the support of someone who could advocate on their behalf with insurance companies and building contractors in order to make progress. According to their website, Emergency Recovery Victoria was established to help towns rebuild and recover. I ask the minister to get staff on the ground to doorknock Rochester and help those who need it.

The *Loddon Herald* has reported that in the Loddon shire layers of red tape are holding up 900 flood recovery projects, with just 10 per cent of projects, totalling \$30 million, approved to fix damaged roads, culverts and bridges. There has been no approval since last October, and the shire will not be able to complete the works by the June 2025 deadline. The council has been questioned at every stage



and been asked to provide more evidence. I have heard that one director working in flood recovery for 20 years said that it was the most frustrating bureaucratic process he has ever been part of.

I was also recently invited by locals to visit Carisbrook, a town that was inundated by floodwaters in January 2011. At that time more than half the town was evacuated and about 260 houses were swamped. In 2022 the community lived through the devastation again. Locals have raised concerns that the works to levees and culverts made the floods even worse. I call upon the state government to work with the local council to support the local community and undertake an independent assessment of the Carisbrook levee plan.

As we look to hold the parliamentary sitting in Echuca on 18 April, members of this chamber will visit for a day, but those who live in these communities live with the impact of the floods every day. While this government spends billions of dollars on city-based projects, I ask the minister to consider these smaller rural communities and provide the people and resources they still desperately need to recover and rebuild after the floods.

### **Professor Bridgette Semple**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:50): (792) I had the great fortune on Saturday 16 March of attending the Ringwood Secondary College 70th anniversary celebration. At that celebration a number of events occurred, but one in particular was quite important for the school and for the broader community of Ringwood, my district of Ringwood, and that is that there were a number of inductees into the halls of fame. It is appropriate I think over the course of the week that I will outline for not only this house but also the people of Victoria the great students, the pupils, the alumni that have emerged from Ringwood Secondary College.

One of those individuals was an individual called Professor Bridgette Semple – of course she was not called ‘professor’ at the time when she left Ringwood Secondary College in 1996. Bridgette left and started her scientific journey with a bachelor in biomedical sciences at Monash University. That was followed by an honours, which gave her a taste of research – something that is important among all of us. Bridgette pursued her PhD in neuroscience, graduating in 2010, after which she spent a four-year stint in the United States completing a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California in San Francisco. Bridgette later returned home to Australia and established, with a number of other people, an independent research group at the University of Melbourne. After two years she was a founding member of the new department of neuroscience in the central clinical school at the Alfred hospital.

Bridgette is now back in the Ringwood area living with her family, with two children. She has made significant research on traumatic brain injury in both children and adults, and her work has also focused, importantly, on a better understanding of biological processes that drive the development of long-term behavioural and functional consequences after traumatic brain injury. Bridgette has a track record of scientific publication in high-quality journals, and she is also regularly invited to present her research at conferences. She has now transitioned to a senior consultancy role, where she is focusing her time and efforts in academic partnerships across the health and medical research sectors to secure multimillion dollar grants in innovative research projects in that space.

She has remembered fondly her time at Ringwood Secondary College and particularly her English teacher Mrs Pearson. I would like to congratulate Bridgette. She is an inspiration not only to Ringwood Secondary College but to young boys and girls everywhere who perhaps while they did not initially think they might go down the path of sciences eventually did exactly that. We need more scientists. We all know this. We need to encourage girls. They have a magnificent new STEM facility they are about to open. I would also of course ask the Minister for Education to join with me in congratulating Professor Bridgette Semple on her induction into the science hall of fame at Ringwood Secondary College.

### Gender transition

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:53): (793) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health and concerns the recent decision by the UK's National Health Service to stop prescribing children puberty blockers at gender clinics. This is not a minor development; it is a complete reversal in direction after years of increasing pharmaceutical intervention in cases of psychological distress in children. And it did not arise from a minor change of opinion – the reasons are actually quite shocking. The review in question concluded that there is insufficient evidence to show how safe these drugs are. Let that sink in. They have been used for years now in Victoria too with insufficient evidence that they are safe. Worse still, there was no evidence to show they were sufficiently clinically effective to prescribe. They might not be safe, they might not work – it is a shocking conclusion. The report was the latest in a series of systematic reviews and research assessments. These have clearly shown that the use of gonadotropin-releasing hormone agonists – in other words, puberty blockers – and cross-sex hormones on children cannot be medically justified, up by 2500 per cent in the years between 2009 and 2017.

These medical reviews have arisen at the same time that serious questions have been asked about the legality of the treatment model. The UK High Court's *Bell v. Tavistock* highlighted the lack of evidence supporting long-term health outcomes as well as the rapid increase in diagnoses. The numbers alone should tell us that the vast increase is statistically improbable: 2500 per cent in the years between 2009 and 2017. This is before we even get into the incredibly fraught issue of consent. How can a child perhaps suffering mental distress possibly fully understand the long term and irreversible consequences of these treatments and therefore properly consent? They cannot. How can they understand their future thoughts and feelings, emotions and physical states, about which, by virtue of their age, they have no comprehension? And still less, can they properly consent when the evidence of safety and efficacy are incomplete?

Affirmation-only models constrain medical professionals' ability to use their own judgement to assess what is really affecting children. The figures about comorbid psychological conditions are striking. We risk wrongly treating the conditions children present with and doing so irreversibly with drugs which may be unsafe and which may not even produce their claimed effect. I hope we are beginning to see the end of this successful ideological, not medical, lie. So, Minister, I seek a thorough clinical review, like the Cass review, of the treatment of gender dysphoric children in Victoria.

### Responses

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (18:56): There were 14 adjournment matters that were raised today, and they will be referred to the appropriate ministers.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 6:57 pm.**