



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 30 April 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Peter Walsh

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

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

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁶ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

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

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Tuesday 30 April 2024

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:06 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills**Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024***Introduction and first reading*

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (12:07): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to repeal the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011, to abolish the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission Act 2011 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:08): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (12:08): The bill will repeal the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011 and amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 – the GRA – the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission Act 2011 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 to abolish the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and to make other related amendments.

Read first time.**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.****Local Government Amendment (Governance and Integrity) Bill 2024***Introduction and first reading*

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (12:09): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Local Government Act 2020 in relation to governance and integrity matters and to make other miscellaneous amendments, to amend the Local Government Act 1989 to reflect machinery-of-government changes, to make consequential amendments to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:09): Can I ask the minister for a brief explanation?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (12:09): The bill will introduce legislative reforms to the Local Government Act 2020 to improve and strengthen accountability, councillor conduct and governance across the local government sector in relation to council leadership, capability and councillor conduct, early intervention and effective dispute resolution and oversight mechanisms.

Read first time.**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024*Introduction and first reading*

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:10): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to repeal the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004, to abolish VicForests, to amend the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 and the Forests Act 1958 in relation to forest management and to consequentially amend other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:11): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:11): In summary, the bill implements priority legislative reforms to support the government's decision to abolish VicForests and end commercial native timber harvesting in state forests. The bill will do so by repealing the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004 to remove the framework authorising commercial native timber harvesting under the act and abolish VicForests and making relevant amendments to the Forests Act 1958 and the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 to preserve key tools that support regulation and forest management.

Read first time.**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.***Members***Greens leadership**

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:12): I wish to inform the house about some changes to Greens roles and responsibilities. I have been elected as the new parliamentary leader of the Victorian Greens. Sam Hibbins, the member for Prahran, will be co-deputy leader and manager of Greens business in the lower house, and Dr Sarah Mansfield in the other place has been elected upper house leader and co-deputy leader.

*Business of the house***Notices of motion and orders of the day**

The SPEAKER (12:12): General business, notices of motion 7, 18 to 26 and 28 to 35 and orders of the day 3 and 4, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matters to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

*Petitions***Grosvenor Street, Balaclava, housing**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) presented a petition bearing 31 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in the Balaclava Community draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the recent untimely eviction of Grosvenor Street Housing precinct tenants, for a proposed redevelopment with demolition programmed for May 2024. Our neighbours (tenants) were told of a redevelopment of their homes and hastily evicted from their homes in late '23. Local residents have raised concerns with both Housing First & Homes Victoria about this proposed redevelopment but have only received a generic letter that states there is no funding for any project, and that opportunities are still being explored for the site. Residents are confused, upset, and anxious about the conflicting information and lack of engagement.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to enforce clear lines of communication immediately with the local residents and community about any proposed redevelopment of the site, including engaging in a face-to-face consultation immediately before any further evictions are undertaken, and before pending demolition (May '24).

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Leakes Road–Clearwood Drive, Truganina

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) presented a petition bearing 387 signatures:

Issue:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the House the dangerous intersection at Leakes Road and Clearwood Drive in Truganina, which has presented a significant road safety risk to children at nearby Truganina P-9 College located just down the road from this intersection.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria calls on the Minister for Police and Crime Prevention and the Government to have the Road Safety Camera Site Selection Committee assess the potential installation of a speed camera and red light camera at the intersection of Leakes Road and Clearwood Drive in Truganina.

Bus route 887

Sam GROTH (Nepean) presented a petition bearing 102 signatures:

Issue:

We the undersigned residents of Victoria draw to the attention of the House community support for an expanded weekday and weekend 887-bus service from Frankston to Rosebud. Train delays at Frankston means missed bus departures and having to wait one hour on weekdays and two hours on weekends for the next service to Rosebud.

Action:

We, the undersigned residents of Victoria therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the Victorian Government to expand the 887-bus service from Frankston to Rosebud for busy and hardworking families.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Wantirna South police resources

Kim WELLS (Rowville) presented a petition bearing 854 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly to the increased crime rate including Burglaries, Home Invasions, Car Thefts in Wantirna South.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to increase police resources to the Knox Police Station to allow for regular police patrols to occur within the Wantirna South Area as well as the addition of lighting at neighbourhood parks, & install security cameras.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Unborn children

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) presented a petition bearing 280 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that unborn babies are not classed as human beings by the law. On the 20th of October 2023 my wife was caught in a tragic car accident. Not only was she severely injured but my son was killed. Unfortunately, the law in Victoria doesn't recognise him as a human being because he didn't take a breath when delivered by the doctors. He was our

first baby. He was loved by so many people already. His heart was beating, he was healthy and ready to come into the world. He did but not the way we expected. My baby will never be recognised as a victim by the justice system and the person responsible of the accident will never be held accountable for his death. We don't understand. He has a birth and death certificate, his own TAC claim number. Why isn't that enough to recognise him as a human being? My wife was 34 weeks pregnant. If she can't get an abortion, why is my baby still recognised as a foetus and not a baby?

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to consider unborn babies as human beings. In our eyes, if the limit 24 weeks of gestation for an abortion, any baby past 24 weeks of gestation, any baby with a birth certificate, should be recognised as a human being by the law. My wife and I know that it is too late for us. Remi will never get justice. We want to make sure this never happens to anyone else.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 5

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:15): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 5 of 2024, on the following bills and subordinate legislation:

Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024
Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024
Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2024
National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024
SR No. 33 – Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) (Waste to Energy Scheme) Regulations 2023
SR No. 49 – Forests (Recreation) (Temporary) Amendment Regulations 2023
SR No. 50 – Conservation, Forests and Lands (Infringement Notice) Regulations 2023
SR No. 78 – Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) (Container Deposit Scheme) Amendment Regulations 2023
SR No. 113 – Social Services Regulations 2023
SR No. 116 – Associations Incorporation Reform Regulations 2023
SR No. 119 – Casino Control Regulations 2023
EPA Designation – Classification of PFAS-impacted soil made under regulation 86 of the Environment Protection Regulations 2021

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Border Groundwaters Agreement Review Committee – Report 2022–23

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria – State of the Birrarung (Yarra) and Its Parklands – Report 2023

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978:

Orders under s 17B granting licences over:

Spencer and Drybrough Street Reserve and Miller Street Reserve

The Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve

Orders under ss 17B and 17D granting licences and leases over:

Albert Park

Point Leo Foreshore Reserve

Ombudsman – Reflections on 10 years – released on 25 March 2024

Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Superannuation Act 1968 – Compliance Officer – Statement of Findings under s 9H – Ordered to be published

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

Alpine – GC222

Ballarat – GC222

Bass Coast – C165

Bayside – C201

Benalla – GC222

Boroondara – C409

Buloke – GC222

Campaspe – GC222

Central Goldfields – GC222

Darebin – C219

Gannawarra – GC222

Glen Eira – C259

Glenelg – C109, C112

Greater Bendigo – GC222

Greater Geelong – C383, C467

Greater Shepparton – GC222

Hepburn – GC222

Horsham – C81

Hume – C266

Indigo – GC222

Kingston – C215

Loddon – GC222

Macedon Ranges – GC222

Mansfield – GC222

Maroondah – C156

Mildura – GC222

Mitchell – GC222

Moira – GC222

Mornington Peninsula – C293

Moorabool – GC222

Mount Alexander – GC222

Moyne – C79

Murrindindi – GC222

Pyrenees – GC222
Stonnington – C333
Strathbogie – GC222
Swan Hill – GC222
Towong – GC222
Victoria Planning Provisions – VC252, VC259, VC261
Wangaratta – GC222
Warrnambool – C212
Whitehorse – C230
Wodonga – GC222
Yarra – C307, C324

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 – SR 20
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 – SR 16
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 – SR 21
Equipment (Public Safety) Act 1994 – SR 22
Guardianship and Administration Act 2019 – SR 13
Land Conservation (Vehicle Control) Act 1972 – SR 19
National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008 – SR 25
Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 – SR 23
Prisoners (Interstate Transfer) Act 1983 – SR 24
Social Services Regulation Act 2021 – SR 17
Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010 – SR 18
Supreme Court Act 1986 – SR 14, 15
Vexatious Proceedings Act 2014 – SR 14
Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 – SR 13

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

Wildlife Act 1975 – Declaration of the dingo to be unprotected wildlife

Victorian Electoral Commission – Report to Parliament on the 2023 Mulgrave District by-election

Wildlife Act 1975:

Declaration of the dingo to be unprotected wildlife (*Gazette S123, 14 March 2024*)

Wildlife (Emergency Closure of Moodie Swamp State Game Reserve and Lake Modewarre Reserve) Notice (*Gazette S177, 12 April 2024*)

Wildlife (Indigenous Game Birds (Quail) Hunting) Notice (*Gazette S155, 2 April 2024*)

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 2/2024 (*Gazette S162, 7 April 2024*).

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

Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Act 2024 – Whole Act (except Divisions 1 and 4 of Part 2 and Sections 50, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95 and 99) – 22 April 2024 (*Gazette S182, 16 April 2024*).

*Bills***Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024****Private Security and County Court Amendment Bill 2024****Statute Law Revision Bill 2024***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (12:18): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024, the Private Security and County Court Amendment Bill 2024 and the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024.

Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023**Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024****Private Security and County Court Amendment Bill 2024****State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023****Statute Law Revision Bill 2024***Royal assent*

The SPEAKER (12:18): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023, the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024, the Private Security and County Court Amendment Bill 2024, the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 and the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024.

Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024**Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024****Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2024***Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (12:19): I have received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024, the Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024 and the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2024.

*Joint sitting of Parliament***Senate vacancy**

The SPEAKER (12:19): I have received a letter from the Governor transmitting a dispatch from the President of the Senate notifying of a vacancy in the representation of the state of Victoria in the Senate of the Commonwealth of Australia through the resignation of Senator Janet Rice on 19 April 2024.

Ordered that message be taken into consideration later this day.

*Committees***Standing Orders Committee***Membership*

The SPEAKER (12:20): I have received the resignation of Ellen Sandell from the Standing Orders Committee effective from 24 April 2024.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:20): I move, by leave:

That Sam Hibbins be a member of the Standing Orders Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Integrity and Oversight Committee*Reporting dates*

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:20): I move, by leave:

That the reporting date for the Integrity and Oversight Committee's inquiry into the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 be extended to no later than 30 September 2024.

Motion agreed to.

*Motions***Community safety**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:20): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the presence of a cactus –

Leave refused.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Anyone can say no at any point when a member is on their feet seeking leave. Leave was not granted.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, for clarity, I am unsure how the government can deny leave on something when they have not even heard the substance of what is being put forward. At the very least it is extremely discourteous.

The SPEAKER: I refer members to *Rulings from the Chair*:

Any member may seek leave of the House to waive the notice period for motions set out in SO 140(1) however, leave is only granted without a dissenting voice. If any member refuses leave, regardless of other members indicating that they grant leave, then leave is refused and the motion cannot be moved without notice.

Gendered violence

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:22): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the thousands of women marching on the streets of Melbourne –

Leave refused.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the ruling from the Chair you just read out made no reference that I heard to the point at which a dissenting member can indicate they deny leave and whether in fact the member on their feet should have the opportunity to explain to the house what the

motion is. Maybe there is something further that, Speaker, you did not read out, but I certainly did not hear that.

The SPEAKER: In further rulings from the Chair, a former Speaker ruled that:

... whilst it did nothing for Parliament if leave was refused before a member had the chance to move his motion, the rules of Parliament indicate that leave may be refused at anytime.

Yoorrook Justice Commission

Tim READ (Brunswick) (12:23): I move, by leave:

That this house commends the Premier –

Leave refused.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, if I can refer you to your further reference just now to *Rulings from the Chair*, I think it is now going to be extremely difficult for anybody on this side of the chamber to grant leave on any item furthermore.

Community safety

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:24): I move, by leave:

That this house supports the Jewish community –

Leave refused.

Middle East conflict

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (12:24): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that since this house resolved –

Leave refused.

Standing and sessional orders

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (12:24): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be –

Leave refused.

Sam Hibbins: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to the ruling that a mover of a motion or someone seeking leave to move a motion has to stop speaking immediately after the government refuses leave, I think we have now demonstrated the impracticality, to say it politely, of such an application of that rule. I ask you to reconsider the application of that rule so that members can actually put forward what they are moving prior to the government simply and immediately shutting down any speeches.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, I ask that you rule the member's point of order out of order as there was no point of order.

The SPEAKER: It is clear in *Rulings from the Chair* that any member can say no at any time during the giving of that notice. It is not for me to determine when that 'no' would be said.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, can I refer you to standing order 104, 'Member's right to speak'. I would put to you that the standing orders make it very, very clear that a member has a right to speak. How can a member put forward a proposition that a government can deny if the member is unable to even have the right to speak which is provided in the standing orders? I think that it runs contrary to standing order 104.

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, maybe these are matters that can be taken to the Standing Orders Committee.

Michael O'Brien: On a further point of order, Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business just referred you to the standing orders. In my respectful submission, *Rulings from the Chair* should be read in light of the standing orders, which clearly provide for members to have the right to speak. I would urge you to consider whether *Rulings from the Chair* should be revised in light of that – that standing orders come first and *Rulings from the Chair* are read subject to and in light of the standing orders – because I can see this Parliament becoming fairly unworkable and fairly undemocratic if this practice is to continue.

The SPEAKER: I refer members to standing order 104, which the Manager of Opposition Business referred to – that members may speak to any point of order that has arisen; propose his or her own motion or amendment; speak to any question before the house, including proposed amendments; and speak on a matter of privilege that has suddenly arisen. There are options available. However, having said that, I think we have canvassed this enough right now. I think this is something that might be referred to the Standing Orders Committee.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, I would also refer you to standing order 106, 'Motion that a member be no longer heard'. I put to you that what the government is doing is effectively moving motions on members that they be no longer heard, which is against the spirit of standing order 104. I do not think it is tenable, frankly, for a committee at some point in the future to perhaps consider this question; I think what we are considering right now is the right of members to actually speak in this chamber today.

The SPEAKER: I will take these matters back and discuss them in my office with anyone who wishes to speak about them with me after we have continued on with government business.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, I am seeking clarification, please. When leave is sought, is it your practice to ask the house whether leave is granted before you will determine whether leave is granted?

The SPEAKER: A member stands and requests leave. At that point anyone can agree to leave or not agree to leave – at any point.

Business of the house

Program

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:29): It is a great pleasure to be back here in the house. I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House is moving the government business program.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I move:

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

National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024

Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024.

It is great to be back in the house after a considerable period of time either back in our electorates or attending to ministerial duties. I know that at least members on this side of the house always welcome the opportunity to come to Parliament to continue our focus on addressing the real needs and concerns of the Victorian people, and that is why the bills that will be discussed this week are of particular importance. I am delighted, and I know members on this side of the house are –

James Newbury: I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER: I am not satisfied that the question can be put, as the member has only spoken for 1 minute. The member is not using her opportunity to speak in a way that is an abuse of the rules or the conventions of the house, nor is she obstructing business.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I would seek your clarity. How can the government be allowed 1 minute and it not be enough time, but a member of the opposition was allowed 1 second and it was considered enough?

The SPEAKER: They are two different issues, Manager of Opposition Business.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: The National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024 is a very important bill, one that will continue our government's nation-leading reforms when it comes to our commitment to renewable power to both drive down power prices and push towards our ambitious climate targets. On this side of the house we know that we can do both: we can transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy and we can drive down power prices. We decarbonised –

James Newbury: I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER: I refer again to standing order 106. I do not believe that the member on their feet has in any way breached standing order 106; therefore I call the Leader of the House to continue.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I was saying, we have the strongest climate change legislation of anywhere in the country, and since this government was elected we have cut emissions by more than any other state. This is a record that we are extremely proud of. We are also introducing the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the House is foreshadowing debate. It is not the appropriate place, during the government business program debate. That is for during the debate of the actual legislation, and I ask you to draw the Leader of the House back to the motion.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Leader of the House to talk to the government business program.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. I have only named the second bill that is to be debated this week as part of the government business program.

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Speaker, you have ruled on the point of order.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House, please come back to the government business program.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: The government business program includes two bills, which we will be debating. I have already outlined one of them.

James Newbury: Under standing order 106(2)(a), on the basis that the member speaking has 'had ample opportunity to state his or her views', I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House has almost concluded her 5 minutes. Does the Leader of the House wish to continue?

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Two bills – a strong Labor program.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:35): On the government business program, what we are seeing in the Parliament today is the most shameful display, the most shameful abuse of this place, that I have seen in my time in this place – in my time around Parliament and involved in Parliament. We have now got to a point where members cannot be heard in this place, where members cannot have a

proposition put, before the government will gag them. This is a very dark day. I would put that the government business program must include an opportunity – the Parliament must be provided with an opportunity – to call out what the government has done today and for members who are not in the government to be provided an opportunity to voice –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed from the chamber if the house does not come to order. The Leader of the Opposition will come to order. The Leader of the House will come to order.

Tim Richardson: On a point of order, Speaker, from your previous rulings I think the member for Brighton needs to come back to the government business program rather than ventilating his thoughts and views on the world and universe, so bring him back to the government business program.

The SPEAKER: I ask you to come back to the government business program.

James NEWBURY: The government business program is a debate about what is being proposed for consideration by this chamber this week, and the coalition would put that there needs to be a debate, an opportunity, to discuss the outrageous tactics of the government to gag the opposition from speaking. It is absolutely untenable for the opposition to not be provided any opportunity –

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Speaker, we are discussing the government business program and we are straying from it.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will come back to the government business program.

James NEWBURY: I am debating the government business program in that the government business program does not fully elaborate on what we need to consider as a Parliament. I put on record that the coalition will not be able to agree to any single proposition that the government puts from now on. I give notice of that.

Dylan Wight: On a point of order, Speaker, further to your ruling, the Manager of Opposition Business has not got even close to speaking about the government business program so far. This is not an opportunity for the Manager of Opposition Business to pontificate –

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, I would ask you to come back to the government business program.

James NEWBURY: Part of this debate is providing a discussion around what the Parliament could be considering. For example, the government has proposed one motion being considered this week. We would put that there need to be opportunities other than simply two bills. We know that on a normal sitting week the Parliament will consider a minimum of three bills. This week the government has proposed only two, which shows that quite clearly we will have time to consider other matters. We have seen both during motions by leave during formal business and now on the government business program that the government is not providing any opportunity for the opposition to put forward their position. How can we have a Parliament where the government gags every single non-government speaker? How can that be? It is absolutely outrageous.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask that you bring the Manager of Opposition Business back to the government business program. He has clearly strayed again from your ruling, and I ask that you ask him to focus his attention on the –

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business has been making a point.

James NEWBURY: What has happened today is a mistake and the government will learn from it.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (12:40): I rise in support of the government business program. Obviously, as we have heard, we have got the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform

Bill 2024, which I think those on the other side of the chamber and this side of the chamber can agree will actually encourage business to expand in Victoria or set up in a different location as well, which is great for everyone: stakeholders and community, and especially growing workforces. It will support businesses to invest in buildings and infrastructure as well. These are very, very important bills that we need to speak about.

Of course we have also got the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. It brings the Victorian retailer of last resort scheme in line with national standards. We have heard quite a bit from across the aisle about renewable energy. People are obviously talking about the people that they represent, their constituents, and about how the success of the solar program has gone down in Victoria as well. This is something that people want to hear about, and this is something that people in this chamber actually want to talk about.

James Newbury: As per standing order 106, on the basis of (2)(a) – ‘the member speaking has already had ample opportunity to state his or her views on the matter’ – I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER: The member for Frankston is not abusing standing order 106, and given the strict time limits for this debate, the member for Frankston can continue.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you, Speaker. Also, we have got the take-note motion on the apology to Victorians in state care, which is a very important part of our government business program. I say thank you to everyone who stood up in the last Parliament to talk about that. We had a gallery full of people who obviously had lived experience, sometimes firsthand experience, of the abuse that went on throughout that period. They need to hear people talking about that state government apology and about what historically happened, what should not have happened and what should never ever happen again under successive governments. It is very important that we take that time – that this Parliament take that time – to consider those people and what they gave to the inquiry and thank them, for want of a better term, for picking those wounds and opening up those wounds so that we could come to a decision and make that apology. To the people that today will speak on that apology I would say: just keep that in mind, and obviously the constituents in your community – keep in mind how important that is. That goes to the fact that we are talking about a very important government business program here, and what I am seeing from those opposite is really just groundhog day once again. *Groundhog Day: The Musical* is down the street, it is not in here. We need to actually get on with government business. I support the government business program.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member is clearly not speaking about the government business program.

The SPEAKER: The member for Frankston was referring to a motion on the business program.

Paul EDBROOKE: I most definitely was. In my concluding remarks, I am not sure of the confusion there. The government business program that we are talking about on this side is the government business program that has been brought to the table by the Leader of the House. It is the one that we are speaking on. We are indeed speaking about that take-note motion on the apology to Victorians today, a very important one which I am sure is the opinion of everyone in this chamber. Certainly we have the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill, which makes sure consumers have uninterrupted energy, which has been ventilated in this place as a concern. It is a bill that will be spoken on by people in this chamber. It actually addresses those concerns as well and any concerns in the community. As I said, we have got the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill. It is not a minor reform; it is very important. It takes a replacement of stamp duty, essentially, and makes that a tax. What we have to do is move on. I am sure that people across the aisle will get tired sometimes of saying no to everything; it is a bit Duttonesque. I will conclude my remarks there.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member is clearly misusing his time in the government business program debate.

The SPEAKER: The member for Frankston has concluded his contribution.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:45): I rise today to talk on the government business program, and as the member for Brighton has said, we are going to be opposing the government business program. A couple of things here: exactly as the member for Brighton said before, the proceedings that have gone on in the chamber today, with the government trying to gag anything from us, are an absolute disgrace. Not only do they try and sit us down and think that they are gagging us on this side, they are also gagging the opportunity for us to represent our communities – with me, in regional Victoria. I was elected back in 2022 to come into this place to represent the constituents of the seat of Morwell, and today I have been told and shown that I do not have the opportunity to do that. I do not know why that is, and I just condemn the government –

Nina Taylor: On a point of order, Speaker, I appreciate that the member for Morwell has various opinions, but I would request that he return to the subject matter of the government business program.

The SPEAKER: The member for Morwell was making a point in relation to government business, but I ask him to be mindful of the government business program that we are here to discuss this morning.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you, Speaker, for saying that to me. When we actually got up and looked at the government business program today we found that there were only two items on the government business program. Since I have been in this chamber – and I think all the new MPs that were elected – we have always had three bills that we have spoken on in the chamber. Today we roll up with two, one of those being the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024, which seems to be a little bit of a complex issue which needs to be – yes, granted – spoken about, because it does affect the people in regional Victoria. I do not want to debate the bill now, but it does seem that it may be an issue moving forward for regional Victorians – that this bill may cause a bit of havoc and grief to owners that are going to cop this bill down there.

I do note that the member for Sandringham, who is the lead on this bill, asked that this be taken into consideration in detail. He did ask the government this; he still has not been told that he cannot do it. He has not even received a response that this will be taken under consideration. I think even though we are in opposition, when we do ask for these things it would be nice for the government to answer us. And it seems that that has flowed through: when we ask ministers questions and when we write ministers letters to ask things on behalf of our constituents it just seems that we do not get answers there. So this also follows through.

The National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024, looking at it, seems like a pretty straightforward bill that can go through, and I think we are all in agreeance that we do need some protections there. But there is also a bigger scope of works, as the member for Frankston spoke about, about moving into renewables and also that our gas and our electricity prices are going up. So yes, it will be nice to be able to stand up and talk on these two bills – not three. I think we are very light on, and the government is struggling to come up with a business program every second week.

I think it has been a month since we have been in here, and they front up with only two bills that we need to discuss. Not letting us get up and talk on behalf of our constituencies in this chamber is a disgrace. This is the house of the people. I am here to represent my people in this chamber, and for this side of the chamber to be constantly shut down and to not be allowed to represent my constituents, and for my fellow members from around regional Victoria to not be allowed to represent their constituents, because the government do not want to front up and talk about the things that are actually affecting us in regional Victoria and around the state, is a disgrace. We oppose the business program.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarnait) (12:50): It gives me great pleasure to stand up this afternoon in support of the government business program. Of course those opposite oppose the government business program. Of course they do. Every single week we come into this place with a government business program with really important bills to debate, to represent the people of Victoria, and those opposite oppose it.

James Newbury: I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER: I think I have ruled on this previously. Given the time limits for this debate and that the member has not contravened standing order 106, the member for Tarneit to continue.

Dylan WIGHT: I think I have been going for 15 seconds. The member for Morwell says that they sat there at the start of this week and looked at the government business program and could not possibly support it. I will tell you what, they never support the government business program. We could lay out the Victorian Liberal Party's policy platform on our government business program and they would still oppose it. They would still oppose it.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member is not debating the details of the current government business program before the chamber.

The SPEAKER: The member for Tarneit will come back to the government business program.

Dylan WIGHT: As I was saying, they would still oppose it. We have two incredibly important bills in this incredibly important motion on the government business program this week. We have got a bill, the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024, that will make it even easier to do business right here in the state of Victoria. I have stood on my feet in this place many, many times and I have said that the settings for business in Victoria are the best in the country. This bill will further build on that. It will make it cheaper and easier to do business in Victoria, it will make it cheaper and easier to invest in Victoria and it will build on the fact, as I said, that Victoria is the greatest place to do business.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member is debating the substance of the bill rather than the government business program.

The SPEAKER: The member for Tarneit will come back to the government business program.

Dylan WIGHT: Thank you, Speaker. As I said, Victoria is the greatest place to do business anywhere in this country. What we also have is the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. This bill builds on this government's landmark reforms in the energy sector. We have not only the most ambitious renewable energy targets anywhere in Australia but some of the most ambitious in the world. That is not just good for the environment; it is also good for our economy. It is great for jobs. It is great for jobs in this state. It will create some 50,000 jobs right here in Victoria, whether that be manufacturing wind towers down at Keppel Prince in Portland, whether that be in the construction sector, whether that be in the maintenance sector or whether that be maintaining some of those significant renewable energy projects that we will undertake. This piece of legislation will build on that, and we will be an absolute powerhouse in terms of energy generation.

What we also have – and I know that both sides of this chamber will absolutely be on the same page with this – is the take-note motion for the apology to Victorians abused in state care. Only a couple of months ago we had a joint sitting in this place and we listened to the Premier make an apology to those people that have been affected by that and to those people and those families that have been affected by some of the absolute atrocities that we saw in state care over decades in this state. It is an absolutely fantastic government business program this week, as it always is, and I cannot wait to debate the things at hand.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:55): I rise to oppose the government business program and note today that members of Parliament have been gagged from representing their constituency. This Parliament has a longstanding bipartisan support for the Jewish community. The events of 7 October, particularly with the terrorist attack by Hamas, was something that was absolutely –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask that you call the member for Caulfield back to the government business program. He is talking about very important matters, but they are,

unfortunately, totally unrelated to the government business program. There are other opportunities for him to raise the issues that he wishes to speak to at other points in the Parliament this week.

The SPEAKER: The member for Caulfield has made a point in relation to what is on the government business program and how government business is run. I accept that, but I do ask you to come back to the government business program.

David SOUTHWICK: As I was finishing this important point, the safety of all members in this place and also of the community is paramount. At the moment there are two matters of business on the government business program – two bills. There was meant to be a third bill. That bill has been pulled, and that does give us the opportunity to discuss notices of motion. Today's motion was going to be about safety for the Jewish community and for all members of Parliament, which this government has silenced.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, as the member for Caulfield well knows, the opportunity in the government business program debate is to talk about the bills that are before the house. At other times, Speaker, you have indulged us talking about take-note motions and so on, but the core business is the bills that are to be debated. I note that the member stands on his feet in good faith to talk about important issues, but this is not the time to do it.

The SPEAKER: The member for Caulfield, again, raised an important point; however, I do ask him to come back to the government business program.

David SOUTHWICK: I am certainly talking on the government business program, which is very important in terms of being able to ensure that we debate the matters that are very important to our constituency. As part of all of that, there are two bills that are up for discussion. There is a bill talking about energy prices and the fact that they are continuing to go up and a bill on taxes that are continuing to rise. But we do have a very important issue around safety and the fact that in this particular place we do not feel safe because of what is happening under this government, and I think it is imperative that we have the opportunity to debate that.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, once again I think that the member for Caulfield is not listening to your advice, which is that he come back to speak on the government business program. He is suggesting issues that are perhaps more appropriately dealt with by speaking with you directly.

The SPEAKER: Member for Caulfield, I have asked you to come back to the government business program. You have made your point, I think, several times.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order, Speaker, the actual point that I was attempting to put forward was particularly about one of the protesters, who has been charged with kidnapping, who has been on the front of Parliament with a Hamas terrorist banner over him, which is a proscribed terrorist organisation, and I was attempting to put forward that that matter be properly investigated for all of our safety. This government is gagging us from allowing us to be able to do that, so I ask that –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a further point of order, Speaker, again, there are appropriate forums to raise the matters that the member for Caulfield wants to discuss, but this is not it. It is the government business program.

The SPEAKER: The member for Caulfield will come back to the government business program.

David SOUTHWICK: It is clear this government does not care about the safety of us or members of the – *(Time expired)*

The SPEAKER: The member for Prahran is seeking leave. Is leave granted?

Leave refused.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has raised a very important issue in relation to safety. The government has not provided the opportunity for the chamber and suggested that we can take that up in another way. Can I put on the record that the coalition has on numerous occasions made attempts to approach the government to discuss these issues, formally and in writing, and has not even received an acknowledgement. We have no other form than to try and raise it in this place.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Assembly divided on motion:

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

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

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Anzac Day

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (13:08): On Thursday last week – Anzac Day – I had the great privilege again to attend the dawn service at the Oakleigh cenotaph and lay a wreath in honour of our veterans – those who have served, those who paid the ultimate price and those still serving Australia both at home and overseas. The attendance at the dawn service in Oakleigh gets bigger every year, and this is in no small part due to our amazing Oakleigh–Carnegie RSL. Our local RSL has been a rock in our community since just after the end of the First World War, supporting veterans, providing a place where the community can come together and every Anzac Day and Remembrance Day coordinating very poignant and moving services. I would like to recognise our community as well as the students, parents and teachers who came out so early on a cold morning to pay their respects on what is a most special day for Australia and New Zealand. To our veterans: we thank you; we will remember you. Lest we forget.

The Australian Ballet

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (13:08): The Australian Ballet have been moving across Victoria visiting schools as part of their Steamdance program, a vital outreach in culture, particularly in remote communities. I had the pleasure of attending Oakleigh Primary School during a visit recently by the Australian Ballet. I would like to thank them for inviting me to take part in this fantastic event. I recognise their significant work to engage and inspire thousands of students in my electorate and around Victoria in the art form of ballet.

Budget 2024–25

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (13:09): The Labor government's 10th budget will be handed down on 7 May, and the people of my Malvern electorate are rightly concerned by what it will mean for them – concerned that yet again we will be hit by higher taxes and charges despite Labor promising the opposite; concerned that yet again our local schools will miss out on desperately needed funding, repeating the neglect of the last nine Labor budgets; and concerned that, with Labor having already closed our Malvern police station 16 hours a day to the public and cut hundreds of tram services from our community, even more frontline services will be cut to pay for Labor's budget mismanagement. Next Tuesday will see the consequence of a decade of Labor waste and economic incompetence writ large. So, Victoria, brace yourself: this is going to hurt.

Stonnington planning

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (13:10): I am also calling out the underhanded way in which the Labor government is going about stripping Stonnington council of planning controls around Chadstone shopping centre. First Labor flagged that the activity centre would actually be in the Chadstone suburb, only to switch it to the shopping centre, which is in Malvern East. Next they gave little time for community consultation on shoving high-rise, high-density overdevelopment into this area. In fact if the government wanted a new slogan, they could go with 'Pretend to consult, and do what we want', because that is how Labor appears to my electorate.

Anzac Day

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (13:10): On the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915 stood a lone pine tree, the sole survivor of a group of trees which had existed prior to the Gallipoli campaign and a reflection of Australia's great losses. Tucked into the rucksack of a 25-year-old private, Thomas Keith McDowell, was a pine cone from this tree, which he brought back to Australia. From the seeds of this cone four seedlings grew, and today one of these four seedlings continues to stand tall in Wattle Park, 91 years on, forever serving as a reminder of the horrors and sacrifices of war. There was a fine gathering at this living shrine on 21 April, and I congratulate the Wattle Park Heritage Group and the Melbourne Tramways Band for their tribute to our soldiers.

It was an honour to join the Box Hill RSL and members of the Box Hill community at the annual Anzac Day dawn service in Box Hill. For over 100 years the Box Hill RSL have organised the Anzac Day service, and I thank them for honouring those who have sacrificed so much for our country and our freedoms.

I would like to acknowledge the Blackburn RSL sub-branch, which again hosted a moving Anzac Day dawn service at Morton Park. Many gathered in honour of the men and women who have served our country. I congratulate the Blackburn RSL committee for their service.

I would like to acknowledge the Surrey Hills and Mont Albert Progress Association, the Rotary Club of Mont Albert and Surrey Hills and the Surrey Hills Historical Society for another wonderful Anzac Day dawn service at the shrine in Surrey Gardens. The service was again very well attended by the local Surrey Hills and Mont Albert communities. Lest we forget.

Bail laws

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (13:12): In the last two weeks there have been three violent incidents in the Latrobe Valley, two involving machetes, that have left the community shaken and asking questions about what it will take for this government to get serious on crime and bail penalties. Two weeks ago in broad daylight in the middle of the Traralgon shopping centre police apprehended a person wielding a machete as mothers and children watched on in horror. Yesterday a Morwell resident visited my office after a terrifying incident at his home where a man, again brandishing a machete, knocked on his front door and attempted to make entry. We all know the tragedy that

unfolded in Bondi just a few weeks ago, and closer to home, the horrific alleged murder of beloved Dr Ashley Gordon.

With these types of violent crimes on the rise, the Labor government's recent decision to weaken bail laws and abolish the offence of committing an indictable offence while on bail has come at the worst possible time. Our police are frustrated. They do their bit, keeping us safe, by getting violent offenders in front of the magistrate, all for them to receive not so much as a slap on the wrist and be back out on the streets the very same day. What will it take for this government to get serious on crime and bail penalties?

Bowl For Your Lives

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (13:13): On Saturday I was delighted to join so many in my local community at Club Sunbury to speak at the Bowl For Your Lives fundraiser, a terrific event put on by the incredible former Victoria Police members Cam Ryan and Shane Hafner. This event partners with the Black Dog Institute to raise awareness for improved mental health through bowls and of course community participation – a wonderful day, a terrific event and I commend both Cam and Shane for the amazing work that they do.

State Emergency Service Sunbury unit

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (13:14): Also on Saturday I joined a number of local fantastic SES volunteers to announce that the Allan Labor government is providing over \$5 million for a second SES base in Sunbury through the growth areas infrastructure contribution – a terrific announcement, and some incredible work that has been done, particularly by Anthony White of the local Sunbury SES, who has advocated for this for some time. I commend all of our terrific local SES volunteers for the work that they do each and every day.

Sunbury electorate ministerial visits

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (13:14): Finally, it has been wonderful to welcome Ministers Pearson, Williams and Brooks and of course the Premier to my electorate recently, with a whole range of announcements going to providing the infrastructure, the services, the opportunities and the educational pathways for those in our community each and every day. We will continue to get on and get things done.

Lilydale train line

David HODGETT (Croydon) (13:14): I rise today to speak on the issue of public transport train service frequency on the Lilydale line outside of peak periods. My constituents have raised concerns regarding a lack of train services available to allow them to finish their commute home outside of peak periods on the Lilydale train line. Currently the train stations at Ringwood East, Croydon, Mooroolbark and Lilydale are only accessible via trains twice an hour outside of peak times, with a large majority of train services being terminated at Ringwood, meaning all too often my constituents are left stranded waiting a minimum of 25 minutes for the next train so they can finish their commute home. With growth increasing in the outer suburbs and the government trying to incentivise people to use public transport, we need to be ensuring that commuters can access all stations after Ringwood on the Lilydale line without the lengthy delays to complete their journey.

Lifeline

David HODGETT (Croydon) (13:15): On another matter, I recently received an updated briefing from Lifeline Australia highlighting the increase in people reaching out for help in relation to financial distress. Lifeline's volunteer crisis supporters, who take calls and respond to texts and chat messages from help seekers on their 24/7 crisis support lines, have reported not just an increase in the number of people citing financial concerns as a driver of their distress but also an increase in the intensity of distress and crisis. Lifeline continue to see increased demand for their services above their current capacity, and their priority in Victoria is to increase capacity of Lifeline services to meet these levels

of need. We all know and value the work of Lifeline Australia and the range of community programs and services they provide. Lifeline have submitted a budget proposal, and I urge the government to support their submission in the 2024 budget.

Women's health

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (13:16): Recently we welcomed the Premier and Minister for Health to the Mordialloc electorate for a women's pain inquiry forum. This was a really important opportunity to bring together women from a diverse range of backgrounds, professions, ages and walks of life united in one common goal, and that is the lack of attention around women's health and women's pain more generally. Our government conducted a women's health survey, revealing four out of 10 women live with chronic pain, with one in three women experiencing pain so severe it affects their ability to work.

What was really powerful was the lived experiences and stories shared by these women. We witnessed their bravery, their vulnerability and their resilience in living with daily pain and how it has a profound impact on their lives. To have that forum attended as well by the Premier and Minister for Health was a really important opportunity to show how important and serious this policy area is, the work that is being done by the inquiry and the journey that we are all on as Victorians to improve the lives and outcomes of women experiencing pain. Whether it is physical, emotional or mental health and wellbeing, we heard that pain has a reference point that is individual to the circumstances of those people living in our community. Submissions are open. Online submissions can be made to 31 July 2024 through Engage Victoria. Already thousands of women and girls have stepped forward to share their lived experience. We want to hear that, and we want to platform that and create a better society for all.

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (13:18): I just want to put on the record my opposition to the 3.3 per cent development levy that is being proposed by the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, which was put forward at a council meeting about two weeks ago. This levy is completely out of line. Maybe it has been generated through the council wanting to do something in this housing space, a space that the government is possibly dropping the ball on, but councillors need to just stick in their lane and take care of the things that ratepayers want them to take care of – roads, rates and rubbish – and make sure they do those first.

I just want to explain the way that council has defined the development levy and what a developer is. In this case a developer is any applicant – so anybody looking to build a house of any description on the Mornington Peninsula that adds supply. Now, in a housing crisis, if John and Jenny buy a block and want to build a house on that, why should they be charged 3.3 per cent to build a house that they are going to live and raise a family in? If they decide to increase supply in anything, anyone will have to pay this 3.3 per cent levy, and I would urge certain councillors on the Mornington Peninsula shire, including Cr Sarah Race and Cr Despi O'Connor, who are both card-carrying members of the Labor Party: if they want to dive into the housing space, maybe they should talk to members on the other side of the chamber, members of their own political party, before they start trying to dive into the space that the state government should be taking care of.

Greenvale electorate multicultural communities

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (13:19): In the past month we celebrated the concurrence of Easter with the Chaldean Akitu and Assyrian Babylonian New Year, immensely significant events with ancient roots that emphasise the extraordinarily rich cultural heritage of the Assyrian, Chaldean and Syriac communities now living in Victoria. I am so grateful to the Australian Assyrian Arts and Literature Foundation, which worked with an array of Assyrian community organisations to create a hugely successful celebration of the Assyrian Babylonian New Year 6774 at Craigieburn Anzac Park on 1 April. Thank you also to the Australian Chaldean Federation, Chaldean League Melbourne,

Upfield Soccer Club and many Chaldean community groups, whose volunteers worked so hard to organise a spectacular celebration of the Babylonian Chaldean New Year 7324 at St George Chaldean parish on 14 April. Both were joyous and joyful celebrations attended by thousands in testament to the resilience of peoples and cultures spanning millennia from their foundation in ancient Mesopotamia, which have more recently overcome much hardship and persecution to make a profound contribution to our community in Melbourne's north and our country more broadly.

Anzac Day

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (13:20): Millions of Australians attended services across the country on Anzac Day to offer respect and thanks for the sacrifices of so many in the service of our nation and to preserve the freedoms and liberties we cherish. In my patch I thank the Craigieburn War Memorial and Remembrance Committee for hosting two beautiful services of commemoration and working so hard with schools and young people from across the area. Thank you also to the volunteers of 1st Tullapark Scout group for organising a beautiful service at Westmeadows at dawn.

Kelly's Ride

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (13:20): When much-loved local Kelly Ramadge was diagnosed with breast cancer mid last year her two nephews Rick and Ben wanted to do something in support. They decided they would do Kelly's Ride, a 280-kilometre cycling road trip raising awareness for breast cancer and raising funds for Breast Cancer Network Australia, who have been so supportive to Kelly. I met Rick and Ben on the final leg of their trip at a fundraising event in Shepparton. They were overwhelmed by the support along the way and also feeling quite sore and exhausted. Rick and Ben should be so proud raising over \$20,000.

St Anne's College, Kialla

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (13:21): I recently had the pleasure of meeting with grades 1 and 2 students at St Anne's College, Kialla. I was so impressed by the enthusiasm and participation of the students and their wonderful questions about Parliament and my role as their state member. I have been meeting with many of our local primary and secondary schools, and I am looking forward to having students visit Parliament.

Ramadan

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (13:21): I wish to congratulate Ahmadiyya Muslim Community on their iftar interfaith dinner bringing our broader and diverse community together to share their tradition of breaking the fast during Ramadan. I am so proud of how our community come together to celebrate our varied cultures and their traditions in such an inclusive and respectful manner. We are so fortunate that we get to share in so many multicultural events.

Toolamba Primary School

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (13:22): I also recently attended the 150th anniversary of Toolamba Primary School. Many memories were shared by past students, teachers and families. A time capsule was buried with what life looks like in 2024 and will be dug up at their 200th anniversary in 50 years time. Congratulations on this wonderful milestone.

Preston Cricket Club

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:22): Preston Cricket Club have had a difficult time with their cricket nets, which have been caught up with a long-running back and forth between Darebin council and the level crossing removal team, and I just want to take this opportunity to thank the leadership of that club, including Stephen Wilson, Lee Cooper and Alex Lewis, for their advocacy and their patience with that issue. But I do particularly want to acknowledge the contribution to that club of Richard Norris. Richard started as a scorer with the Preston Cricket Club in 1948. As well as playing over

500 games, including six premierships, he has been on their general committee for 58 years, and we acknowledge his very deserved induction into their hall of fame.

Darebin Young Citizen Jury

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:23): I would also like to acknowledge the contribution locally of the Darebin youth jury, who recently presented to the Minister for Youth and me on a range of important issues, including junior wages, mental health, cycling infrastructure and cost of living. Thank you to Max Taylor, Hunter Cullen, Zena Mohamed, Sakshi Puri, Thomas Balakas, Thomas Taylor, Rafael Garcia, Dylan Vigilante and everyone involved in the development of their thoughtful *Future Perfect* report.

Preston North East Primary School

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:23): Harmony Week occurred during the break, and I want to thank the staff and students of Preston North East Primary for their wonderful event led by acting principal John-Mark Gook; acting assistant principal Annie Neville; Riley, who acknowledged country; and Shakira and other students who spoke to us about their diverse cultural backgrounds. I also want to acknowledge Anne Christie, who retired there as the school crossing supervisor after seven years. We wish Anne the best.

Home building industry

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (13:23): I rise to bring the Parliament's attention to the rising number of fraudulent builders within Victoria and my electorate of Rowville. Just recently constituents contacted my office to convey their horror stories when dealing with builders who are regularly leaving works that are either incomplete or defective, often in blatant disregard for current building regulations. One constituent has had four properties affected by these deceitful builders, and 11 other dwellings owned by different residents are also affected by the same builder. Unfortunately this constituent is still waiting for the Victorian Building Authority and Consumer Affairs Victoria to act on her complaint, having first raised her complaint way back in May of 2021 with both of these authorities. At a time when we are in a housing crisis the absolute last thing we need is poorly built homes putting more Victorians at risk, and I would urge this government to make a priority of cracking down on these builders preying on vulnerable Victorians. We have also written to the appropriate minister and wait with anticipation for the response.

Ballarat City Council

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (13:25): I have been contacted by many Ballarat City Council workers in my electorate who have been waiting for a pay rise since September last year. Their employer pays the worst of any major regional council in Victoria, and workers are sick of it. These workers care for our kids, maintain our roads, clean our public amenities and collect waste across Cardigan Village, Lucas, Learmonth, Mitchell Park, Miners Rest, Invermay and beyond. They keep Ballarat going, but despite this they are being paid \$2 less an hour than council workers in Bendigo, Geelong and even neighbouring Moorabool shire. For a full-time worker that is a massive difference of \$4000 a year.

The mighty Australian Services Union has been supporting these workers through their ongoing dispute with Ballarat City Council. Management have committed to putting a revised wage offer on the table tomorrow, and ASU members will have a mass meeting on Thursday this week to consider the revised offer and vote as to whether to proceed with industrial action or not. I stand with these workers in their fight for fair pay and conditions. They are an asset to the Ballarat community, and they deserve better. I want to thank the ASU and their organisers for supporting these workers for the past nine months and beyond. I wish the workers the very best in their pursuit of a pay rise, and I encourage Ballarat City Council to come to the table with a serious offer.

Melbourne Youth Orchestras

Tim READ (Brunswick) (13:26): Congratulations to the young musicians from Brunswick accepted into the Melbourne Youth Orchestras Ensemble program in 2024, including Max McCamish-Symes on bassoon, Madeleine Caruso on bass clarinet, Lily Hanger on violin, David Hoel on trumpet and Cedar Christensen-Elliott on alto saxophone. I look forward to hearing them perform.

Sustainable House Day

Tim READ (Brunswick) (13:26): Thank you to all who participated in Sustainable House Day, organised by Renew. I visited a small townhouse in Princes Hill retrofitted to a budget by owners Brendan and Chloe from Get Off Gas, with double glazing, insulation, solar panels, reverse-cycle air conditioning, heat pump hot water and an induction cooktop, not to mention a meadow on the roof, so they could stop burning fossil methane gas in their home. They have managed to cut their combined gas and electricity bill from \$1800 to just \$500 a year on electricity alone. I encourage the government to make this process easier, especially for renters.

Middle East conflict

Tim READ (Brunswick) (13:27): I was proud to speak on day one of the encampment of Unimelb for Palestine on Anzac Day when they set up camp on the Melbourne University South Lawn calling on the university to cancel its deals with weapons manufacturers, surely a logical outcome after reflecting on the sorrow and the cost of war.

1st Albert Park Scouts

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:27): It was a great pleasure to attend a sod turn for the 1st Albert Park Scout hall upgrades with Minister Suleyman. It is a joint project between Scouts Victoria and the Victorian government and will have an enduring legacy for the local community. It is moving along fast, which is really exciting.

Albert Park electorate ministerial visit

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:28): I also caught up with local traders with Minister Suleyman. A shout-out goes to Rock Paper Scissors, Creme, and Grey & Bliss.

Albert Park Primary School

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:28): Also the Albert Park Primary School fete was an absolute ripper. I was happy to sponsor the blow-up basketball hoops. I note there were fantastic live performances, with Jacksta the DJ. There was a big focus on sustainability; there were clothing and plants and things that people were circulating and also parents rewashing re-usable cups – how exciting is that.

South Port Community Housing Group

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:28): South Port Community Housing Group held a barbecue at their Emerald Hill site to thank all who contributed to the refurbishment of 29 units, not the least being the corporate and other philanthropy groups – a wonderful community effort. A real shout-out goes to the South Port Community Housing Group for the fabulous work they do in our local communities.

Park Towers Community Pantry

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:28): I popped in again to Park Towers Community Pantry. It is a food pantry that is resident led, providing healthy food for residents and other participating public housing sites. Foodbank Victoria provides 90 per cent of the food. A shout-out goes to the wonderful Troy for the magnificent logistics of getting food to his fellow residents.

Breast cancer

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (13:29): I rise today to share the wonderful efforts made by the Mulgrave Football Club in their annual ladies day high tea to raise much-needed funds for Breast Cancer Network Australia. Over the weekend the club raised a whopping \$4500 for BCNA, which goes to the care, treatment and support of those affected by breast cancer. Breast cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in Australian women and the most diagnosed cancer in Australian women. Approximately 20,000 Australians are diagnosed with breast cancer every year – that is 57 a day – and there is not a single person who is not touched in some way by breast cancer. So today I would like to remind everyone about BreastScreen Australia and the importance of regular mammograms to reduce illness and death from breast cancer by detecting it early.

Vic Kids Eat Well Awards

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (13:30): I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Mulgrave Football Club on the Vic Kids Eat Well sports club award. Their commitment to providing nourishing options for their young footy players, including hummus and carrot sticks, protein balls and homemade air fryer wedges, is truly commendable. Vic Kids Eat Well is a collaboration of Cancer Council Victoria and Nutrition Australia's healthy eating advisory service, which promotes healthy eating habits among our youth and their families. Well done to the Mulgrave Football Club on making health a focus.

Footscray United Rangers Football Club

Katie HALL (Footscray) (13:30): I rise to celebrate the growth of inclusivity in local sport in my electorate of Footscray and new opportunities for women's participation. In our history the Footscray name has been attached to eight soccer teams, but we had not had a namesake women's team until this year, although our wonderful Maribyrnong Swifts football team for women, girls and gender-diverse players has its home ground in West Footscray and has been operating a safe and inclusive women's club since 2011.

I am thrilled that we now have the Footscray United Rangers Football Club. It started in 2017 as a men's team and has since quickly embraced community interest and steadily expanded the club's outreach and inclusivity. The club boasts seven junior teams, including two for children with disabilities, and also funds 20 refugee visa holders to participate free of charge. But importantly the club has also recognised the need for opportunities for women's participation at the grassroots level, capitalising on the momentum of the FIFA Women's World Cup and the massive boost in interest in women's soccer locally. Footscray United Rangers Football Team has grown from a base of zero women players in 2023 to now boasting two teams totalling 36 players. On Sunday 21 April I was proud to attend their first ever match in the women's state league soccer competition.

Clarinda electorate schools

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (13:32): Congratulations to Clarinda Primary School, Kingston Heath Primary School and Dingley Primary School for their most recent funding allocations under the planned maintenance program. These three great local schools will share in over \$1.3 million to get essential maintenance works underway. This investment will help Clarinda's local schools undertake essential work like fixing roofs and ceilings, replacing windows, floor replacements, painting and much, much more. The program makes sure that all Clarinda's and Victoria's students and staff have safe and modern learning spaces. This is a fantastic result for our local schools, and I am very much looking forward to seeing the results of these important works.

Anzac Day

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (13:33): Also I was honoured to join Anzac Day services with the Dingley, Dandenong and Cheltenham Moorabbin RSLs to honour the generations of Australians and New Zealanders who have served in all wars, conflicts and peacemaking operations. Thank you to all

of those who hosted services to honour the memory of those who served and lost their lives and all Victorians who have been impacted by war and armed conflict. Anzac Day means different things to many different people, and we all have different ways to commemorate and reflect. These services were a great example of that. Lest we forget.

Anzac Day

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (13:33): I would like to acknowledge and thank the Geelong RSL and veterans and families for the significant Anzac Day events held to honour those who have served and those who continue to serve our country today. As a special thanks I would like to mention RSL president Mark Lee and vice-president Matthew Jack for their commitment to veterans and the broader community. The morning started at 4:15 am with the pre-dawn service at the Geelong Peace Memorial, then the dawn service at 6 am at Eastern Beach, the 9 am service at the RSL in Belmont and the march, which was also a service, at Johnstone Park, which draws a huge crowd of people who want to show their respect and gratitude. There was also a wreath-laying service at the St Joseph's and South Barwon football-netball club matches during that day.

Joel McGuinness

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (13:34): On another matter, last week I attended the farewell for Joel McGuinness, CEO of the Geelong Arts Centre. Joel saw the arts centre through the COVID pandemic – no easy task – and of course the Geelong Arts Centre redevelopment, creating incredible spaces and performance areas whilst supporting the arts sector. With the redevelopment now completed and the arts centre open for business, Joel is leaving an incredible legacy to start a new role with the State Library. Although we are sad to see Joel leave Geelong, we also wish him every success.

Eid and Nowruz

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (13:35): I am pleased to rise today to acknowledge the significance of Eid and Nowruz, celebrated by many in my electorate of Narre Warren South. Eid marks the end of Ramadan and the end of dawn-to-sunset fasting. Nowruz, while there are many ways to spell it, means new day and marks the first day of spring and the new year for our Afghan community. Nowruz is celebrated by more than 300 million people around the world, and it goes back 3000 years across Central Asia, the Middle East and more. To that end, in my community I would like to thank the Bakhtar Community Organisation's Nowruz festival, which was held recently at Hallam Reserve; the Victorian Afghan Associations Network, or VAAN, for their Nowruz new year festival at Dandenong Park; and the Afghan Australian Philanthropic Association's event, the Afghan new year and Eid celebrations at Springvale town hall. Again I would like to thank Bassir Qadiri, Hafiz Asadi, Dur Aschna and their incredibly hardworking teams who put on these events that showcased fantastic live music, cultural dances, family-friendly activity, art exhibitions and of course some really delicious traditional food. I am so grateful for the work of all of the organisers who held events that brought so many together in happiness, warmth and pride. I am honoured to represent such a proud multicultural community.

Cranbourne Football Netball Club

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (13:36): There has been a lot going on in Cranbourne, and I was really delighted to have the opportunity to spend time with the Cranbourne Football Netball Club, who presented me with a wonderful new framed football jumper. It has got the First Nations colours and a terrific piece of artwork that includes Bunjil the eagle. This football-netball club, and in this particular context the football club, are an extraordinarily inclusive club, and this new kit, this new jumper, is going to be used by that part of the club for people with disabilities and people who in other ways cannot always participate in sport. It is going to be used by that part of the club, so it is a great pride for me to be able to have that presented to me.

Nowruz

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (13:37): I was very pleased just then to hear from the member for Narre Warren South talking about the Nowruz festival and how lucky we are to have the opportunity to celebrate Nowruz. I was there at the event in Dandenong, at Dandenong Park, with over 10,000 people. There were reports of up to 15,000 people at Dandenong Park to celebrate the festival. The dancing, the music, the literature, the joy for families was something that was contagious. We feel very fortunate.

Bills**National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:38): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

I am moving that the debate be adjourned because what we have seen today is an outrageous abuse of this place whereby the government did not provide an opportunity for members to be heard, and we must stop government business now to debate that matter.

We must provide members in this place with an opportunity to speak on behalf of their communities. That is what this chamber is about. It is a place where every member can come in, having been elected, and speak for their community. What we saw today was the government deny any member from the non-government benches an opportunity to put a notice of motion verbally in the chamber, and we must debate that matter. We need to urgently debate the fact that non-government members must be provided with an opportunity to debate issues of importance. We cannot have a circumstance where a government uses its numbers to gag every member that is on the non-government benches. It is an outrageous proposition. The only time we have seen something similar to this was in the dark days of Peter Batchelor. We need to debate this now. We need to debate this today.

There is no greater function of this place than for members to be provided an opportunity to speak. There is no part of your job in this place more core than to speak on behalf of your community. To have the government not allow that requires an urgent debate, so the coalition has moved to immediately and effectively suspend the matters that the government is proposing to allow the debate on those matters to be adjourned so that we can debate these more urgent matters. There is no matter more urgent than for a member to be provided a voice in this place. Listening to the government deny members an opportunity to even speak for a moment shows that the government has reached a very dark place. When you look at the standing orders which I think would inform the debate, we know that standing order 104 provides a member with the opportunity to speak – and so it should. It is beyond any comprehension that a government could deny a member an opportunity to put forward a proposition before that proposition is put. How do you know what you are saying no to until you hear it, unless you stand against non-government members putting forward any proposition? We must debate that matter immediately and with urgency.

I would say that this is of such urgency that I suspect that this will be a preoccupation of the Parliament this week, because we cannot have a Parliament that allows a government to so outrageously gag any member from having an opportunity to speak, as we saw today. I have moved that the debate be adjourned on an alternative matter and that we have a debate on these issues now, that we look to the standing orders and what they should provide and that we provide an opportunity for debate to consider these matters. And then I would of course hope that we can convince the government to admit the error of their ways and not need to go to a division on it – if the government were to stand for what

they did earlier – to force them to divide against the proposition to allow a debate so that members could have a voice. You would not see events like we saw earlier today in the other place, because the crossbench would not allow it. To know that the government is now in such an arrogant frame of mind that it would not allow members in this place to speak is deeply concerning, and it should concern every Victorian. The coalition has moved that the debate be adjourned so that we can with greater urgency provide an opportunity to ensure that all members have an opportunity to speak, as they have been elected to do.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (13:43): The urgency with which the member for Brighton speaks is correct – the urgency of our government, who have important work to get on with in this place. Once again our important work is being slowed down and thwarted by what is simply a stunt by those opposite. What is so urgent –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a very, very serious motion, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the very serious motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order as yet. The member to continue on the procedural debate.

Lauren KATHAGE: As I was saying, we on this side are disappointed to have an interruption such as this to what is the important work of this chamber this week. That is where the real urgency is. The member for Brighton said that they have things that they want to stand up and say. Well, we stand up on this side. We stand up and speak for Victorians. We stand up and seek to pass the legislation this week that they have voted for. This urgent work, which we are standing up for Victorians on, is around the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024, which is an important bill that we want to discuss and progress this week.

It is part of the broader suite of bills that have been debated in this place, because that is the sense of urgency – the sense of urgency to turn to renewable energy in the context of climate change and in the context of dirty, expensive power that we are replacing with cheaper, greener power. That is where the urgency is. The member for Brighton calls it ‘deeply concerning’, and I am deeply concerned by their attempts to thwart our important work. But do you know what I would be willing to hear them stand up and speak about? Do you know what probably a lot of Victorians would be happy and interested to hear about when they interrupt the important business of this place? I would like to know where they are planning to put the nuclear power plants. That is what we would be interested in hearing them stand up about. And where are they going to put the waste? We see that in the other place a member of their party has started the nuclear youth internship program –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is an important procedural motion. I do not know what the member is debating, but it is certainly not the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member had strayed from the procedural motion, and I ask her to come back to it.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, for your guidance. We are looking also for guidance from those opposite when they talk about what is urgent, when they talk about deeply concerning topics and when they talk about things that they want to stand up and talk about. Tell us what we really want to know and what the people of Victoria really want to know. What are their secret plans for nuclear energy in Victoria? Because God forbid –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, with respect, the member is now defying your ruling.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The procedural debate is about the potential adjournment of the matter in government business, and I ask the member to come back and stay within the bounds of the reasons for its adjournment or otherwise.

Lauren KATHAGE: I apologise for that slight meltdown. What we are discussing this week in this place and what is important are the important reforms that we are seeing in terms of the new stamp duty and the industrial and commercial tax reforms. We are making real improvements for business. We have seen recently that Victoria has the highest investment of any jurisdiction in Australia in 2023. We need to continue this work – that is what is urgent. We need to keep up this important work, which is making investment attractive in Victoria and which is leading to the amazing job figures that we have in Victoria. That is what we want to stand up and talk about – that is what is urgent. What is deeply concerning to me – truly, deeply concerning and not the faux concern of the member for Brighton – is that we are allowed to get on and do the business that we were elected to do.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (13:48): I rise to support the member for Brighton's motion that this debate be adjourned so that we as members for our communities have the opportunity to raise the issues that we want to raise in this Parliament. I do not know what the Leader of the House is frightened of. How can the Leader of the House be frightened of a couple of notices of motion? We come here to represent our people, and they feel that they have been spoken for if we can stand up in this place and raise issues. It may not be debated – it most likely will never be debated if they are notices of motion – but we have the opportunity to raise issues on behalf of our community that are of concern to them. I do not know why the Leader of the House is afraid of someone moving a notice of motion. Is there a ghost in the closet somewhere that is going to cause some huge issue because someone on this side of the house brings forward a notice of motion? I just do not get what the Leader of the House is frightened of.

One of the important issues – if I could speak on the member of Caulfield's behalf, which he will do well himself as well – is about raising safety issues in this place. I think that the whole system in this Parliament needs a re-examination of safety. There are people raising concerns, particularly about the demonstrators on the front of the Parliament steps. Previously the rule was that the lower steps were part of the footpath and people could demonstrate there, but once you came up onto the flat area before you get to the higher steps, people were not allowed to demonstrate there at all. There used to be police across there that stopped demonstrators coming up onto the steps. Now you have got demonstrators all the way up, actually under the annexe at the front of the Parliament, and people are having to walk through that.

Tragically, if you look at the UK, we have had three MPs killed over there and issues around MPs being attacked. We are not being protected well enough in this place. As I understand it, it is a ruling of the Presiding Officers that the PSOs do not stop the protesters coming right up to the top of the steps. They are the sorts of issues that we would like to be able to raise in this place on our own behalf and on behalf of the public that come to this Parliament. We saw the tragic events in Sydney, at the Bondi shopping centre. We saw the tragic event of the bishop in western Sydney that was stabbed in his own church. We do not want to get to the situation in this Parliament where we have to have an injury or fatality before something is done about the safety of this place.

They are the sorts of issues that we want to raise when we stand up in here. I do not know why the Leader of the House is against us raising those sorts of issues, because I would have thought the safety of the parliamentarians in here, the safety of all the staff that are in here and the safety of the public that are coming to watch us exercise our duties on behalf of our community should be paramount to this place, and they are the sorts of issues that we want to raise in here.

As I understand it, there are some from our side of politics who have written to the Premier twice about this and have had no response. No response at all – not even an acknowledgement of the letters that have been sent. What is wrong with raising those issues in this Parliament? That is what the Parliament is for. We are the green house under the Westminster system. We are the village green, we are here to talk on behalf of the people that send us along here, and we are being gagged from doing that. It is an absolute disgrace. It is a travesty of the Westminster system of freedom of speech that the Leader of the House just says no and no-one can speak. That means that on behalf of my community, which was severely disadvantaged by the October 2022 floods, I can no longer stand up and move a notice of

motion supporting my community. It means some of the bushfire-affected communities of my colleague in Gippsland East – he can no longer stand up and speak on behalf of his community about bushfire issues. It is uncomfortable for the government. They have not responded to the bushfire recovery well, they have not responded to the flood recovery well, so it is uncomfortable that we move a notice of motion that they are not doing their job, and they just say no. How is that democracy?

In all the years that I have been here – and there are a few – I have never seen us be shut down as a house as much as I have seen it today. It is a disgrace, and that is why I support the member for Brighton’s motion that the debate be adjourned and that we debate the issues that are important for us in this house. It is about the safety of everyone that comes into this building. Everything has gotten very, very lax and very laissez faire around how people move around this place. I do not want to make it too rigid, but I do not want to see someone hurt. I do not want to see a fatality in this place before the government and the Parliament act.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:53): I think the only fear that there would be on this side is of the desperate lack of vision and policy on the side of the opposition and their deep resistance to clean energy.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this clearly has nothing to do with the procedural debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member had just started her contribution, and the previous member was given some room.

Nina TAYLOR: I did hear the word ‘fear’ raised a number of times. I thought it was only apt and appropriate to be able to address that particular issue that was raised. I believe that I addressed it in a way that is fit for the chamber.

I would say that what is really important of course is energy reform, a continuation of energy reform, which we have proudly led in Victoria and continue to lead on all fronts. When you are looking at affordability, when you are looking at a transition to a cleaner energy future for the benefit of all Victorians and making sure that power is put back in the hands of Victorians at the same time – and important tax reform as well – I would hope that the opposition are not resistant to debating such important issues, although they do seem on any occasion when we do raise the issue of energy reform to default to a sincere love of and affection for nuclear energy. That tends to be their default.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would ask that you bring the member back to the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member to continue on the procedural motion.

Nina TAYLOR: What I would say is I would take the opposition seriously on the matters that they are bringing before the chamber if we did see on any occasion any kind of vision or serious policy, and unfortunately we do not see that. We see consistently just opposition for the sake of it, which –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this clearly is not a debate on the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would appreciate if the member would revolve her comments around the importance of the procedural debate and the question put.

Nina TAYLOR: Thank you, learned Deputy Speaker, for your considered advice. What I was merely suggesting is that this is nothing other than a stunt. We have important work to do, and I think we can agree on all sides of the chamber that a continuation of energy reform is very important for our state as is taxation reform for Victorian businesses. Of course the chamber will enable considered and robust debate on these matters for all who choose to speak during the parliamentary sessions that we have and during the government business program that we have for the week ahead accordingly and adhering to the tenor of this procedural motion. I would pray to the chamber to continue with the very important government business program for the betterment of all Victorians, in particular and none

the least energy reform and taxation reform for Victorian businesses. Of course this will facilitate the opposition and others to proffer other points of view on the particular legislation before the chamber, as is their premise to do so. Should they wish to do so, we welcome that debate, but let us get on with the government business program. Let us debate these important reforms for the benefit of fellow Victorians.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (13:57): I rise to support the member for Brighton in adjourning the debate to talk about matters that are really important to all of this house. There have been times in this chamber where we have heard speeches from all sides of Parliament; some we have agreed with and some we have disagreed with, but we have still had the ability to have them heard. Every single member that comes into this chamber comes here to represent their constituency and to fight for their constituency. I cannot think of anything more important at the moment than safety – safety for those members of Parliament, safety for the staff, safety for the journalists that work here, safety for the visitors that come here to this Parliament. At the moment we have a real issue of safety in this precinct, such an issue that I attempted to raise a notice of motion today, and I was gagged. It was absolutely imperative that that motion be heard because it is on an issue that compromises safety for all of us.

Yesterday we had a protester that came here dressed up in Hamas terrorist garb, which is a proscribed terrorist organisation. He had that here in the Parliament precinct, and that was an issue that compromised safety. We are seeing that these protesters, that started outside of the precinct, have crept their way right up to the top, so that even when we had a press conference those protesters were there at that time. We have students that will not come to the building because of the issue of these protesters. I have written to the Speaker, I have written to the Presiding Officers, and we have had no resolve in this particular matter. I have been told it is a security issue; security says it is a Presiding Officers issue. Why do we have to wait until something happens? It is absolutely imperative that we see something happen to ensure we can all feel safe.

We saw the events in Sydney unfold. We have seen an increased escalation of these protesters, a desperate attempt to try and get their point heard, and again that is something that certainly compromises all of us in how we feel at the moment. I say to you that when these matters are so important to be heard, the last thing that we should have from this government is a gag on us, because this chamber is the place where we need to bring these matters to the Parliament.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Member conduct

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. The previous Labor member for Ringwood, the current member for Ringwood and the former Parliamentary Secretary for Education, the member for South Barwon, have all been judged to have behaved inappropriately, including by breaching the ministerial code of conduct. Is there a cultural issue within the government concerning the treatment of female members of staff by male Labor MPs?

The SPEAKER: I will allow the question as it refers to the ministerial code of conduct.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I thank the member for Eildon for her question. In answering her question I will confine my comments to questions relating to my time in this position and also, as per your direction, Speaker, my responsibilities to enforce and uphold the ministerial code of conduct, and I make the point very clearly that the standards and how I have enforced that ministerial code of conduct insofar as it applied to allegations that had been made and were examined and which subsequently saw the requirement for the member for South Barwon to resign firstly as parliamentary secretary and then secondly as a member of the parliamentary Labor Party came as a consequence of upholding the highest of standards. It came as a consequence of being very clear that there was no

place for this sort of behaviour – persistent, repeat behaviour – in either the government or the party room.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:03): Last August the media reported that a cabinet minister told colleagues that:

... we know that some of you are sleeping with your staff and it's a misuse of power.

And that:

There is a cultural issue within the party.

Since a cabinet minister was reported as saying that there is a cultural issue within the government by male MPs towards female members of staff, should Victorians trust that this is the last Labor MP misusing his position?

The SPEAKER: I ask the member for Eildon to rephrase her question and not refer to party matters.

Cindy McLEISH: Last August the media reported that a cabinet minister told colleagues that:

... we know that some of you are sleeping with your staff and it's a misuse of power.

And that:

There is a cultural issue within the party.

Since a cabinet minister is reported as saying there is a cultural issue within the government by male MPs towards female members of staff, should Victorians trust that this is the last minister or parliamentary secretary misusing his position?

The SPEAKER: The question is very borderline. I will allow it this time.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): My answer to the supplementary question is indeed similar to the answer I gave earlier. I have made it clear that there is no place in either the government or the party room for this sort of behaviour. I will enforce and uphold the ministerial code of conduct, as I am required to do. But I also make this point to the member for Eildon, every member of the Liberal Party, the National Party, the Greens political party and the crossbench: with the introduction of the parliamentary integrity commission, we will all be held to these sorts of standards. There will be, for the first time, an opportunity for anyone to make a complaint against any member of Parliament and for that to then be investigated.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! This is a very serious matter. Members will come to order.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 58(1)(a), the Premier does have to be factual, and the government is proposing a model that carves out ministers.

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

Ministers statements: Yoorrook Justice Commission

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): Yesterday I had the honour to appear before the Yoorrook Justice Commission on Wurundjeri country as the first head of government in Australia to participate in a truth-telling process. It was a humbling experience, especially considering the commission is establishing a true record of our state's history. Telling the truth matters. It matters because still the record of our state's history is incomplete. Like many Victorians, my formal education of Aboriginal people's history here in Victoria and their experiences was not as it should have been. To be clear, that limitation was not an accident; it was part of a deliberate and systematic attempt to erase First Nations people from our state's story. The process of truth-telling and our participation in that truth-telling process are a refusal to submit to that silence.

Appearing before the commission, I heard of the strength, resilience and resistance of Aboriginal people in our state and of their unbroken connection to country and culture for thousands of years. I also acknowledge the harms and injustices committed against First Peoples since colonisation: the murders, the massacres, the dispossession of country and culture, the separation of families, and the policies and practices of government that have created the gap that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians. Acknowledging this demands an honest recognition that we still have a long way to go.

As Premier of this state, the government remains fully committed to truth, treaty and determination of First Peoples. I remain hopeful that in time those opposite will put down their political weapons, join with the government, join with First Peoples here and join with the Victorian community to reckon with our past and go on that journey towards treaty.

Family violence

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): My question is to the Premier. In 2022 the federal government allocated \$220 million to the states to fund 500 new frontline workers who would provide support to women and children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. In March this year it was revealed that only 17 of the 500 are employed across the entire country. How many funded positions in Victoria remain unfilled?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): I thank the leader of his opposition for his question because it does give us the opportunity to discuss the huge amount of work that has been going on here in Victoria, a huge amount of work that did not start in 2022. It started way back in 2014 when, from opposition, we committed to holding Australia's first-ever royal commission into family violence following the tragic murder of Rosie Batty's son at the hands of his father. Since then, we came to government, we held that royal commission, we received that royal commission report and all 227 of its recommendations are being implemented and continue to be implemented. We have invested \$3.6 billion over that period of time, implementing system reform, strengthening support for women and children who are experiencing the horrors of family and domestic violence and strengthening the police response and resources as well.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question related to the government sitting on funding for frontline workers that have not yet been employed, and I would ask you to bring the Premier back to that specific question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being relevant to the question, which asked about investment in family violence.

The SPEAKER: The question referred to women and children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. I believe the Premier was being relevant and was giving some background to the answer to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am giving this background because it is not background, it is fact. It is reality, and it is the lived experience of too many women and children.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: I hope I do not have to raise my voice to answer this sort of question. I really hope that this would be the sort of question that is given some respect in terms of the conduct of this chamber, because I was about to say, member for Polwarth, too many women and children continue to experience the horrors of family violence. That is why I want to acknowledge the work of the organisations that deal with this every single day, the Victoria Police officers who respond to this every single day, the teachers in our schools who are supporting prevention and resilience-building programs –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was specific to the 500 positions. Can you draw the Premier back to answering how many of those positions remain unfilled in Victoria?

Richard Riordan interjected.

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

Member for Polwarth withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. I cannot direct the Premier how to respond to your question, but she is being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: And I say this because the huge amount of investment that we have made, the huge amount of work that is going on by those agencies and organisations, does demand an acknowledgement but also a continued response as to how we can build on that foundation, and it does include the recruitment that is going on right now for those workers that the Leader of the Opposition refers to. It does include the work that I have asked the Minister for Women, the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and the Attorney-General to look at on what more we can do as a state, because we have done so much but there is still so much more to do, because every four days a woman is killed in this country. It is happening too often. We know we need to take further action in this state. That is exactly what we are doing, and it does include the utilisation of the resources that have come from the federal government – I should note, a Federal Labor government which has made this investment.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:14): When will the state Labor government employ our share of the 500 new frontline workers funded by the federal government in 2022?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): In answering this question I refer back to the work that we have done in the building up of this sector since we held the royal commission, a royal commission that was described by some as a lawyers' picnic, described by some –

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: Liberal Party people, Leader of the House. The Liberal Party described it as a lawyers' picnic. We ourselves as a result of that work –

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

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I was about to say that as a consequence of that royal commission and that work and that \$3.6 billion of investment, which others have described as a lawyers' picnic, we have ourselves increased the workforce by 2000 people – 2000 additional people – and we are working to add to that with the investment that has been provided by a federal Labor government, who have joined with us. That is why I am looking forward tomorrow to the opportunity to work with the federal Labor Prime Minister and other state and territory leaders as a national cabinet to work together to address this critical national crisis.

Ministers statements: North East Link

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:15): I rise to update the house on how we are getting on and delivering the North East Link, the missing link in our freeway network. Today I was delighted to join the Premier as well as the Minister for Creative Industries and visit the tunnel-boring machine launch site in Watsonia, where we are in the final stages of assembling the TBMs. Starting from the middle of this year, the TBMs will dig the longest rail tunnels in Victoria so

we can slash travel times across the north-east and, more importantly, take 15,000 trucks off local roads. As part of the North East Link, the Allan Labor government will complete the M80 ring-road and deliver a massive overhaul to the Eastern Freeway, which will be the single biggest overhaul of the Eastern Freeway since the 1970s, when it opened.

This project will be an absolute game changer for residents and businesses across Melbourne. It will change the way people and goods move across our state and take pressure off the rest of our freeway network. For example, for a family in Bayswater, what this means is it will save 35 minutes and 18 sets of traffic lights off a trip to the airport. For a small business in Dandenong, which I know the Minister for Government Services is thrilled about, it will mean less congestion on the M1 for a trip to the city and high-speed access to the Melbourne Market. It will save 11 minutes off a trip to Melbourne University from Box Hill, which I know the member for Box Hill is thrilled about. It will mean a parent living on Rosanna Road in the great electorate of Ivanhoe can get to school drop-offs without trucks screaming past their driveway. It will mean better public transport for people in the member for Bulleen's electorate, thanks to the dedicated eastern busway and the new park-and-ride in Bulleen, which celebrates its first birthday today, which is fantastic. Already more than 5000 dedicated and highly skilled workers are working on this project, and we are creating 12,000 direct jobs across the life of the project.

Let us be clear: this is the missing link that has been the dotted line on the *Melway* for a generation, and the Allan Labor government is making it a reality. While those opposite never delivered a thing in four years, we are getting on and delivering the infrastructure – *(Time expired)*

Stalking law reform

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:17): My question is to the Premier. The Victorian Law Reform Commission presented its report on stalking and harassment to the Labor government in June 2022. Premier, after nearly two years, why has the government failed to respond let alone act on this report?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): I thank the member for Malvern for his question, and I will correct the member for Malvern. He is incorrect to say that we have not responded. We have, and the Attorney-General has spoken to this publicly on a number of occasions in terms of the work she is doing since receiving the law reform commission's report – the work that she is doing to consider how we as a government can better protect victims of stalking, because we know this is an area where there needs to be further reform. It is an example –

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier's answer needs to be factual. The Premier has stated that the Attorney-General has responded. There are 45 recommendations. There has not been a government response, so I would urge you to bring the Premier back to answering the question in a factual way.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was responding. I cannot determine the factualness or otherwise of that response.

Jacinta ALLAN: If it would assist, because clearly the member for Malvern needs to be assisted, what I was saying earlier is that the Attorney-General has already publicly stated she is working through how the government responds to the law reform commission's work. So let us not make this political. Let us –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I said in my earlier answer, four women a week are dying at the hand of a current or former partner and I would hope that this would be, of all the debates we have in this place, a debate that could be founded on respect.

Roma Britnell interjected.

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

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: At the heart of what is happening here is we are seeing, as a consequence of instances where women are not respected, too many women are dying. That is what happens when you do not respect women, when you do not teach young boys about what it looks like to not respect women. This is the work that the Attorney-General is doing to lead the government's response to the law reform commission's report to work through this complex area. Following the royal commission, following the implementation of significant reforms, it is an example of an area where we know that there is further work to be done and that the law and justice system needs to continue to respond and look at how it can continue to be strengthened to support in this instance where women have been harmed and killed as a consequence of stalking. This work is ongoing and is part of the work that the Attorney-General, with the Minister for Women and the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, is working on right now. Our work did not begin and end with the royal commission. We have a Minister for Prevention of Family Violence who every single day is working on this area, and that is why we remain committed to looking at ongoing reform that includes in the area of stalking.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:21): The law reform commission's report contains 45 important recommendations to make Victorians and particularly Victorian women safer from stalking and harassment. Given the government has been reading this report for nearly two years, when will the government prioritise the safety of Victorian women and formally respond to this important report?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:22): I want to be absolutely clear that every day since we came to government, following the 2014 election, we have been committed to prioritising the safety of women. We committed to holding the family violence royal commission. We committed to implementing all 227 recommendations, something that those opposite did not support. As part of those recommendations we recruited 208 new family violence police officers – police officers working with victims of family violence – that you called not real police.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! This matter is extremely concerning and it is also a problem, probably, for many people who are watching today's question time and for some members in our chamber and in the gallery, so I would ask members to show some respect.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the question was specifically relating to the 45 recommendations of the law reform commission's report on stalking. I would ask you to bring the Premier back to answering the question: when specifically will the government respond to those 45 recommendations?

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The Premier was being relevant. You asked around prioritising the safety of Victorian women and formally responding. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I said, that work is ongoing. It is ongoing every single day, but particularly over the course of this year ministers have been working together on how we can build on the foundational changes we have made here as a state and look at what more we can do. I repeat: every single day the safety of women is a priority for our government through the work of the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and every member of this government.

Ministers statements: Victorian energy upgrades program

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:24): I am delighted to update the house on our flagship energy savings program: Victorian energy upgrades (VEU). It is helping Victorians save money on their energy bills each and every year. The program has been a massive success, with over

2.4 million households and businesses saving thousands of dollars on their energy bills through reduced energy use, and Victorians are continuing to jump at the chance to get their hands on discounted products that will help save money on their energy bills each and every year.

Since we introduced electric appliances to the program in June last year, more than 5300 reverse-cycle heating and cooling systems have been installed, replacing old, inefficient gas appliances and saving those households up to \$600 a year. Over 13,000 hot-water systems have been installed, with savings of up to \$490 a year each and every year. In 2023 over half a million homes and businesses received discounted upgrades across the program. This is part of our energy fairness plan, delivering bill savings for every Victorian. But we are not stopping there. A ban on telemarketing in the VEU will start tomorrow, and doorknocking will be banned from 1 August. We have listened to consumers and are putting a stop to high-pressure sales tactics so Victorians can make informed decisions as they make these energy efficiency upgrades to their homes.

The other side of course are more interested in killing off the VEU – that is what they tried to do – because they do not care about energy fairness for Victorians. Today their only plan is to lock Victorians into expensive gas and nuclear energy, which will send their energy bills skyrocketing for decades – absolutely decades. Only the Allan Labor government delivers real energy bill savings for Victorians, because our energy fairness plan is about ensuring that we replace the old energy with the new energy, which is the cheapest form of new build that we can do, and making sure that every Victorian gets the benefit of that.

Short-stay accommodation

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:26): My question is to the Premier. Premier, we are in a housing crisis. The Premier has been on the record talking about needing more housing supply. There are currently over 48,000 whole investment homes listed on Airbnb in Victoria – 48,000 homes which could house a renter or a first home buyer or a family. Instead they are being used to maximise profits for investors and for the Airbnb corporation and to inflate property prices. Labor's policy is to put a tax on bookings, which today's PBO report shows would only have a marginal impact on the issue, whereas regulation could free up 13,000 homes for long-term residents. Will Labor commit to properly regulating Airbnb to actually make thousands of homes available for people to live in?

The SPEAKER: I ask the member for Melbourne to rephrase her question to make it in relation to government as opposed to a party.

Ellen SANDELL: Will the government commit to properly regulating Airbnb to actually make thousands more homes available for people to live in?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question and acknowledge her elevation as Leader of the Greens political party following the resignation of the member in the other place. In terms of the critical issue of addressing housing supply, we are using every single lever we have available to us as a government to build more homes. The work that the Treasurer has been doing in looking at areas like the short-stay levy and looking at how homes that may previously have been available on the rental market are now being used to support our tourism industry is an area of that work, but that is not the magic solution that the Greens political party may be seeking. The solution is looking at all of the levers we need to use, including the parliamentary levers that we have, to support more homes.

Blocking the development of more homes, blocking housing opportunities, is not the way to do that. I had hoped and I continue to hope – we have not had the chance to have a conversation yet – that with a change of leader in the Greens political party we might see a change of approach and, instead of not supporting the building of more homes, using parliamentary mechanisms to block and stop the building of more homes and seeing how in council chambers around the state the Greens political party are not supporting housing opportunities, that we have a new approach. I am still hopeful that we will get a new approach from the member for Melbourne, because we have heard from the member

for Melbourne how she wants to see more homes being built. That is what the government wants to achieve, but we do not achieve that by standing in the way of developments across the state; we do it by building more homes.

I am reminded that recently we were in Mount Waverley. The Minister for Housing, the member for Ashwood and I were in Mount Waverley where we got to see a fantastic development supporting women, particularly with a focus on women over the age of 55 – the single fastest growing group of Australians experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It is a fantastic development – 96 brand new, modern and secure apartments for women over the age of 55. You would have thought this is a project that everyone would have got on board with. Sadly, no, in this instance the Liberal Party did not support this development and actively campaigned against it.

We will continue to push on and look at what we can do – every lever – but we need councils, we need the federal government and we need those of us in Parliament to get on with the task of building more homes.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:31): I note the Premier wants to build more homes and yet her party's policy is to demolish all the public housing in Victoria. Anyway, when we are talking about using every lever, major cities around the world – Berlin, Amsterdam, London – have all introduced caps and restrictions on the number of days a short stay can be listed on platforms like Airbnb. Even WA announced a similar policy just this week. These caps stop property investors buying up homes and taking them away from renters or owner-occupiers, whereas the Parliamentary Budget Office, an independent body, has said that the levy that the government has proposed will have a marginal impact on the housing crisis. Why won't Labor follow their WA colleagues and introduce regulation of Airbnb that will actually bring thousands more homes onto the long-term market?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): It is the same question. I only have a minute as opposed to 3 minutes to provide the same answer to the same question that I was given in the substantive question. I simply repeat that there is not one magic solution to building more homes in Victoria – and it is not even the main solution, member for Melbourne. Rather than looking at the margins, we are looking at what we can do in making substantial change, which is why the work of the planning minister, for example, is so important and the work of the development facilitation program, which now has tens of thousands of homes in the process that were not there previously, before we introduced this policy. There are so many levers that we are pulling to build more homes for more Victorians, and I look forward to the support from the member for Melbourne and the Greens political party in this task.

Ministers statements: rental reform

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:33): I rise to update the house on the work the Allan Labor government is doing to support Victorian renters. We know that more Victorians are renting than ever before. While we have the strongest rental protections in the country here in Victoria, we know that there is always more that we could be doing to protect renters rights. That is why last month I joined the member for Albert Park to announce a new renting taskforce to crack down on dodgy rentals and to send a clear message to landlords and agents who might be doing the wrong thing.

We have already delivered over 130 reforms to protect and strengthen renters rights, and we have more on the way. This taskforce will back in those protections that we have already introduced with more intelligence analysts, inspectors, investigators and lawyers who are focused on detecting offences like false advertising, like failing to lodge bonds and, really importantly, like not meeting our minimum rental standards. The taskforce will make sure that all Victorian renters have a safe, secure and comfortable place to call home. The taskforce will be embedded within Consumer Affairs Victoria and will be modelled on our successful underquoting taskforce, which has already collected over \$1.2 million in fines and has in one case also initiated criminal proceedings. We know that most agents

and landlords are doing the right thing, but we also know how important it is to send a clear message to the few who do not that their poor conduct will not be tolerated.

On this side of the house we are committed to supporting renters, and we have a very strong record in doing just that. We are continuing to work for Victorians every day, whether that be through building more homes – and many of my colleagues on the front bench here are focused on that, backed in by a backbench who tell us every day just how important that is – or by making things fairer for renters.

Taxation

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:35): My question is to the Minister for Planning. Will the Minister confirm that Labor's great big new tax on home owners will hit every postcode across Melbourne and every town across Victoria?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a question that I tried to understand, but it sounded like it was about tax, and that should have been rightly directed to the Treasurer, not the Minister for Planning.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Speaker, with respect, this question is entirely within order.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business has directed his question to the Minister for Planning. The Minister for Planning has an option to answer or not answer.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:36): I thank the member for Brighton for his question. First of all, I acknowledge that regarding certain portfolio responsibilities the question that he has asked is probably more appropriately directed to the Treasurer. However, I would really value the opportunity to get up here to talk about this government's commitment to making more affordable homes for more Victorians. We know those on the other side, the member of Brighton in particular –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, with respect, this question was about Labor's great big new home owner tax.

Jacinta Allan: On the point of order, Speaker, you clearly issued a direction to the Minister for Planning that given the broad nature and lack of specificity in the content from the member opposite the Minister for Planning had discretion in how she answered the question. So as a consequence of your direction, Speaker, the Minister for Planning was being entirely relevant to the question that was asked.

John Pesutto: On the point of order, Speaker, the question is very narrow. It refers to the big new tax on home owners. It does not provide the Minister for Planning with a broad remit to address other matters. It is about the big new tax on home owners that the Allan Labor government is going to impose on every postcode in this state.

The SPEAKER: Given the Minister for Planning stated that the question was better directed to the Treasurer at the outset, the Minister for Planning is to come back to answering the question.

Sonya KILKENNY: It is a great opportunity to talk about this government's commitment, as I said, to delivering the 800,000 homes over the next decade and ensuring that we are pulling every lever available to us to support that commitment. We have seen the member for Brighton, we have seen the member for Malvern and we have even seen the Leader of the Opposition blocking homes for more Victorians, locking Victorians out of the very places where they want to live – close to transport, to jobs, to services and to their families. We know the only way to make homes more affordable here in Victoria is to build more of them. That means working with communities and working with local government, alongside industry, to ensure we have got the conditions right to support the growth of those homes and the building of those homes in the places where Victorians want to live.

This is about ensuring that we are not just building more homes but building communities that are going to support these Victorians to reach their very full potential. This is about supporting all Victorians with the dignity of a home in the area they choose to live, not about locking them out of their suburbs, not about blocking developments, not about using heritage as a way to stop development and to block Victorians. I want to be able to look at the next generation of Victorians and say I did everything with the Allan Labor government, everything possible, to ensure that we are providing homes for Victorians in the places they want to live. This is about those opposite failing to have any coherent strategy on planning and on delivering affordable homes for more Victorians.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question related to Labor's great big new tax on home owners, and I would ask you to bring the minister back to that question.

The SPEAKER: The minister indicated that the question was not within her portfolio. She is answering the question according to her portfolio. The minister has concluded her answer.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:41): Under Labor's great big new tax on home owners, can the minister confirm the plan to make home owners pay more than \$1000 when they renovate or rebuild their home?

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:42): Can I just remind those opposite that we are in the middle of a housing crisis, and the mischief that is peddled by those opposite and the bizarre allegations that are made that we have seen here today are not serving –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was a very specific question about a particular charge on home owners – a \$1000 new charge on home owners – and I would ask you to bring the minister back to that question.

The SPEAKER: I am very well aware of the question, Manager of Opposition Business. The minister was answering the question within her portfolio. I do ask the minister not to attack the opposition but to come back to the answer.

Sonya KILKENNY: I would hope that those in this place are factual and that we are not peddling mischief when what we are facing is a housing crisis. What I would hope is that those opposite would join with us in seeking to support the delivery of more homes for more Victorians. We know the only way that we are going to make homes more affordable is to build more of them. It is not a laughing matter, I say to the Leader of the Opposition. This is such a serious matter. The dignity of housing is a basic human right, Leader of the Opposition. I remind you of the housing crisis. I remind you of the need for us to build 2.54 million more homes by 2050. Please join with us on this.

Ministers statements: growth areas infrastructure

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:44): I am absolutely delighted to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting Victorian families in our fastest growing suburbs with the critical infrastructure and services they need. Last Wednesday I attended the Whittlesea Early Parenting Centre with the Premier, and what an outstanding centre this is, supporting new mums and dads in the northern suburbs with access to specialised support close to home as they navigate not only some of the most precious moments with their newborns but also some of the most stressful and difficult times too. It was there that we announced more than \$400 million in funding from the growth areas infrastructure contribution to fund 37 projects right across our growth areas of Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Mitchell, Whittlesea and Wyndham. This is the biggest funding round of GAIC projects we have ever made. Projects include \$35 million towards a new school in Cobblebank; more than \$150 million for new bus services across the north, the west and the south-east; \$9.6 million for the Wallara Waters enhanced parenting centre; and nearly \$3 million for upgrades to the Sunbury community hospital.

As we create the conditions for 800,000 new homes over the next decade, we want to make sure our communities continue to be thriving and livable – that we are not just building houses, we are building communities too. Unlike those opposite, we will support and invest in the families in our growing suburbs. Unlike those opposite, we will not abandon our communities or lock them out of having a home in the places they want to live, near services, near transport, near schools and close to families and jobs. We will continue to work with communities in partnership with local government and with industry to build the homes Victorians need and deserve.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I have questions overdue and not answered by the ministers: question 476, a constituency question to the Minister for Public and Active Transport – an important issue about a new bus service on Clegg Road in Mount Evelyn to Wandin; adjournment matter 535 to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC; and questions on notice 943, 945, 957, 1050, 1051, 1052, 1053, 1055, 1076, 1077, 1078, 1079, 1080, 1081, 1082, 1083, 1084, 1085, 1086, 1087, 1111, 1112 and 1113 to the Minister for Skills and TAFE, the Minister for Economic Growth and the Minister for Education. I would appreciate those being answered.

The SPEAKER: Member for Evelyn, would you pass your list to the clerks, please.

Constituency questions

Lowan electorate

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:48): (590) My question is to the Minister for Environment. What penalties would apply to a landholder taking or killing the species *Canis familiaris* on their own private land for a legitimate purpose, namely, to protect against injury or damage to livestock? Recently the wild dog management zone in north-west Victoria was revoked. As part of that farmers were provided with no pathway to protect their own stock. Since the revocation of this management zone – and I will remind the house that this is only the perimeter of the zone, not the internals of this zone – we have seen extensive dingo and wild dog attacks on stock. I have seen terrible photos of live lambs who have had nips taken out of them, their intestines dragging along the ground. It is a horrific death. There is no ability for farmers to get an authority to control wildlife. There is no funding for fencing. There is no ability to manage these wild dogs or dingoes on their land. I therefore ask – (*Time expired*)

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:49): (591) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport: how is planning progressing for the Stead Park redevelopment? Stead Park is the home of the Geelong Hockey Association and many local hockey clubs from across the Greater Geelong region, and this government is committed to seeing it reach its full potential, with upgrades planned to the pavilion, a new pitch and new seating. The current facilities are very weary and in need of an upgrade, and I had the pleasure to host the minister there recently to see it for herself. The community are very excited for these upgrades, and I am looking forward to working with them and the clubs to ensure that this project will deliver a hockey facility in Corio that current players and our hockey stars of the future can enjoy for years to come. Again, my question to the minister is: how is planning progressing for the Stead Park redevelopment?

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:50): (592) Montrose small businesses and traders are experiencing significant losses as a result of the disruption caused by the Montrose intersection upgrade, which is impacting the broader Montrose community. These businesses rely on customers from not only Montrose but the broader Yarra Ranges community and tourists who are now avoiding the area altogether. My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure: can financial compensation be made available for Montrose traders who suffer significant losses as a result of this road project? Some are already reporting a 35 to 40 per cent loss in trade, and the Department of Transport and Planning advise that construction works will persist for another 11 months or so. Some businesses may have to let go staff or shut down, which would be devastating for our local community.

I wrote to the minister about this about two months ago and still have had no reply. I urge the minister and the government to support Montrose and these small businesses.

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:51): (593) My question is for the Minister for Police, and my question is: what are the available avenues for community members in Preston and Reservoir to seek the removal of graffiti, stickers or posters that are racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or in any other way discriminatory or inciting of violence? As we know, graffiti has a long history as an art form and an activist tool, but it also has a darker history as a way of intimidating people and making them feel unsafe. We have seen racist examples in recent years targeting the Indian community, the Chinese community during COVID and more recently the Jewish community through phrases like ‘Kill all the Zionists’, which relate to the conflict in West Bank and Gaza but do not reflect the views of those advocating for peace. I recognise the good work of Darebin council and other councils in promptly removing this sort of graffiti. I look forward to the minister’s response with respect to graffiti on private properties in particular.

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:52): (594) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Will the minister consider developing more specific statutory guidance around declaring dogs as dangerous animals under the Domestic Animals Act 1994? Recently a constituent reached out to me following the tragic death of her dog from a vicious dog attack last year. This event was preceded by multiple other threatening encounters with the same dog. Despite the fatality, the dog in question was not declared a dangerous dog under the act following the fatal incident. Such a declaration would ensure the dog is kept in an appropriate enclosure and that appropriate warning signs are displayed. Section 34 of the Domestic Animals Act indicates council may exercise a discretion to declare a dog dangerous if the dog has caused the death or serious injury to a person or animal by biting or attacking that person or animal. However, it provides no specific guidance as to how this discretion should be exercised, and this means that councils are left to themselves to implement the criteria. Given the risks that such dogs may pose to other animals and persons, I strongly encourage the minister to review the effectiveness of the current act.

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:53): (595) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Minister, when will the consultation period begin for the construction of the brand new Tarneit West station? We know that the brand new Tarneit West station will significantly improve public transport for my community of Tarneit. I know this station will dramatically change the lives of residents who live around Riverdale and Tarneit North. The new station will be located near the corner of Davis and Leakes roads and will include a four-bay bus interchange and up to 400 parking spaces. This will make it easier for Tarneit residents to get into the city, and I look forward to the further updates. This is a transformative project for my community, and I cannot wait for the minister’s response.

Prahran electorate

Sam HIBBINS (Prahran) (14:54): (596) My constituency question is to the Premier, and it has been submitted to me by Linda in Prahran, who is concerned about the number of tobacco and vape shops, particularly along Chapel Street and Commercial Road. She is concerned they are unlicensed and they are not checked by police or council to make sure they are not selling illegal product. Victoria has seen unprecedented levels of tobacco-related violence, arson attacks and illegal tobacco being sold and an increase in vaping, particularly amongst children, and all this has happened whilst Victoria has been the only jurisdiction in Australia without a tobacco licensing scheme. The Premier recently did announce a tobacco and vape retail licensing scheme. However, there was very little detail, so I ask: when will the government implement the licensing scheme in order to improve public health and safety?

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:55): (597) My question is for the Minister for Health. Last month I joined the Premier, the Minister for Health and the member for Footscray at the brand new Footscray Hospital site to see the construction progress and the footbridge connecting VU to the hospital. The new Footscray Hospital is opening next year thanks to a \$1.5 billion investment by the Allan Labor government. In fact this is the single biggest piece of health infrastructure ever invested not just in Melbourne's west but in Victoria. We are delivering world-class facilities to Melbourne's west, benefiting local councils I represent, including Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong and Wyndham. The new hospital will have more than 500 beds and help our medical staff care for an additional 15,000 patients and 20,000 extra people through the emergency department annually. We need this hospital in Melbourne's west, and I am so pleased that it will be open next year. My question to the minister is this: how will this record investment into the new Footscray Hospital benefit those in my electorate?

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:56): (598) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety on behalf of Doug Humphries. Mr Humphries is seeking clarification regarding a section of road on the Myrtleford side of Everton on the Great Alpine Road. There are temporary roadworks signs from 80 kilometres down to 50 kilometres, but there are no roadworks being performed. Granted it is a very bad and dangerous piece of road, but Mr Humphries requests clarification on whether it is misleading or even illegal to inform drivers to say roadworks are occurring when there are actually none occurring at all and there have not been for months.

Pakenham electorate

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (14:56): (599) My question is to the Minister for Community Sport. How many sporting club grants have been awarded in my local community of Pakenham district since 2014? The sporting club grants program provides funding for community sport and active recreation organisations across Victoria. Access to this funding helps grassroots clubs and organisations address barriers to participation and build social and active local communities. The grants assist Victorian sport and active recreation organisations to acquire uniforms and equipment that are essential for participation, first aid and safety; attract, build the capability of and retain a skilled workforce, both volunteer and paid; increase equity, diversity and inclusiveness; increase participation of individuals and communities who participate less; and create opportunities so Victorians can participate in ways that suit their needs. This is a fantastic program, and I look forward to the minister's answer.

Bills**National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:57): As I was saying, today a dangerous precedent has happened in which members of Parliament have been gagged from being able to raise important matters on behalf of their constituencies. Safety matters, social cohesion matters and the ability to raise concerns on behalf of Victorians in this Parliament absolutely matters. As I have said, for me to try to raise safety concerns in this Parliament but be gagged by the Labor government is an absolute disgrace. This is a really, really important matter. This is a matter for all of us. We have anti-Israel, anti-Jewish protesters taking over, literally moving in in the City of Melbourne and moving in on the parliamentary precinct. Members of the Jewish community do not feel safe coming into the city or coming into this Parliament. We also had issues as of yesterday, when there was an altercation on the steps of Parliament – there was an effigy of a Hamas terrorist, a prescribed terrorist organisation, at Parliament. One of these protesters has been charged with kidnapping and is also out there protesting.

This is a real concern for everyone that works in this precinct, for everyone that works here. I say that this is the time when we must be debating these issues. That is why the member for Brighton called for an adjournment to raise these important issues on behalf of constituents. It is important for all of us to be able to bring this to the attention of the Parliament. That is why we are here. That is why we have been elected. My community, my constituency of Caulfield, would be absolutely horrified to think that the Labor government gagged me today and prevented me from being able to raise important safety matters for our community, for the Jewish community, when it comes to these anti-Israel, anti-Jewish protesters.

We have extremists that are out and about doing things – violence – and this kind of thing should never happen. Social cohesion and safety should be absolutely paramount in what we do. We celebrate multiculturalism and we have been on a unity ticket so many times when it comes to these issues, but when a community does not feel safe then I think it is time for this Parliament to act. For this government to silence me today is an absolute disgrace. I am feeling like I have never felt before – to think that the government would silence me at a time like this. They may not agree, but they should at least give members of the Jewish community an opportunity to raise a point when it comes to safety.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (15:00): I also rise to speak on this procedural motion. I oppose the motion by the member for Brighton. It is a disappointing and slightly confused debate that we are having because the lead speaker from the opposition initiated the debate claiming to have been gagged a number of times and taking exception, I think, Speaker, to your rulings earlier today. I was not in the chamber at that point, but I was watching proceedings from my office at the time. I understand that you invited any member who had concerns to speak to you in your rooms to discuss the issues that were raised earlier this morning in this house and to seek to resolve the issue in that way. I think that would have been the appropriate way to deal with the disputes that arose in the house this morning.

We have then had successive speakers from the opposition, the Leader of the Nationals and the member for Caulfield, talk about really significant issues: the safety of Victorians on our streets and the politically motivated murders of parliamentarians in the UK, Jo Cox and Sir David Amess, and attacks on other parliamentarians like Mike Freer and sadly a number of others, and the security of this place. They are really important themes – of course they are. The safety of parliamentarians and the safety of those who work for us in this building, the safety of parliamentary staff and the safety of Victorians going about their lives in peace and seeking to live in safety and in dignity – they are really important themes. But that does not mean that it is an appropriate course of action to railroad the government business program and seek to discuss them now and in this way. They are important themes worthy of consideration and discussion – of course they are. But there is something ironic about complaining about being gagged from speaking on particular topics by then seeking to gag discussion and debate about the government business program and the very important bills that are contained on the government business program this week, including the regulation of the energy market and tax.

This is of course not to suggest that the issues the member for Caulfield has discussed are in any way unimportant – they are important issues. My suggestion, and the reason I rise to oppose the member for Brighton's motion today, is that there is a time and a place for the discussion of those – it is not during the government business program. I look forward to the government business program being debated further this afternoon, and I look forward to contributing to the important pieces of legislation that are on that business program. So I rise to oppose the member for Brighton's procedural motion. I hope we can vote on that, and then I hope we can get on to debating the business of the government business program – those significant bills that I talked about before. I look forward to you then providing the house with a ruling on the issues that you invited members to come and speak to you about earlier this morning.

The SPEAKER: The member for Prahran, by leave. Is leave granted?

Leave refused.

Assembly divided on James Newbury's motion:

Ayes (31): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

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

Motion defeated.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:10): I rise to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. This bill is about ensuring that Victorians have an energy provider if their provider goes under – ensuring that there will be an automatic transfer of customer in those circumstances. It is a very, very simple bill, and for that reason the coalition will not be opposing it. But the bill is about so much more than just simply ensuring that a customer has a provider. At the heart of the bill, at the heart of this policy debate, is ensuring that all Victorians have access to reliable, secure, affordable and clean energy. This one bill, although a simple bill, is about ensuring that where an energy provider goes under, the Australian Energy Regulator will automatically transfer a customer to another provider.

Ensuring that Victorians have access to energy – have access to electricity – has been of great concern to Victorians, because we have seen so many Victorians left without reliable and secure access to energy. Many important organisations and independent thinkers have turned their minds to policies of energy and spent some time talking to the policies of energy. I refer to the most recent report *Keeping the Lights On* from the Grattan Institute, which looked at a number of the underpinning policy issues at play in this bill, because this bill is about ensuring that people have access to energy. That is what this is about. That report, *Keeping the Lights On*, is about that very same thing. What that report found was that there is an uncoordinated approach to energy at a national level but also more broadly. It also found that the energy market:

... may not be able to deliver enough investment in low-emissions generation, storage, and transmission, when and where it will be needed.

That goes to the very core of what this bill is about: ensuring that people do have access to energy and electricity. The report, which I will speak to in some detail, is significant, and it does go into quite important policy thinking around these matters. It was only released days ago, but it has provided an important policy contribution to these matters. I refer to the report:

Currently, the vast majority of power system outages occur because of problems with poles and wires, not lack of generation. But a reliability problem is emerging.

Before we go into the substance of the policy conversation it is important to note the report's general observation that we have an uncoordinated approach, that we have power system outages which partly occur because of infrastructure and that reliability will be an emerging problem. As you delve further

into the report and if you look at the statistics on what we have seen in terms of outages, you see an increase in that reliability problem emerging. If I can further quote from the report, it says:

As the Australian economy restructures to meet the challenges of climate change and net zero, it will rely even more on the electricity system. If this system fails, the country is in real trouble.

And what does that ‘real trouble’ look like? Well, 530,000 people in Victoria had no power at the last and biggest blackout that this state has ever seen, so there will be real problems. These are real problems. These are real policy challenges, and it is important to have a conversation about those policy challenges, not to be political about it but to understand that the experts are saying these challenges are going to get worse and need to be addressed. What the report recommends is:

... three priorities for planning this future market: a fit-for-purpose reliability framework, an emissions reduction policy for the energy sector beyond renewable electricity targets, and better integration of distributed energy resources. These must be accompanied by a major review of the governance structure.

Important findings – and things for us to think about as we consider what is a very, very simple bill in a very complex conversation.

I spoke a moment ago about trends that have occurred, and I make a point that has been referred to in that report, at page 10, which is that by the Reliability and Emergency Reserve Trader, between 1998 and 2016, backup supply was only procured on three occasions, in 2004–05 and 2005–06. But since 2017 there has been a striking change: backup resources have been procured and called upon in every financial year since 2017–18. It shows the trend. In 2021–22 this came at a cost of more than \$125 million to energy consumers. We know there is a growing emergence of a problem, and that problem is about reliability. As we have a conversation today about the bill – which the coalition does not oppose – and ensuring that people have a switchover to a default provider, we do need to have a broader conversation about what these emerging trends are showing and the reliability concerns that are being pointed to that exist and the trends that are showing into the future.

I referred at some length to reliability, but I should also refer to the grid in some detail, because when we are talking about reliability we are not just talking about reliability of supply, we are also talking about the reliability and security of the infrastructure. We know that the Australian Energy Market Commission found that 95 per cent of blackouts in Victoria between 2009 and 2018 were caused by transmission and distribution failures, not the weather – 95 per cent. So there is an infrastructure problem – they are real issues. If I can refer to the Australian Energy Market Operator’s warning, it says:

To ensure Australian consumers continue to have access to reliable electricity ... it’s critical that planned investments in transmission, generation and storage projects are urgently delivered.

We know there is a reliability problem. We also know from the experts that there is a trend, and we know from the market operator that we need urgent investment in transmission, generation and storage. We saw some of the reality of that play out in the AusNet report which was released around the time of the 530,000 Victorians being left without power, which found that one in seven of the 13,000 electricity transmission towers were damaged by patchy or extensive rust and about 8000 of them are now a decade or less from the end of their service life design. These are really concerning findings from an operator in the market, an operator who has conducted a report effectively into ensuring that we have secure and reliable electricity – findings that I am sure concern all of us. The report further found that 12 per cent of the towers were deemed to be in average condition, with patchy rust, and 1.5 per cent in poor condition that could pose a serious health and safety risk. So we know that there is a trend occurring in our supply, and we also know that our infrastructure is not secure, as we saw earlier this year with 530,000 people being affected and without power throughout storms. These are real concerns, so when we have a conversation about the bill before us it is important, and that is why the coalition will not be opposing the proposition before us that consumers will have an almost default provider provided in circumstances where their provider goes under.

We need to have a broader conversation, because what is being proposed by the government is not enough. The government is not doing enough to ensure that we are protected from the broader issues of reliability and security concerns. Referring again to that 2020 assessment, it further found that 11 extreme wind events had knocked out 45 transmission towers since 1959, with a further six going down in the recent storm. But the pace is accelerating, and that is the point of the findings of this report. The pace is accelerating, with more than half of those towers – 25 – coming down in the past 15 years. What we are seeing from the Grattan report and what we are seeing from industry is a speeding up, if you like, of concerns around reliability and security, and what the government is not doing is fixing those problems. What the government is not doing is fixing those problems, and that is why you can see the Grattan Institute referring to an uncoordinated, ad hoc approach in terms of policy. In fact the report effectively says that in many ways governments are tripping over themselves and causing many of the problems we face. That is what the report says. It is not a direct quote, but if I can summarise it, it says that governments are often the problem.

Security is important and security of supply is important, because at the end of the day this is not just about people having access to an air conditioner when it is hot; this is about people having access to electricity that may save their life, may keep them alive, may provide their family food, may provide energy to ensure that their businesses operate so they can provide for their families. When we have the conversation and these debates about security and supply, we do not clearly enough, at times, talk about the real impact. When you hear big numbers like 530,000 people without power, that does not go into the real stories of what happened that day and the days thereafter – the impact. I am sure that all members in this place – I know I did – had people contact them who were desperately in need of power for life-saving reasons. Security and supply is not about making sure that someone has an air-conditioned home, it is about making sure they are safe, it is about making sure that their families are fed and it is about making sure their businesses are operating.

We have spoken about the experts, and we have spoken about industry in terms of operators. I should also refer to some of the industry more broadly. If I can refer to the chief executive, Paul Guerra, of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, after that blackout he was quoted rightly as saying:

The fragility of our existing system was exposed. We can't get to net zero on a hope and a prayer.

And further:

... the concern lies in how are we actually going to get there?

And further:

We cannot let energy security be the casualty of the transition to net zero.

He, as a representative of industry, was making the points that I made earlier, and making them on behalf of business, on behalf of industry, that we need a better plan to deal with the problems we face, more than just the policy plans that have been put forward by this government.

When we talk about security one of the things that is often missed is the real impact of the cost increases of energy. A business certainly feels that, and I will get to some comments about that shortly. At the end of the day, we know the cost to the consumer, the cost to someone at home, is hurting them. It is really hurting them, the cost of energy. St Vincent de Paul recently found that there had been a 22 per cent increase in gas and a 28 per cent increase in electricity costs, which is roughly in line with the ABS finding of a 25 per cent increase in energy costs. These costs hurt. These numbers, which may sound cold, have an impact upon the people that can least afford it. We know that those costs also have an impact upon business in a very meaningful way, not just when the lights go out and the business is forced to close and throw out its goods but also upon its thoughts about continuing as a going concern in this state.

I have referred to it before, but the chamber did a survey of members in terms of costs, and it is worth repeating those findings. They found that energy policies were a top concern for two-thirds of

Victorian businesses. That is an issue at the forefront for businesses operating in our state. Eighty-six per cent believed that the move to renewables would impact upon their output; 73 per cent said that the blackout earlier this year had forced them to close – three out of four forced to close, a significant hit on their capacity to trade and provide for their families; and finally, cost was cited 81 per cent of the time as a main barrier to switching from gas to electricity.

Although I will not go into too much detail on gas, we have in this place talked a lot about gas and Labor's pernicious gas ban. We cannot allow as a state this government to ban gas. We know that a supply of gas should be provided to ensure security of energy to Victorians. By banning gas, Labor is effectively undermining that security. What is interesting is what the minister is saying to gas producers when the door is closed. That is what is interesting. What the minister says in public and what the minister is now starting to say in private are two very, very different things.

A member: That's not true.

James NEWBURY: That is true, and that is coming from the industry themselves. They will start standing up and calling that out. They will start calling out what the minister is saying behind closed doors. If I can refer to a comment from Mr Guerra on gas, where he said:

Specifically on gas, if we don't have a clear plan which also includes affordable pricing, and if we get out of step with the other states in Australia by becoming more expensive for energy, that increases the operational risk for business.

We saw only a couple of months ago ABS figures which showed a net decrease of 7606 businesses in Victoria. Anecdotally, not just by the numbers, when you talk to business, business talks about leaving the state. Tim Piper, a director from Ai Group, said, and he is right, that:

Some (companies) are able to stay here, (but) it is the continuing reinvestment that is the real problem ...

That is the message that business gives you when you talk to them. There are businesses that are operating. But it is the reinvestment, and you can see reinvestment decisions are now being made interstate. You can see businesses considering what they will do in the future, and they are talking about South Australia and they are talking about Queensland regularly. It is a very common conversation to talk to businesses and for them to say that. Further, Mr Piper said:

... I know some big companies that are saying this is beyond the pale, they're not going to be able to pay the level of gas prices especially, and they are having to reconsider their positions ...

in this state. These are very important points.

We see it more broadly in policy more generally. We saw it with wind generation, and hasn't wind generation been a real concern for Victorians? We have seen the federal government state that there will be no meaningful wind generation, in its view, until the late 2030s. But the government has a legislated target in Victoria for well before then. This parliament passed it. In good faith we had a conversation in this chamber and that bill was passed because we want energy generation to succeed. We want it to succeed. We want people to have reliable, secure and affordable energy. But we saw with wind a complete collapse of wind policy, and it is for a number of reasons that these policy areas have failed – one, because of poor policy work. Poor policy work has been a key issue in that, when you look at states like New South Wales, there has been an incredible lag in this state on policy in energy and working with industry to ensure it. We are years behind other states here. I recall speaking early in this chamber, five years ago, about that very fact and looking at New South Wales. The Victorian government has now started to, in recent parliamentary weeks, implement some of the measures that were passed in New South Wales, to bring those in with VicGrid most recently in the last sitting week.

The government proudly boasted in bill briefings how they modelled themselves on the New South Wales model – some seven years behind New South Wales before we have even got off the ground, so we are going to be the best part of 10 years behind. That is not something to be proud of, because

what that means is we have a reliability and security and affordability problem with energy. That is the problem.

There is a policy concern, but there is also a lack of community buy-in. We saw that with the government modelling with their public report – a need for 70 per cent of agricultural land to be covered by renewables to meet targets. That report was removed from the government's website. People in regional communities were deeply concerned that the minister had released a report – and I have a copy here with the minister's coloured photo – announcing that up to 70 per cent of agricultural land would be required to reach renewable energy targets, without any consultation with the communities. And then when the media wrote about the report, they pulled the report, hiding it, not stating otherwise but hiding it. You can understand why communities look at that and believe there is a lack of trust. You can see more recently, with decisions made by the Premier and the Minister for Planning around bypassing communities on any renewable project, why communities are upset, and what we will sadly see is communities become more and more upset by the government's approach.

You cannot walk into a community and override that community, because communities at the end of the day have built themselves around people who have been there since the community was formed, who have been part of the community groups, who have built the houses. Governments cannot walk into those communities and say, 'We're not going to ask you what we're going to do. We don't care what you think. We're going to build what we want.' It is just wrong. You can see it with renewable energy; you can see it with planning more generally. I mean, the planning system is heading down a dark path where communities have no say over their own streets or towns – none at all.

I was recently at a community meeting in Meredith where a wind farm has been proposed, and some 400 people turned up to talk about the project a kilometre away from an airport, an airport that has served the community for some 30 years and is a point for emergency services to land and use. And the community has said, 'We're open to having a conversation about this project, but can you give us some guarantees around what this will mean about the capacity for emergency services to provide the services they have been providing?' They have not had an answer. So is it any wonder that 400 people turn up to say, 'We're not asking for much. All we're asking for is the courtesy of a conversation, not simply being ignored.' We will see with wind, we will see with renewables and we will see with offshore wind – we will see communities, we will see councils starting to say, 'Enough.' That is what we will see over the coming year. Either the government are going to learn that lesson before they make the change or they are going to learn that lesson the hard way as the year goes on, because community trust is important, and the government do not have an ounce of it. So the government has failed on that measure.

When it comes to energy, we must have reliable, secure, affordable and clean energy, and some of the big policy conversations we need to have are being ignored. And though we will not oppose this bill, because it does something, it does not do enough in terms of fixing the big challenges we face and the big policy challenges that this state faces into the future.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:40): I am pleased this afternoon to have the opportunity to contribute to debate on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. Before I go to some of the changes and the mechanics that are contained within the bill this afternoon, I just want to pick up on some of the comments made by the previous speaker. We on this side of the house know that the energy market is a very dynamic one. It is indeed a changing market that responds to both a growing population within the state and a need to continue to invest in many of the new technologies that we know exist within local communities. The previous member summarised his contribution by saying that we need reliable, affordable and secure energy, and on those points I agree. But for much of his contribution the previous member spoke about a lack of energy policy and a lack of community buy-in. Sometimes I actually think that the member and I live in different states, because from my experience moving around the local community and speaking to people about solar, about wind and about the opportunities that renewables can provide – not just for the state but for what is critically important:

household bills – we know and understand that there is significant support within local communities for many of the policies that this government has implemented and will continue to implement.

I also want to make the point that the notion of a lack of policy during our time sitting on the government benches is astounding to me, because as I have made previous reflections on in the house, just imagine where we could have been at a national level if we had had national leadership from the previous LNP governments – for nearly a decade – in this space. We in Victoria have had to go it alone and have had to invest in so much technology – in wind and solar and all of the things that are contained within the Victorian renewable energy target and more – to ensure that we are providing critical leadership within the space.

The piece of legislation that is before the house this afternoon, the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill, provides for the adoption of the National Energy Retail Law retailer of last resort scheme. The bill will apply to specific parts of the National Energy Retail Law to give effect to the retailer of last resort arrangements in Victoria. It also provides for regulations to be made under the bill that can modify those applied parts to achieve consistency between the adopted scheme and the broader Victorian energy retail law framework.

We know and understand that providing certainty and safety and making sure that we are working with those people right across our state – as I mentioned earlier, we are indeed a growing community and a growing Victoria – is critical within the market. There are many, many, many examples that I and I am sure many members in this house have spoken about before about this government's leadership. We have put our foot down. We have been investing through the budget and a whole range of initiatives and projects time and time again to make sure that we are transitioning, working hard to bring down costs for households and making sure that we are doing the critical work: listening to science, listening to new technologies and manufacturing, particularly within regional communities, to know and understand the importance of transition. This piece of legislation goes to fairness and safety and makes sure we are continuing to deliver all of those things right across the state. Specifically, the bill applies provisions of the National Energy Retail Law model for powers for the Australian Energy Regulator to enable the designated retailer of last resort to access gas supply and pipeline capacity contracts purchased in the case of a failed retailer and of course many of the other provisions which go to ensuring that those critical steps are taken to provide for certainty and, as I said earlier, surety within the market.

We know and understand that this is an incredibly important and dynamic space. We know and understand that making sure that we are working with communities right across the state to deliver in this space is critically important to driving down those prices and making sure that we are listening to many of the changes within technology to come. We also understand that local communities have a determination and a real passion to see some of these new technologies come on board and of course to make sure that those costs are coming down. We know and understand – and I have heard many members in the house over a long time speak about this – the importance of transition and the recognition that we are a changing, evolving community, and ensuring that the legislation and the framework are in place is fundamentally important.

I only go back to these points because what I think time and time again we see from those opposite – and I note in the previous speaker's contribution there was no opposition to this piece of legislation before the house – and what is astounding is a lack of recognition of so much of the work that has been done within this space. If we were to travel back seven, eight, nine or 10 years within this state, we would see a vastly different energy market. We of course have been really up-front with local communities. We have been incredibly strong in our investment and we have been incredibly determined to see that delivered, but we are not here by any sense of the words to tell every single Victorian that this is not a challenging market. We are not here in any sense of the words to say that we are not going to have storms and a whole range of serious weather events that impact the grid and of course go to the infrastructure and the provision and movement of energy right across our state,

because we know and understand that that is just not reality. We need to be up-front with people, and that is exactly what we are.

But what we will not cop is those opposite coming in here and saying that there is a lack of – how was it put? – policy in energy and a lack of community buy-in. I think that members on this side of the house know and understand that when we move around our local communities – whether it is doorknocking or whether it is at street stalls; looking at some of these members I think there are many of those events that happen – and talk to our local communities there is genuine passion and excitement about much of this policy. But of course there is a recognition that we need to keep doing more, both through the budget process and through working with new technologies and of course with our providers, to make sure that we are supporting communities at each and every opportunity.

We on this side of the house will always invest in making sure that we are supporting communities to be safe and to be able to go about their business each and every day as they move around their local communities in a way that gives them the very best opportunities, both within those communities but also when moving across the state. We have got a massive investment right across transport, health, education and energy. There is so much to deliver. What we know and understand is that being up-front with our local communities and having honest conversations about the need for and the importance of that investment is something that we on this side of the house – this Allan Labor government – will continue to do each and every day.

This is a bill, again, that goes to fairness, safety and security, but what is most important is the broader frame – and that is a frame of investment, certainty and honesty and doing things for and with the local Victorian community that ensure that our community, those that we represent, can be their absolute best. What we cannot have is an ideological debate based on, well, ideology – not science, not fact – on this legislation before the house. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (15:50): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024 and to talk about energy retail and all things power. This bill, I know, in short is designed to make the Australian Energy Regulator responsible for ensuring Victorians are not left in the dark if their energy provider goes under. I support the fundamentals of the bill and I support individuals being protected, but can I say that at the same time as we are introducing legislation that protects families and protects individuals, in regional Victoria, at the other end of the energy cycle, families are getting thrown under a bus, and that is due to this bloody-minded appetite for renewables at any cost – renewables regardless of impacts to communities.

Again I remind this house that regional people strongly support renewable projects – overwhelmingly we do. We want a smooth transition. We want a greener power supply, a future for our children, less reliance on coal and sustainable renewables, but energy sustainability also means sustainability for our communities. I am talking the whole paddock to plate, the beginning to end – start with the end in mind. The tunnel vision of this government, with its single-minded power vision, is really ripping the heart out of some of our communities. I speak specifically of Meadow Creek and Dederang, which I have spoken about before in this house.

Just out of Wangaratta, Meadow Creek is a 56-hectare solar factory that is going to start operating on prime agricultural land; and in Dederang there are two BESS – battery energy storage system – projects. Again the community supports the idea, supports the notion, and supports these projects going ahead, but they are the right project in the wrong place. It is like the definition of a weed: a weed is a grass species in the wrong paddock. These renewable projects are the right projects; they are just in the wrong communities.

In fact, to show my support for renewable projects in our communities, this Friday I am turning a sod at the CleanPeak energy project in North Wangaratta, and I am really looking forward to that opportunity because this is the right project in the right place. The local mayor Dean Rees, the mayor of the Rural City of Wangaratta, and I have been very consistent. We have been on the same page for

many years. You talk to your community, you lay your cards on the table, you have robust discussions and you agree or you agree to disagree on the outcome and you move on and you go forward. This is unlike some of these projects that are happening.

In particular Mint Renewables at Dederang refused to talk to the community for over six months – they would not talk to the representatives of that community – and they refused to answer questions even via email. The Victorian government becomes an accessory when it tells farmers and communities they can no longer go to VCAT or they can no longer appeal the decisions that are made. It is really, ‘Suck it up, Princess. It’s here to stay whether you like it or not.’ After six months Mint has finally agreed to have a meeting this Saturday morning, which I am keen to be at, and I will be at. But it is like tying the hands of the community behind their back, putting a blindfold on the community and saying, ‘Okay, now we can sit down and have a genuine discussion about how this is going to roll out’, but what they are really saying to our community is, ‘We’re not going to discuss options.’ This is the ‘brace yourself’ position. Brace yourself; the knock-out blow is about to come. Again the Victorian government is an accessory to this crime, and I call it a crime because it really is criminal to violate the Dederang community’s rights.

They talk about bringing back the SEC, making everything cheaper; it is all complete spin. This bill is standing up for people who have been dealt a poor set of cards, and I support that. I support the idea that if their provider goes under, the Australian Energy Regulator will make sure that people can get further support and be moved to a provider that can support them, but what about my communities in Meadow Creek and Dederang? They have been dealt a poor set of cards – a bad hand – but the Victorian Labor government seems to be turning its back and saying, ‘It’s not our problem.’ I have not seen any Labor MPs – not even the local upper house members – come to the community.

I hear the member for Sunbury talk. He talks about his communities in Sunbury. Does he have wind farms? Does he have solar factories in Sunbury? I am not sure that he does. He may have. He may correct me if I am wrong. Talking to his communities about renewable projects – that is great when you are a receiver of that renewable energy, you are not the producer and you do not have all the concerns that go with the production of that renewable energy. Even our local independent federal member for Indi is very silent – in fact I think she is in witness protection. They just will not come and talk to our committees about how we can do this better. We support renewables, we support wind farms, we support solar, we support batteries – everything that this government is trying to achieve for Victoria – but at the end of the day we are being left out of the loop.

Last week I was very fortunate, along with some others in this house, to visit Anzac Cove. It was a wonderful experience. I could not believe it, to be honest. To drive from Istanbul down to Çanakkale – 4½ hours, prime agricultural land, absolutely prime. There was wheat, there were cereal crops, olives, orchards – all sorts of things. It was a sight to behold. Renewable energy? Yes, there was. There were wind turbines at the top of the hills – at the very peak of the hills where it is pretty much useless for any agriculture. You could hardly even build a house up there. Wind turbines were up there. Did I see any solar farms, any solar factories? No, I did not see any. I did not see one single one on prime agricultural land, which is common sense to me. I did not see any battery factories either – prime agricultural land. It appears to me a country like Türkiye has struck that balance between renewables and farmers and renewables and communities and is making it work, unlike this Victorian government, which is running the heavy roller over our smaller communities. Then there is no right of appeal. I really believe it is unconstitutional. It is certainly just not right.

This bill is about fairness. It is about justice. It is about equality for people who have been dealt a tough hand. Where is the fairness for the people in Dederang and Meadow Creek? Where is the justice for those people and where is the equity and the equality for the people of Dederang and Meadow Creek, who are the producers of this energy? The people of Melbourne are the beneficiaries. All they request is that discussion. Now they have got their hand up saying, ‘Talk to the hand.’ The government, who we are seeking fairness from, are now missing in action. In fact they are hiding behind new regulations. They have not even got the gumption to face up, this government for Melbourne. If you really want to

govern for all Victorians, at least show your face. At least put the stake in someone's heart, not a knife in their back, because we are Victorians too, and we deserve the same rights that this bill delivers. As I say, this bill delivers fairness, justice and equality. Our people deserve the same equal treatment – not being treated as second-class citizens. Where are our Labor upper house MPs? Are they too busy, are they too lazy or are they just too scared to come to the communities?

I want to refer to the second-reading speech in the few moments I have left. The second-reading speech says:

This Bill marks a significant step towards safeguarding the interests of energy consumers in the face of an evolving and, at times, challenging energy landscape.

Where are the safeguards for the Dederang and Meadow Creek communities? Where are their safeguards? It also says:

... the Bill spreads costs across a wider consumer base, mitigating the impact on those unexpectedly affected by the aftermath of a retailer failure.

It is mitigating the impact on those unexpectedly affected people, so where is the support for those people, again, in Meadow Creek and in Dederang? Just like this bill provides for the people who are beneficiaries, where is the support of our people?

My communities of Meadow Creek and Dederang will be affected, while the Victorian government has stood by and basically ignored and failed our communities in that respect. This bill is demonstrating the double standards that we have in this state. If you are a beneficiary and you live in Melbourne and things go sour for you, this bill is going to support you. But if you live in one of my communities and you are a producer and you have got prime agricultural land and the farmer next door decides to put up a solar factory or a battery operation, there is no justice, there is no equality and there is no fairness for you. I really feel that as we think through this process of renewables, which we all support, we need to look at both ends of the energy cycle, not just the retail end – not just those who are beneficiaries but the producers as well.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (16:00): Today I rise to contribute to the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024, and the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024 represents significant advancement in protecting consumers and bolstering the resilience of Victoria's energy retail market by adopting the national retailer of last resort scheme. Of course the bill aims to safeguard consumers' interests in the face of a dynamic and sometimes challenging energy landscape, and I am pleased that the coalition will not be opposing this bill.

I did want to pick up on a couple of things that the member for Ovens Valley just stated in his contribution. He said that they were the right projects in the wrong place, and I just wonder if those opposite are being honest with their constituents about them even suggesting nuclear energy and looking at nuclear energy and suggesting that it should be part of the process. I am just wondering whether the Leader of the Opposition would rule out building nuclear reactors in the backyards of Victorians, and if not, whether he would be happy to have them in his electorate or in the electorate of Ovens Valley or in other opposition electorates and whether they have been honest with our community members in regard to nuclear energy. We know that before the election last year anonymously there were four coalition MPs that spoke to the *Age* around about 12 June last year indicating their support for nuclear energy to be included in Australia's future energy mix. We know what the federal opposition leader has stated in regard to nuclear energy, and I think he actually even indicated back in September last year that the old Anglesea coalmine might be an appropriate location for a nuclear reactor, and that was written up by the Times News Group. I am sure the locals of Anglesea would be very happy with that, let alone the tourists that go down to Anglesea! They would be very happy with things glowing at night! You would not have to get a suntan in Anglesea in the future; you could just glow by being close to a nuclear reactor. How would that look in your speedos? Send Tony Abbott down there in his speedos – that would be fantastic. But anyway, put that aside.

Of course a member in the other place, Mrs McArthur, stated in January last year that nuclear must be considered in our energy mix. It has been repeatedly called for nuclear power to be introduced into Victoria. Again, I just wonder whether those opposite – while they are supporting this bill, which I am pleased to say – have been open and honest with constituents around the state about their position on nuclear energy and whether they will be coming out and being public about it and being honest with the people. If you are supportive of nuclear energy, well, tell us about it – and tell us where you would position the reactors, let alone where you would dump the waste. I am sure not only the people in Anglesea would be up in arms but in other locations they would be up in arms.

A member: Melton.

Steve McGHIE: Yes, come and tell the people of Melton that you think you are going to have a reactor there and you are going to dump the waste in Melton. Just come and do that. That will go down really well in Melton, I can assure you! I can assure you it will go down really well in Melton!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Through the Chair, please.

Steve McGHIE: Sorry, Acting Speaker. So of course, as the Leader of the House mentioned earlier today, I too am very proud of this legislation. It continues our nation-leading reforms. This state is leading the nation in regard to our commitment to renewables, and we are leading that race. As the member for Sunbury stated in his contribution, this bill will provide security and safety and fairness for consumers, which is obviously what we are seeking to do. Of course if you live in Victoria and you use electricity or gas, this is important legislation for all Victorians. The legislation is going to make it so that if your retailer for gas or electricity goes out of business, Victorians are covered, and this is about not leaving customers in the dark when the power goes out from one particular company, one particular provider. The energy regulator makes sure that the customer has another provider.

We have reduced our greenhouse gas emissions more than any other Australian state consistently from when the Andrews Labor government was elected back in 2014, and we have increased our 2030 renewables targets by 15 per cent because we have already smashed our targets. We have brought forward by five years our net zero emissions target, from 2050 to 2045, which means the target for 2035 of 95 per cent is well within our reach, contrary to what the member for Caulfield was tweeting out some time ago. We have delivered 300,000 solar rebates to households in Victoria to help them reduce their bills and control their energy. This is such a fabulous initiative, and it is something that in my family my wife and I hope to be undertaking very soon, when we build a new house within the next 12 months. So there you go – totally renewable out there in McGhie land, totally renewable. It will be quite interesting for an old fellow like me, I can tell you.

Juliana Addison: When is the house-warming?

Steve McGHIE: If I could get a decent council that would give us a planning permit, then we would be doing okay.

The opposition's lead speaker the member for Brighton raised the issues of transmission and storage, and the member for Eureka and I have been involved in the process with the western transmission network project for some time because our electorates are affected by the suggestion of above-ground transmission wires. I have got to remind those opposite that there were many members from the opposition that attended public meetings and objected to this transmission project because of it being above ground, but they did not have any alternatives apart from 'Oh, maybe it should go underground' or things like that but knew that the costings were enormous. So for the lead speaker of the opposition to suggest transmission and storage is important – it is. There is no question it is; it is right around the country and all states are facing the problem of transmission and storage. But unless we introduce these projects that problem will just continue. We need to transmit the renewables and we need to work with the communities and consult with the communities and work through these problems, and I have attended many meetings in trying to assist with that process. But I just want the opposition to get on board with these projects – rather than make suggestions that transmission and storage are key

to this transmission of renewables get on board and help us deliver these projects and provide all this renewable energy to our local communities and reduce costs for our constituents.

If electricity and gas retailers do go out of business, it creates a substantial volume of uncertainty, not just amongst customers, whether they are residential or small businesses or big business owners, but also across the wider community. It is fundamental to people's lifestyles to have these utilities available to them at all times. This bill does not just help the end customer and consumer, it helps new companies taking over by making sure they have enough resources to handle the new customers.

I want to refer to an article that was written I think a couple of years ago now; I cannot remember the exact date. It was actually an article on *ABC News*, and it was on my constituent Heather Westaway's home, which was unbearable in the winter:

Heather Westaway's home used to be unbearable in winter.

She would wear puffer jackets around the house, close all her blinds and rely on a 35-year-old power bank heater to keep her warm.

She dreaded her power bills each quarter – becoming more expensive as the winter progressed.

But more importantly, the 81-year-old was embarrassed about her cold home.

"It was so cold, I felt embarrassed asking people to come over because I'd have to ask them to bring their coat and wear it inside my home," Ms Westaway said.

"And because of that, a lot of people didn't come and visit."

We went and visited Heather Westaway in her house, with her conversion to heat pumps, to split-system air conditioning and to other things that support her – solar and things like that. It has just been a great benefit to Heather and to many other households. I think there are a thousand households between Melton and the Goulburn Valley that took on these programs. This is our commitment to Victorians. I am pleased that this bill has been introduced. I am pleased the opposition are supportive of it, and I commend the bill to the house.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (16:10): I rise to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. Energy security and energy prices are a key issue in my local community, and I appreciate any opportunity to speak on this key issue. Today I rise to speak in support of a pivotal piece of legislation that stands to profoundly impact the lives of households in my electorate of Warrandyte and to fortify the resilience of our energy retail market.

The government knows that it has failed Victorian households. It knows deep down that the energy market it has created is just as reliable and stable as any policy it brings forward. I think we can all remember that terrible day when our energy market fell apart and we experienced one of the biggest blackouts in our state's history.

At its core this bill embraces a nationally recognised retailer of last resort scheme enshrined within the National Energy Retail Law. This scheme serves as a lifeline for consumers, ensuring uninterrupted energy supply in the event of a retailer's failure. In a market as critical as energy, where stability is paramount, the existence of such safeguards is not merely desirable, it is imperative.

Why is it that our electricity market is so fraught with unpredictability? Why is it that we are so regularly at the whim of mass blackouts like the one we experienced recently? What is the key problem according to Minister D'Ambrosio? According to her second-reading speech, it is unexpected global events like the war in Ukraine. Wow. Now, while I can understand a brief surprising moment when this horrific war began that we would not be prepared for, we are more than two years from this war beginning, and using the excuse of an unexpected global event will not pass the pub test. Perhaps members in the house would remember when the government used the same reason – the Ukraine war – as an excuse to cancel a certain sporting event. That is, at its heart, what is wrong with this government. How about taking responsibility for their actions? How about not passing the buck? How about letting the opposition speak and bring their motions to Parliament as part of the democracy that we have here in Victoria? How about that? The irony is that those opposite have been in power in this

state for nine years. If there is a problem in this state, any right-minded individual would assume it was the fault of those responsible, but no, as always, Labor governments just seem to have the worst luck.

Enough is enough. The Labor government must take responsibility for their energy greed and stop blaming geopolitical events thousands of kilometres from our front door. One clear reason why power bills have skyrocketed is Labor's secret energy tax – that is, the electricity easement land tax bill that is passed through from energy companies to energy consumers. Over the last four years this easement land tax bill on energy providers has totalled \$772 million. The electricity transmission easement land tax has increased from \$161.4 million in 2020–21 to \$246.7 million in the current year, 2023–24 – an increase of 53 per cent. Labor's approach to the cost-of-living crisis is to jack up prices through land tax increases, meaning that it is Victorians who are paying the price.

But of course this bill is a smokescreen – a red herring, if you will. Those opposite know that the Victorian public do not trust them with energy policy, and why would they? Electricity prices have increased 25 per cent. Gas bills have increased by 27 per cent. Recent figures reveal the number of Victorians seeking assistance to pay their gas and electricity bills has risen more than 40 per cent compared to the previous summer. This follows a recent St Vincent de Paul Society report finding that Victorians have paid 22 per cent more for gas and 28 per cent more for electricity over the past year. According to Lifeline, crisis supporters have reported a significant uptick both in the number of people stating that finances and cost of living are causing them distress and in the levels of distress being felt. As the member for Warrandyte, I know I have received calls to my office from Victorians who are struggling in this cost-of-living crisis, and my heart goes out to them. This is why it is so important to speak about this today. Victorians are having to pay the price for Labor's energy mismanagement.

The Australian Energy Market Operator, otherwise known as AEMO, in its latest *Gas Statement of Opportunities* has warned that gas demand could outstrip supply in Victoria as soon as the middle of next year. Further to that, AEMO has forecast the entire east coast gas market will be in deficit until action is taken to secure additional supplies and upgrade infrastructure. Labor's gas-phobic policies are driving jobs out of our state and into states with smarter, evidence-based energy policy. For example, recently Seeley International announced it would close its Albury–Wodonga facility by 2025 and consolidate operations in Adelaide – why? – citing the Allan Labor government's hostile gas, energy and business policies. This is not even an ideological battle. There is no Labor–Liberal divide. This is just thanks to Victorian Labor and those opposite. Even South Australian Labor Premier Peter Malinauskas, one of their own, has criticised the Victorian government's energy policies, confirming gas has a role to play in the transition to net zero.

Minister D'Ambrosio presents legislation today purportedly aimed at safeguarding our energy supply. However, let us not be fooled by the government's superficial remedies. This legislation fails to address the root causes of our energy woes and serves merely as a bandaid on a gaping wound. We need gas in this state if we want to keep the lights on. That is why the Liberals and Nationals have committed to keeping the use of gas, like many cities and nations around the world which have chosen to continue to use gas, and not be gas phobic, so that they can use it as a transition to net zero.

The Allan government's promise of an inquiry into the blackouts is nothing short of a charade. With its limited scope the inquiry conveniently sidesteps any scrutiny of the government's own failings and turns a blind eye to critical questions. Did Labor take proactive measures to fortify Victoria's transmission network? Were adequate steps taken to ensure resilience in the face of foreseeable challenges? These are the questions my community, who were without power, will never know the answers to. While transmission infrastructure may be in the hands of AusNet, the responsibility for ensuring uninterrupted energy delivery ultimately rests with the government. It is not enough to shift blame onto energy distribution companies: the government's role must also be held to account. The buck needs to stop here. Until we address the fundamental weaknesses in our energy network, Victorians will continue to suffer the indignity of prolonged power outages at the most inconvenient of times. We cannot afford to stand idly by as families, businesses and essential services bear the brunt

of government inaction. Therefore I implore Victorians to see beyond the Allan government's smokescreen of political rhetoric and demand real accountability. Let us call for a comprehensive inquiry that leaves no stone unturned, holding the government accountable for its failures and charting a course towards a more resilient energy future for Victoria.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (16:19): I too rise to make a contribution to the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. Why would you want to talk Victoria down when indeed we are obviously in the best state in the country? We are the third most livable city in the world and the most livable city in the country, and I have got to tell you, it is as a result of the massive suite of reforms that has been coming through for the last 10 years from a very, very hardworking minister.

Right at the outset, big kudos to the Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources and now minister for the SEC, who is steadily and very progressively moving this state towards our 95 per cent renewable target in 2035. One can only imagine if we had the opposition in post 2014 where we would actually be now.

Indeed it gives me great pleasure, as I said, to speak to this bill, and as has been shown, our government really is very committed to protecting Victorians in the retail energy market. The bill itself works towards keeping energy retailers accountable and making sure Victorian energy consumers are protected. It does this by providing the national retailer of last resort scheme in Victoria, ROLR, and a better four-letter acronym I have not heard in a while.

Everyone uses essential services like energy, so it is important that everyone is protected in the event of a service provider failure. I know people in my electorate of Narre South, like all Victorians, welcome the chance to get the best possible deal from the energy system. As we work towards our transition to clean energy and our target of 95 per cent renewables by 2035 we are very committed to ensuring consumer protections are in place and keeping pace with this important transition. The bill, as we have heard, applies parts of the National Energy Retail Law in Victoria and adopts the national retailer of last resort scheme provided for in the National Energy Retail Law. The scheme is a successful safeguard in practice that transfers customers to an alternative energy company if their current provider fails in the market. The scheme ensures customers receive energy and gas supply with no interruption, in turn ensuring that they can continue their daily lives with these essential services.

The bill does a few things. It provides power for the Australian Energy Regulator to enable the designated retailer of last resort to access essential services like gas and energy from a failed retailer. It ensures that the retailer of last resort recovers costs that it incurs on or after a ROLR event by way of passing through the distribution network service provider payments to allow for recovery over the largest customer base. It ensures that the Australian Energy Regulator is able to appoint more than one retailer as a ROLR, and it gives an express power to the AER to request financial information and customer information from a retailer. It ensures that energy regulators must notify one another of any matter that could give rise to a ROLR event. The bill will also repeal provisions that affect the Victorian ROLR scheme contained in the Gas Industry Act 2001 and the Electricity Industry Act 2000, amending these to ensure the law operates as intended. The bill was developed in consultation with the Australian Energy Regulator, the Essential Services Commission and the Australian Energy Market Operator as well.

In terms of context the bill is crucial to ensuring energy consumers have a reliable energy supply. It ensures that if a consumer's energy retailer fails they are quickly transitioned. We have had a successful ROLR scheme in place since 2007, and this reform will update the scheme's suitability in line with national standards. We have seen an unpredictable energy market since mid-2022, when energy prices hiked significantly, so this bill is an important part of updating and keeping up with the changing landscape. We know that this cost-of-living crisis is hard, and we know that consumers should not need to worry about unregulated service providers. The National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill will enhance protections for Victorian consumers and strengthen the resilience of the

retail energy market. With four retailer failures in Victoria this past year, it is important that we enhance the scheme and continue ensuring consistency where Victorians need it most.

In terms of our renewables record, we know that this is particularly important as we shift towards clean energy sources, a move this state is making with gusto. We are paving the way, the most progressive in the country, with one of the fastest energy transitions in the world. We are home to the largest battery in the Southern Hemisphere, and the state has more than tripled its share of renewables in power generation, and that has all been achieved in just eight years.

I have seen an increase in constituents, however, who have come to my office concerned about their energy prices, and we know it is something concerning Victorians. We are putting in place incentives to help with this. There is the \$1.3 billion Solar Homes program, which has saved households over \$1000 a year. We have provided 300,000 rebates to help households install solar panels, and there have been some 320,000 installations of solar panels, batteries and hot-water systems in total. I know members in the outer south-east who do lots of doorknocking in the electorates get to see all of those solar panels and all of those solar hot-water services, and indeed batteries now popping up around those households, when they are out there doorknocking and talking to their constituents. This puts the power in the hands of Victorians to help reduce their bills and do their part for the planet.

The Allan Labor government is committed to making energy fairer and more affordable for Victorians. Measures like the Victorian default offer provide a baseline for private industry to compete. It increases competition and it brings down prices. The VDO will create on average a \$112 decrease on Victorian residents' energy bills and a \$206 decrease for small businesses. We know this will make a real difference to families as well. The reduction in energy bills is largely driven by wholesale energy costs declining as a result of Victoria's investments in renewables.

We do know that those opposite prefer to sit on the fence about climate change. Let us face it, before 2010 they pontificated about nuclear energy and then did nothing about it for four years. We came in in 2014, and thankfully we have moved another way, towards much cleaner and renewable sources of energy. We have also seen that when they were in government they privatised the energy network and left Victorians hanging. When they were in power between 2010 and 2014 disconnections doubled. Under the Liberals vulnerable Victorians were left without heating and power.

It has been well discussed about how we are bringing back the SEC. I will not go too much into this but I will pick up a point that the member for Brighton made in discussing Tim Piper from the Ai Group. In a former role I used to have a lot to do with Tim Piper from the Ai Group, and I can tell you that when it came to talking about reinvesting back into that business from savings that he in essence wanted to take from workers' pockets. I saw very little reinvestment going back into those businesses. All I saw was those dollars going immediately to the bottom line of the company and profits for executives, so I do not think you can hold in too much esteem what Mr Piper says.

In conclusion, this bill is another example of our government delivering real reform, real certainty and a real safety net to our energy sector. It really is terrific for the consumer, as it ensures the best possible deal that can be the outcome from our energy system. It is an excellent bill. I again commend the minister, I commend the department and I commend the bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (16:29): It is my pleasure to rise to talk about energy in the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. It is lovely to see you in the chair this afternoon, Acting Speaker De Martino. This bill, as other members in this place have asserted today, is designed to make the Australian Energy Regulator responsible for ensuring Victorians are not left in the dark if their energy provider goes under. It seems like a good day to have this conversation given that it is becoming more obvious how hard it is to do business and how tough businesses are doing it in this current climate.

So it is a real reality. We have seen it with builders, we see it with airlines today, we see it with small businesses and we have seen it for the last few years. So having a safety net for consumers to keep the

lights on is obviously something that we would support. But let us talk about not being left in the dark. If that is a consideration, then obviously we would like other safety nets as well, and we would support other measures such as not putting all energy eggs into one basket. That requires, obviously, conversations about alternatives and what is best for different communities.

I actually had the chance over the break to travel to France to attend Villers-Bretonneux, which is a sister city of Robinvale, my home town, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the twinning of the cities, spending a few days there with mayors and councillors and also their department heads and senators and riding around some sites on the western front in the north of France. And in the words of Mayor Dinouard, who is the mayor of Villers-Bretonneux, the landscape is polluted with wind turbines. They are everywhere. In the area of Villers-Bretonneux itself they produce about 6 per cent of France's wind energy. They have been there for about 20 years – we had a conversation while we were driving around. They have been doing this for 20 years and the turbines are approaching end of life, which has become a concern for his community. There have been all sorts of concerns from the community, but they are now looking at new renewable technology. France uses a lot of nuclear, yes, but they are also very, very aware of the advances in technology that are happening very quickly, and they are technologically agnostic, as are we. We just know that there needs to be safety nets in place. He was talking about new technology in solar – which is something that I know the federal Leader of the Nationals has been talking about – putting panels on every rooftop, whether it is big warehouses or homes, and having batteries where the power is needed. Because the other issue that was discussed was that even though the north of France around Villers itself produces 6 per cent of France's power, they cannot actually get it to where it needs to go – they cannot get it to Paris because of transmission issues.

A member interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Transmission issues, I know, which might lead me on to another subject that is quite contentious in my community. Let us talk about the VNI West project, shall we, because I did not get to speak about this last time. The transmission projects that are on the table in Victoria at the moment seem to be reckless, unplanned and a rush to unrealistic targets. The issue for communities in Victoria – in my communities – is that they are not having the chance to have their say. When being given the chance to speak on energy legislation, I cannot let the opportunity go by without expressing the discontent of people in Charlton, in Donald and everywhere that is illustrated in the VNI West plan, with the reckless rollout of renewables and these targets.

I will repeat again: we are not opposed to the transition to renewables. We are technologically agnostic. We want it done in a common sense, well-planned, thought-out manner – like using existing easements and upgrading both of the lines that already exist. What we are opposed to is having the lifeblood sucked out of regional Victoria and the lack of opportunities for communities that are directly affected having their say. In this place today it is very apparent that democracy in Victoria is dying. We have been gagged. Communities feel they have been gagged. They have lost the ability to have a voice, and we cannot do –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Yes, exactly, member for Gippsland South, a bit like the chamber. It is an absolute disgrace.

People in the communities of Victoria – particularly regional Victoria, who fear for their livelihoods, which is agricultural land – feel like it is one big contradiction. If they apply to put housing for workers on their agricultural land, they cannot do that because of all the red tape that surrounds it. Even in a housing crisis, even in a workforce crisis, they cannot put housing on their agricultural land because it is prime agricultural land, but when it comes to the reckless rollout of a transmission grid – which there are alternatives to, and it has been illustrated – then the need for community consultation has been taken away, and the ability to even fight against this has been taken away from them. You can

understand why communities in regional Victoria feel like they have had all of their power taken away. It is not overstating it. There was another meeting in Charlton again last week, another rally, and St Arnaud again and Stawell were exactly the same. There are photos all over the internet. It has been widely reported about, the discontent in these committees. Again, it is not that they are opposed to renewables. They are opposed to not being able to have a say, to not being consulted properly. They feel like it is a bit of a tick-the-box exercise, and they move on. That is not okay. This is supposed to be a democracy, so you can understand why communities feel the way that they do.

Then after seeing programs, like I said, overseas that have been there for 20 years and now they are considering what the next step is, there is opportunity here to actually look into the future – at countries like France that have been doing this for a long, long time – and perhaps leapfrog past technology and move on to what is next and have a look at that in a much slower, considered, commonsense manner.

Let us talk about gas. I actually moved house recently and into a house that has a gas cooktop, which is actually life-changing. I can cook a stir-fry again. It is actually fantastic. The lack of thought and broad-minded thinking and just putting all your energy eggs into one basket is mind-boggling. However, this bill and adopting the provisions of the National Energy Retail Law and providing a retailer of last resort, if you like, and the arrangements and the provisions of that law that support effective operations of those provisions, will add some additional protection for Victorian households, which they will probably need, and it will also add protection to Victorian businesses if their energy provider does go under. We are not opposed to this bill. In fact we are in support of safety nets for Victorian households and Victorian businesses, because we know times are tough out there at the moment. We have increased taxes and more taxes. The budget is not far away. Things are going to get tougher before they get better. We do not oppose this, but I think there needs to be a broader picture view to more safety nets where the energy market in Victoria is –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Jade BENHAM: I have said safety net enough, but I think it is required where we are talking about energy in Victoria.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (16:39): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. Can I start by thanking the minister for her work. The bill is yet another reform from our government to better protect Victorians in the retail energy market. The bill makes a significant step towards safeguarding the interests of energy consumers in the face of an evolving and at times challenging energy landscape. I am really interested to hear that those opposite are supporting this bill, because it does not really sound like it in some of the contributions I have heard. From what I have heard sitting in the chamber here from those of the opposition, it is really such a backward approach to climate change, to the energy issues that we experience.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Chris COUZENS: You say you are supporting the bill, but some of your contributions almost sounded like a whole lot of conspiracy theories, from this side of the chamber. It was quite interesting to listen to some of that. I was also interested in the contribution from the member for Melton, who raised the opposition's position on nuclear energy, and the comments that he quite rightly referred to about Melton and Anglesea being potential targets for nuclear reactors and waste to energy. I know that in my community of Geelong and right across the region, as soon as Anglesea was mentioned, people were outraged. They do not want that.

I am quite happy to encourage my constituents to read those opposite's contributions to this debate in *Hansard* and other debates around energy, climate change and the environment, because they will be able to establish for themselves where the opposition is coming from. I do not know if they have a position or not. I do not know if they have policies. But perhaps if constituents read their comments and their contributions in *Hansard*, they might be able to get some idea of where they are coming from, which only supports our position as a Labor government.

I know that my community are very supportive of the work that we are doing on energy, so I think it is not going to take much for communities like mine and those around the state to determine who is best to govern in this state and the work that we are actually doing. We are leading one of the fastest energy transitions in the world. That is really clear, and my constituency understands that very well. We have more than tripled the share of renewables in power generation in just eight years. We have given over 300,000 rebates to Victorian households so they can reduce their bills and to give them control over their energy through our Solar Homes program, with strong take-up on solar energy in my community. In fact right across the Geelong region people are taking it up. They are making huge savings by doing that, and we know with the cost of living and those issues that are confronting people every day, having solar panels on their rooftops is saving huge amounts of money but is also beneficial to the environment. When I walk around my community, as other members from this side of the chamber have said, you are walking past hundreds and hundreds of houses that have got solar panels on their roofs, because people understand the importance of it, whether it is a financial commitment or whether it is to do with climate change. Whatever the reason, people are stepping up and taking up these opportunities. Of course the rebates help with that as well.

We held the Victorian renewable energy target auction, the country's largest reverse auction for renewables. We have installed the Victorian Big Battery, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, and made Victoria the home of the big batteries. Of course we have that in the seat of Lara, the Big Battery, which has been there now for a couple of years.

My community is really excited about those opportunities. When I talk to people from Geelong Sustainability, probably the biggest environment group we have right across our region, they are excited about these opportunities. They are excited about working with government to ensure that these sorts of things are being rolled out, whether it is the Big Battery, whether it is putting solar panels into public housing or into community organisations. We are supporting them to be able to do that. As a government we are supporting groups like Geelong Sustainability, which we are all really proud of. These actions will reduce greenhouse emissions by more than any other state in Australia since 2014. As I said, this is exactly what our communities want. This is what they want their government to be doing, not sitting around talking about climate change as something that is not a real thing. They want us to do the hard yards. I am really proud of the minister for the work that she has done, because she is leading the way. This government is leading the way. They are so committed, and my community actually supports that, as I believe most Victorian communities do.

With essential services like energy, it is critical that Victorians are protected from adverse consequences in the private market. The retailer of last resort scheme ensures that customers of failed energy retailers are quickly transitioned to another retailer to avoid disruption in their energy supply. Victoria has had its own successful retailer of last resort scheme since 2007. However, we have seen much instability in the energy market over the past few years, and this is why we have reviewed the scheme's suitability. Over the past year alone there have been a total of nine retailer failures across the east coast electricity and gas markets, including four in Victoria. To enhance the scheme, the bill proposes the adoption of the national retailer of last resort scheme in Victoria. This national scheme, already operational in several jurisdictions, provides a uniform framework for managing retailer failures, ensuring consistency and reducing the risk of unintended consequences for customers.

This bill adopts the national retailer of last resort scheme in Victoria provided for in the National Energy Retail Law. The retailer of last resort scheme is a key consumer safeguard designed to transfer customers to alternative energy retailers should their current provider fail in the market. The scheme ensures customers continue to receive electricity and/or gas supply without disruption. The bill will apply provisions for the National Energy Retail Law. The bill will provide the Australian Energy Regulator with the power to direct the failed retailer's gas contracts and supply to the retailer that takes on the failed retailer's customers. This ensures that the retailer has the necessary gas to service a larger customer base. This provision addresses a crucial gap in Victoria where the Essential Services

Commission does not have the equivalent powers in Victoria and the Victorian retailers of last resort are at risk of having insufficient capacity to service their new customers.

The bill also allows for the transfer of affected customers to multiple retailers, minimising the disruptive impact across the community and energy market. This stands in contrast to the current Victorian scheme, which does not allow additional retailers to be appointed after an event, placing undue pressure on a single retailer. The bill provides better financial protection for affected customers of a retailer of last resort event. Unlike the current one-time fee imposed on customers of failed retailers in Victoria, the bill spreads costs across a wider consumer base, mitigating the impact on those unexpectedly affected by the aftermath of a retail failure. Unlike in other jurisdictions, where energy retail laws are regulated by the National Energy Retail Law and monitored by the Australian Energy Regulator, Victoria maintains its own regulatory framework enforced by the Essential Services Commission. Victoria has some of the strongest energy protections in the country, and these will continue.

As I said, for my community this bill is really important. For all communities across Victoria it is an important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:49): I am pleased to rise to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. I will begin by expressing my bemusement with many of those opposite talking up particularly the minister but generally the government's policies on energy and how wonderful they are and how nation leading they are and how Victoria is leading the way on energy policy – all on a bill, I might add, that is dumping a Victorian scheme in favour of a national scheme. It is quite bemusing to me as well that this legislation is in fact dropping what was introduced by the former Labor government in 2007, because it recognises that it is probably not fit for purpose and that we should adopt the National Energy Retail Law, which is a national scheme of course. I am bemused at the way these things come. Someone did not check that in the caucus notes that went around as to how to talk up the government on this bill.

But the legislation, as my colleagues have indicated, is not being opposed by the opposition. It is sensible legislation to ensure that we protect consumers in the event of retail failure, which as the second-reading speech indicates, does happen. In fact in an 'efficient competitive market, market exit is a natural occurrence,' the second-reading speech says, which is interesting. It does not seem normally that the minister actually believes in an efficient competitive market; she believes in government intervention – but I might come to that a little bit later.

This legislation basically provides a retailer of last resort. It ensures that if someone's retailer goes under, that customer is swiftly transferred to another provider and ensures that their power stays on, which is something that I want to touch on a bit. It has become increasingly a big issue in my electorate and indeed I am sure right across the state – the lack of reliability of supply. It is nothing to do with the retailers but everything to do with the transmission and distribution system that has been repeatedly failing, no more so than in the storms event of 13 February earlier this year. Not for a second, though, am I blaming the transmission and distribution companies for what was a freak storm, particularly as it hit my electorate, most particularly in the township of Mirboo North.

We had people across the state off power for three, four or five days, but in places like Mirboo North and a number of other locations across Gippsland in the north-east for longer than seven days. The seven days is important, because this generous government, which is always apparently looking after the issues of energy consumers, provided a support package for those who had lost power but not unless they had lost power for seven days. I heard one of the minister's good friends on the radio this morning talking about how he and many others in Mirboo North were reconnected to power after six days and 22 hours. Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that they had lost considerable goods – particularly out of their fridges and freezers but also incurring significant costs in terms of diesel for generators and the like – they were eligible for precisely nothing from the Allan Labor government. The Premier and the Minister for Energy and Resources came to Mirboo North on the Friday after the

storm that occurred on the Tuesday afternoon and announced this scheme. It is great that the Premier and the minister came to Mirboo North at the time to announce that scheme, but not a single person in the state was eligible for it because they had to be off power for seven days and it was only four days after the event. As it turned out, as I have indicated, many, many people did not qualify.

There is one particular niche issue that I want to raise here. The prolonged power outage payment, for which, as I said, people had to be off power for at least seven days, had a household and a business component. Whilst a number of constituents in Mirboo North did get access to the business component early on in the piece, I have subsequently discovered about a dozen or so constituents who have not been able to, and these are businesses operating from home – home-based businesses. The rule initially – it was available on the AusNet website – was that if you operated a home-based business and you were a registered business with the relevant state authority, you could get the residential component plus the difference between the residential component and the business component, and a number of businesses did receive that. But at some point in time – I do not know whether it was that the Treasurer came in and took over or whether the department saw an opportunity to make some savings – they made home-based businesses absolutely ineligible for that prolonged power outage payment unless they had a separate business electricity account. If you are running a small accountancy firm, a photography studio, a hairdresser or any other business – one business I spoke to was a PR firm – from home, you are not going to have a separate business electricity account. For the government to say ‘Sorry, you don’t qualify’ after these people and their businesses had been without power for more than seven days is absolutely obscene penny pinching.

Of the people that I heard of, and I advertised this issue on the Mirboo North Facebook page and had a number of people come back to me about it, it might be in total across the state maybe 20, maybe 30 people. That equates to a total of \$20,000 or \$30,000. These businesses are going to miss out on an extra payment because they do not have a business electricity account at home, notwithstanding that they are legitimately operating a business from home. The government has said, ‘No, you’re getting nothing; you get the residential payment and nothing else.’ That is the meanest penny pinching. If the boot was on the other foot with this government, those opposite would be going spare about it, and quite rightly, because this is just absurd. These small businesses – they are mostly mums, they are mostly young women – are being denied access because this government has made the criteria so tight. I think that is just absolutely wrong.

Previous speakers have also highlighted the issues that are occurring more broadly in the energy market and the development of the renewable energy policies. We have seen today in this chamber some absolutely disgraceful behaviour by the government trying to shut down any voices, but in the energy space we are seeing it more broadly with the decision of the government last month to introduce amendment VC261. I am sure all members opposite have been reading amendment VC261. I can see the member for Frankston nodding. He would have been having a good hard look at it, because he would know that his constituents now are going to be muzzled when it comes to objecting or raising concerns about renewable energy or the transmission and distribution lines, or the batteries that the member for Geelong raised as being so welcomed in her electorate. If you are subject to one of those being developed nearby under amendment VC261, you will no longer be able to have your objection heard at VCAT. You will no longer be able to have a planning panel because of this change. The government has put out the explanatory report on this change, and it states inside, on pages 1 and 2:

Additionally, as there is an urgent need to maintain Victoria’s electricity supply, the state will need to begin rapid renewable energy facility construction which will include new and upgraded utility installations.

The justification for silencing regional Victorians who might be opposed to a renewable energy facility or indeed the transmission and distribution lines, which was not actually made clear when the government first made this announcement, is that we are going to do so because the government has to replace energy supply to meet its policies, because its policies are actually shutting down our energy supplies. That is happening because of the 2035 renewable energy target – 95 per cent – which is going to ensure that not only Yallourn but Loy Yang and Loy Yang B power stations will close. As a result

the government is madly scrambling to try and meet those targets under renewable energy and in the same process is shutting down the voice of regional Victorians who might have something to say about it. That is a disgraceful decision by this government. It is removing the rights of particularly regional Victorians. I say regional Victorians because all those over there, with a few exceptions, do not actually have the impact of renewable energy facilities in their electorates, because they have actually been specifically precluded in most cases by this government's laws. The government stands condemned for that. This National Energy Retail Law is sensible and reasonable to ensure that retail consumers are protected, but they are not protected from the failing policies of this Allan Labor government.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:59): I am very pleased to speak to this important bill.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, but I will note that there were a number of topics that did not actually specifically pertain to the central tenets of this bill. However, noting some of the, can I say, inaccuracies that have been put forward to the chamber, I feel it is important or incumbent upon me to address some of the matters that have been put forward to the chamber to ensure accuracy for the sake of those who may be watching. There are so many watching us today, I am sure, out there – at least one or two.

Gary Maas interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: One or two thousand – exactly right. There was a rather spurious connection between energy transition and blackouts. Let us be honest here: we could have all the solar and wind covering every inch of every element of the state, we could have federal opposition leader Dutton's dream of nukes from one end of the state to the other, small modular reactors – albeit that they are unaffordable and, I would say, undeliverable in the foreseeable future, and nobody wants the waste anyway; there is no social licence – but when you have an extreme weather event that knocks down hundreds or maybe thousands of poles and wires, energy cuts out.

Who knew? Unfortunately the Labor Party and our Victorian government do not control the weather – maybe the opposition think they have a mechanism to do so, but I am just putting it out there – save for mitigating the impacts of climate change. Obviously we take that very seriously, and that is why we have various mechanisms in place and being rolled out to adapt to and to mitigate the impacts of climate change. This is part of the urgent imperative to transition our energy resources because of the impact of extreme weather events. But also it makes sense to be efficient with energy resources when we are looking at mitigating and mediating costs into the future for Victorian consumers.

So noting that the Victorian government does not control the weather, we fully acknowledge and accept the very unfortunate impacts of climate change and hence the imperative to have a cleaner energy future. This is why it is important to be very accurate and to not create, as I say, spurious connections between energy transition and blackouts, which are an inaccuracy at the least and also unnecessarily concern Victorians and perhaps create a hesitancy that really is not helpful and is not in the interests of all Victorians when it comes to transitioning our energy for the benefit of all Victorians into the future.

Also this is nothing to do with the premise of this bill but I just want to address another point that was raised by I think it was the member for Mildura, who took a trip to France. It is always good to see other countries and see other ways that countries are generating energy. She noted that they were polluted with wind turbines. I hope that was positive pollution in the sense that I hope that was a positive connotation on her part and that the word 'pollution' was not implying that somehow wind turbines are polluting. On the contrary, these are actually a clean energy source, noting the abundance of wind and noting also the importance of certain geographical areas within Victoria. Obviously we do not put turbines in place to punish people. These are put in optimal positions to be able to capture and to take advantage of an ample supply of wind. It was funny because the member for Mildura also said – I hope I have not misunderstood her – in France they are putting solar on top of buildings and

houses, and I am like, 'Oh, funny that,' because that is exactly what we are doing in Victoria on government buildings. We have the greener schools program, so we are putting it on school buildings, on police stations, on hospitals and on the museum. The museum is covered. I know many of us have been up there and seen it with our own eyes. It is also helping to transition our whole transport sector. So who knew? You did not have to go to France to be able to see this energy revolution. It is happening right here in our wonderful state of Victoria.

I am going to come to the purpose of this bill, because I think that is actually why we are here, to debate this bill today, but there was one more point that was raised – I hear this a little bit from the opposition – this idea of being energy agnostic. Well, let me say here I would not be so proud of being energy agnostic. I am not agnostic about fracking. We are very opposed to fracking, which is why we have embedded a ban on fracking in the constitution. We are not ambivalent about energy sources here. We are quite specific and strategic about the mechanisms with which we will make the energy transition in Victoria because there is an accountability with that. Similarly, we are not hurtling towards nuclear. I was on an inquiry in which it was emphatically proven that it does not make economic sense, and it takes years and years and years and years to build. We know even SMRs are not going to be commercially viable in any way that would be affordable for Victoria or our country in the foreseeable future, and of course there is no social licence for the waste. We are not energy agnostic, but with good reason. And I would not be proud of that particular term, because it is basically saying it is a free for all: 'We'll take any energy, regardless of the drastic impact it might have on our environment.'

Rest assured we are very specific and precise about the selection of energy generation in Victoria. Why? Because Victorians care about the impact of energy and energy generation on their lives. They want their kids to have a real future. You can go to any primary school in Victoria, let alone secondary school, and what are the kids talking about? They are talking about – and they understand the science of it – the importance of using this ample supply of sun and this ample supply of wind. Funnily enough, you have got to be a little bit careful too when you are comparing oranges and apples, because the weather in France is starkly different to the weather in Australia. I am just pointing that out. We have –

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: I know. Is that broadly known? I am just going to put it out there. But we actually have a lot more sunshine here.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, granted – even in Victoria. Therefore these are important elements that have to be taken into consideration – I am putting it forward there. I think that that is not an unreasonable proposition when you are looking at the energy sources that you use to support industry, to support transport and to support Victorian households individually.

Coming back to the purpose of the bill, with essential services, I had to acquit some interesting – I will say interesting; I am going to be generous – points put forward by the opposition. I hope that I have acquitted some of the interesting little journeys we took in the chamber that really had very little to do with the premise of the bill. So, why is this bill needed? With essential services like energy, it is crucial that Victorians are protected from adverse consequences in the private market. The retailer of last resort scheme ensures that customers of failed energy retailers are quickly transitioned to another retailer to avoid disruption in their energy supply. And I should say: what is wrong with that? What is wrong with this important structural reform?

I also heard from the opposition. They have said things like, 'Oh, you haven't solved every problem under the sun with this bill. You should be doing all these other things.' Really it just seems like a diversionary tactic to vitiate the central premise of this bill, which is a really important one, and further to that, a way of not having to perhaps delve into the vacuum when it comes to the energy policy of those opposite. I am just putting forward a proposition. And when we are looking at the kinds of

structural reforms that we are doing here, we know with things such as the war in Ukraine there are global pressures as well which are putting stresses in terms of cost et cetera in terms of energy supply, and in places such as the UK they have had to make some, can I say, comparable reforms. I will not say the same – obviously, again, oranges and apples – but I am just putting it out there that in the modern world we are very much cognisant of what is necessary to support Victorian consumers.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (17:09): I rise to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. I am not sure I can top the previous speaker's reference to *la météo française*. The bill proposes to replace the current Victorian retailer of last resort scheme with the national energy retailer of last resort scheme provided for under National Energy Retail Law. A retailer of last resort is an energy retail business directed to step in and take on a customer's electricity or gas contract if their own retailer goes under, to make sure their lights stay on regardless. Where the Victorian-only scheme under the state's Essential Services Commission has been largely successful since 2007, it is now considered to have insufficient scale and flexibility to deal with potential future instability and higher wholesale energy prices that may force more retailers out of business.

This is particularly necessary for gas retailers, who face declining domestic supply and future higher prices for this polluting fossil fuel. The Victorian Greens support this bill in order to protect consumers, but as it moves through the Parliament, we think it is important to acknowledge the elephant in the room, which is the need for Victorian households and businesses to transition off gas appliances and towards an all-electric future far quicker than is currently occurring. As this bill shows, gas not only is a fossil fuel which is polluting, unhealthy and inefficient but is also expensive, vulnerable to global demand and supply shocks and therefore susceptible to an unstable wholesale and retail market that households can no longer rely on.

Methane gas is a significant contributor to climate change. In Victoria it is responsible for 17 per cent of total emissions. Victorian households are the biggest household users of gas in the country. It is estimated that over 2 million homes and businesses are connected to the reticulated gas network, with businesses responsible for burning more of the gas than households in this state. There is no denying Victoria has a gas problem, and we cannot pretend we have not noticed. We need to accept that the advanced world has evolved beyond burning wood and fossil fuels in the home for cooking and heating, whether it be the wood stoves of the Middle Ages, lumps of coal in the Edwardian era or bottled and reticulated gas in the last century. We have to accept the reality of progress means that the kids of today will look back on this time a bit like boomers now reminisce about the pre-internet era. Their own kids will ask them with incredulity, 'In the olden days did people really pipe combustible fossil fuels into their homes?'

The Victorian government belatedly recognised this reality by releasing a gas substitution road map in 2022, which committed to very little, which was then updated a little over a year and an election later to include a much-needed prohibition on new builds connecting to gas. This updated road map was the essential first step, but still, all banning new gas connections does is stop making our gas problem worse. It does not make it any better. Until very recently the government was continuing to even subsidise people buying new gas appliances, which will be costing households thousands to run while polluting homes and the atmosphere for decades to come.

Of course there is opposition to change from those in the wholesale gas industry, the gas appliance industry and some of the plumbers who install them, and I understand that accepting change is always difficult. But to allow the gas lobby's ongoing narrative of denial, disinformation and, dare I say it, gaslighting about electrification not only will leave households and the climate worse off but will also leave their own unprepared workers worse off as we inevitably transition. This is not unprecedented for the industry. The gas lamps on Melbourne streets in the 1890s were electrified by the 1930s, leaving about 132 Victorians employed as gaslighters without a job. With any dying technology and the industry that surrounds it there needs to be a transition plan in place for businesses and workers.

But denying the future is no longer an option. Plumbers need to be trained to install heat pumps. Manufacturers need subsidies to shift production to the modern, clean and efficient electrical appliances that will characterise current and future homes. The government must launch an education campaign. When I speak to energy engineers I hear that too many households still do not know that reverse-cycle air conditioning is the most efficient way of heating their homes, at least four times more efficient than gas. There is no logical reason why anyone should be replacing any of their household appliances with a brand new but already obsolete gas appliance today. It beggars belief. New gas appliances should not be on the market in Victoria.

As we electrify we must recognise the already growing energy inequality. The fact is that right now the wealthiest households in the country, who have electrified everything or soon will, have energy-efficient homes and have solar panels and batteries, are not paying any energy bills at all. Increasingly these households do not even pay for petrol anymore, and even if these homes do receive a rare energy bill in the winter, it is one modest electricity bill instead of two bills. It is not fair, and it is not equitable. All households, especially the most economically disadvantaged, deserve to enjoy free solar energy, to have comfortable homes to live in and at the very least have just one low energy bill to pay instead of two.

Once again the government's Solar Homes initiative is an excellent start, but it must be rapidly expanded so that every household can enjoy these benefits. For example, how can the government still exclude insulation and draft sealing from the scheme despite it being the most cost-effective way of heating and cooling homes? And why must Victoria always be trailing behind the ACT in terms of energy efficiency subsidies and interest-free loans? Why can't we be the leader?

We need to talk specifically about renters, who are so often left behind. I have spent enough time watching Shit Rentals and even inspecting them with Purplepingers to know that right now we are lucky if landlords provide walls or a functioning toilet with their rental listings these days, let alone installing energy-efficient heating, cooling and insulation. The government must mandate minimum energy standards for rentals, and these standards need to be enforced in rental properties. A good place to start would be to require all rental ads to provide an energy efficiency rating or the indicative heating and cooling bill costs for listed properties. Reverse-cycle air conditioning for both heating and cooling should be mandated now for all rentals rather than landlords being able to install just any old heater, as they currently do. Land tax incentives for landlords that improve the energy efficiency of their rentals, particularly if they electrify, insulate and install solar, should be considered too to offer some carrot along with the stick to convert rentals quicker.

In short, renters deserve the cheap, clean energy that is currently only accessible for relatively wealthy landowners. The fact that so many less wealthy households in Victoria, mostly renters, pay more to run polluting energy-inefficient appliances, have to pay both gas and electricity bills, live in uninsulated homes and are locked out of solar energy is not only bad housing policy, it is bad climate policy and bad public health policy, and it broadens financial inequality between the haves and the have-nots. The government needs to do more to get all households off gas sooner, and this means the homes renters live in as well.

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (17:17): It is great to be able to follow the previous government speaker, obviously before the member for Brunswick – a Taylor-to-Taylor handball.

Members interjecting.

Jackson TAYLOR: The member for Glen Waverley gave me that. It sounded better in my head, like a lot of things unfortunately. Thank you very much.

John Mullahy: Hey, don't put it on me.

Jackson TAYLOR: Member for Glen Waverley, this was all your idea.

It is a great pleasure to rise today and speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. I want to, from the very outset, give my thanks to the Minister for Energy and Resources, a fantastic minister who is often on her feet in this place. She has to be – in fact I am just going to say it: she is the best energy and resources minister in this country. There is no doubt about it. I am not biased, not one bit at all, but she is absolutely fantastic. I had the privilege of having the great minister out recently in my electorate, and there were words and acronyms that I had to google later – very, very impressive, very well briefed and very active within the government. She is a steadfast supporter and obviously leader of the Allan Labor government's bold and progressive agenda when it comes to renewable energy and when it comes to reform in this space. I want to thank the minister. I want to thank as well the team and the departments who do a lot of the important work behind this reform, behind this legislation. I want to thank all of them for their hard work.

I want to reflect on a few contributions by some of our members. I particularly enjoyed the member for Geelong's bill contribution. She mentioned something that I will go into in a little bit in my contribution – just about how the member for Geelong was encouraging perhaps some of her constituents to have a look into *Hansard* about some of the contributions from those opposite about, let us say, their willingness for nuclear. As the member for Albert Park talked about, they are energy agnostic. I can tell you right now, no-one in the community of Bayswater and the suburbs that I represent has come up to me going, 'Jacko, can I get some nuclear? We'd love a reactor. You can chuck it right next to Boronia Mall.' Those words will never be uttered. I particularly enjoyed the member for Geelong's contribution.

The member for Narre Warren South was talking about another great thing that the Allan Labor government is doing, and that is rooftop solar. That is batteries and residential solar through our Solar Homes program, which has been incredibly popular. It is one of those things where a lot of other governments are copying our schemes. If you look across the country, we were the first to do it on such a large scale – hundreds and hundreds of thousands of solar batteries, gas water heaters replaced, solar panels on roofs.

I have been out to a number of my local constituents, and they are absolutely rapt with the difference it is making not just for the environment – that is critically important. But also it is about cost of living. It is about putting money back in people's pockets. There has got to be a good reason to do it. The environment is a great reason, I would argue, but putting money back in your pocket is the real kicker. That is something that the member for Narre Warren South focused on and that I think has been a really big feature of our government's reform.

I have got to say, obviously following the other Taylor in the government in this place, I do not know anybody more passionate about renewable energy than the member for Albert Park – very, very passionate. That and Metro Tunnel I think the member for Albert Park is very passionate about, as well as many, many other things. I always enjoy hearing her contributions. The previous Acting Speaker the member for Monbulk – just while we are talking about energy and while we are talking about some of the impacts that we know we can see on the energy grid, I want to give a quick shout-out to the member for Monbulk, as I have done in previous forums, for her work in the previous storms. She has been an absolute gun. She just has compassion and care like I have never seen before. I want to thank the member for Monbulk for all of the work she did and of course other members in their affected and impacted communities as well. But of course sharing a border with the member for Monbulk, I sort of get a bit of a front-row seat to her fantastic work in her local community.

We know that this bill is yet another reform from our government to better protect Victorians in the retail energy market and that this bill marks a significant step towards safeguarding the interests of energy consumers in the face of, as we know, an evolving and at times challenging energy landscape. As has been said many times, I know the member for Cranbourne is paying attention. She is up and about because she knows that Victoria is leading one of the fastest energy transitions in the world. Isn't that right, member for Cranbourne?

Pauline Richards interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: Audience engagement. I am bringing something new to Parliament: audience engagement. No, I am not. It is a one-off only. Do not hold me to it.

John Mullahy interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: I started with you, and it has just gotten worse – sorry, not ‘you’, member for Glen Waverley.

We know that we are leading one of the fastest energy transitions in the world – and of course we are. It is because we are not waiting for others. We are not waiting for others. If we waited for others, like our previous partners in Canberra – of course we have got good partners in Canberra now under the Albanese federal Labor government. But we know that for years and years and years there was stalling, there was capitulating, there was energy policy after energy policy, leader after leader, but what we did not have were results on the ground and runs on the board. We know that our previous partners in Canberra obviously let this place down but also, importantly, let Australians down. We in many respects are so much further behind than we should be today, but I think in Victoria we have absolutely lessened the impact of their capitulation and stalling because we have set ambitious targets. We have bold policy – bold, progressive reform in this space – because we know it is the right thing to do. It is not about ideology, it is about doing the right thing. It is about using the best technology, using the resources in solar and wind that we have at our doorstep like nowhere else on this planet, and it is about harnessing it, because it is a real opportunity for Australia and it is a real opportunity for Victoria. It is something that I am very proud – in fact one of the things I am most proud – that this government is getting on with.

Acting Speaker Edbrooke, I am sure it is the same in your community as well. This is my take at audience engagement again. I did say I was not going to do it again, but here we are. We know that this starts because it is about our next generation. It is about making sure that we have got a planet we can all live on, that is sustainable. We know that that is an issue because of those reasons. That is very much canvassed at local schools. I find it incredible that every time I go out to local primary schools – and I am sure you are the same out in Frankston in your patch – the number one issue that literally kids as young as five years of age and even kids in kinder are raising with me when I talk to them is climate change. It is about our transition to renewable energy. Clearly this is a very important issue not just for us but for future generations. Importantly, we have also more than tripled the share of renewable energy – since we are on that topic – in power generation in just eight years. That is a huge, huge thing that we should be incredibly proud of.

We have given over 300,000 rebates to Victorian households so they can reduce their bills, and of course have given them control over their energy, as I said, through our Solar Homes program. We know the power saving bonus was an incredibly popular program helping to put money back in people’s pockets. My office, as well as many others in this place – in fact I am sure everybody’s – was assisting local residents to apply for that, but importantly what is still available is the ability to get on there and find the cheapest deal to make sure that you are keeping your energy retailers honest. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that, because they are making plenty of profits. Making sure we are shopping around, getting the best deal we can, is incredibly important, and I will keep talking to my community about that.

Obviously we know we have held the Victorian renewable energy target auction, the country’s largest reverse auction for renewables. The member for Geelong also spoke about the Victorian Big Battery. We have installed that. It is the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, and we have made Victoria the home of big batteries. We had an election commitment in the electorate of Bayswater, and we are now getting on and delivering that. We are delivering a couple of pole-top batteries in Bayswater and Ferntree Gully, from memory, which is very exciting. Just around the corner from one of those batteries, we have also delivered Tesla batteries to the Bayswater Bowls Club. We have got solar

panels out at the Boronia Bowls Club. It is absolutely all happening, not just at our local sporting clubs but also at our local schools. Wantirna Primary School, a great community school at Wantirna, has also benefited from our solar panels on schools program.

These are just some of the areas where our government is taking serious steps to help our economy transition to renewable energy. That does not just mean businesses and households; that is also public assets and of course our local community groups, which are of course under other levels of government as well, which is something we are very happy to partner in. We know through these actions we have absolutely reduced greenhouse gas emissions more than any other state in Australia since 2014. This is a great piece of legislation. It is a fantastic bill. I am happy to support it. I am happy I moved up the speaking list to speak in support of it. I am very glad to hear that those opposite are supporting it. It is just an absolute banger. Thank you very much. Cheers.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (17:27): I rise today to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024, a bill that we do not oppose. This is a bill designed with the intention of ensuring that Victorians are not left in the dark if their energy provider goes under. If this bill passes, the Australian Energy Regulator will automatically transfer customers to another provider if their existing energy provider goes under. This is done through a handful of amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and the Gas Industry Act 2001, as well as some minor technical amendments to improve their operation.

Gas has been something topical for all regional communities recently, with Labor's gas ban set to hurt our communities. This city-centric policy fails to consider the necessity that this energy source has for members of regional communities like mine. Regional Victoria is set to be disproportionately impacted by the short-sighted transition, leading to higher energy bills and unreliable power supply. We know that many of our regional communities are only fitted with gas options for heating, cooking and their water. Removing gas options in these houses will only put further pressure on our electricity supply, which has already crumbled under the slightest bit of pressure over summer. I am all for the responsible transition to renewables, but how are our already-struggling communities meant to survive when there are no alternatives?

After power outages left much of the region without electricity earlier in the year, AusNet research found that electricity-only households were saddled with significantly higher costs than those that had gas connections as well. Electricity-only customers spent on average \$1100 to respond to an outage over Christmas, whereas if they had gas connections too, that amount was reduced to just \$360. This is something that is having a profound impact in my electorate of Euroa, with energy security perhaps the most pressing issue raised by my constituents. Towns like Euroa, Longwood, Violet Town, Ruffly, Nagambie and Strathbogie have been dealing with unreliable power and constant power outages for months now, if not years. Thousands of households have suffered regular outages, with towns like Euroa suffering from 17 unplanned outages during the Christmas period alone. Residents in some of the worst-hit towns in my region say they experienced up to 90 hours of power outages in December and January, with cuts ranging from several hours to several days in many cases.

Wild weather has caused havoc for the state's power supply. These outages can be tracked back to issues with energy supply itself. There have been outages when it is cold, outages when it is hot, outages when it is dry, outages when it is wet, windy, calm and still. In absolutely all weather conditions, we have had outages. Many of the issues in my region are due to there being a single line of supply running from Benalla to Violet Town through to Euroa and spreading out across the surrounding region, traversing 1200 kilometres of powerlines running off the longest feeder line in the state.

One disruption cuts off up to 5000 homes. Upgrading this infrastructure is essential and will go a long way to reducing the frequency of these outages. People's health and safety, their ability to operate a business and their general wellbeing are all significantly compromised when there is a lack of reliable power. Since the outages began in my region I have met with more than 300 impacted community

members at local town hall meetings and spoken with several more who suffer from the unreliable local power supply, and I want to share some of those stories today so we are all aware of the significant impact that a lack of power reliability can have on communities. Natalie in Euroa told me:

My concerns aren't just for myself but for the elderly, especially those living by themselves.

I have a number of neighbours I check on every time the power goes out as they lose all contact because their phones go down and they don't drive.

There are many vulnerable citizens in our area that deserve better and while many have bought generators, it's just not possible for some to do this.

Irene in Euroa said:

I ... use a CPAP machine for sleep apnoea and ... I suffer dreadfully the next day from fatigue and brain fog when the power goes off during the night and am unable to use the machine.

My neighbour who also uses a CPAP machine sits up all night when the power is out as he is too fearful to sleep without the machine as he might die.

For so many our health and general well being are suffering.

Irene is one of 20 people I have spoken with about the torment of not having a working CPAP machine.

Lib in Longwood said:

The experience of repeated power and mobile outages has been both frustrating and almost unbelievable in this day and age.

I have lived and worked in remote rural communities throughout SA, Central QLD and Victoria in the past and never experienced the number of power outages as I have in the last 7 months since moving to Longwood.

Judith in Nagambie said:

My husband is quite disabled and is suffering from terminal cancer.

Our main issue with the constant power outages is that we lose all our phone and internet connection.

Ausnet advise to keep our phones charged, which we do, but it doesn't help when the whole system goes down.

When I say these outages are dangerous, I am not exaggerating. The ongoing power outages in my region have highlighted how dependent our community is on a reliable energy supply as well as showing the serious risks that come into play when outages happen. With our phone lines and internet connections being impacted, emergency services like the CFA and SES have struggled to communicate and respond to emergencies. We saw the same thing happen when the floods caused havoc with the electricity supply in previous years. Residents are unable to contact each other and are left in the dark as they struggle without power, light and in many cases water or a regular food supply.

The solution is not as simple as asking everyone to use a generator. Hospitals like Euroa run off a generator in order to provide essential health services to the region when there is a power outage, but they require diesel to run. Most fuel stations in the region do not have their own generators, and their bowsers are rendered useless when the power is out. We had situations this summer where local brigades were not able to be notified of nearby fires and residents were not getting critical emergency warnings. Locals were literally required to walk outside, hope the wind was blowing in the right direction and smell the air to see if there was a bushfire at their back door. This is not acceptable and not sustainable, and it has to be fixed as a matter of urgency.

Due to these outages and the impact they had on our community I arranged meetings with the AusNet CEO and the Minister for Energy and Resources. We discussed how this matter can be improved and how dangerous poor service delivery can be in the first place. Thankfully we are starting to see some progress. Since the regular outages over summer AusNet have confirmed they will be investing an immediate \$5 million as their first step towards preventing what is happening across my region. The changes appear to be positive, but time will tell if they are effective and alleviate the issues that local communities like Euroa, Violet Town, Longwood and Nagambie all faced. AusNet indicated they are

extremely confident the new changes will successfully improve the situation and confirm that no costs will be transferred onto customers. The changes include lowering the rapid earth fault current limiter sensitivity, repairing defective equipment and animal-proofing the lines, among many immediate changes, and this is all a good start. One of the most rewarding developments for the community is the \$10 million resilience fund, allowing residents and local businesses to recoup costs from the outages. I have spoken to far too many businesses that have closed as a consequence of these power outages.

The community fund will work in three key areas: immediate support, community infrastructure and resilience. The community fund will provide immediate support to boost local recovery efforts and assist more businesses most impacted by the power outages who are not eligible for other payments. The fund will also involve supporting and enhancing community facilities so that locals can better access essential support, information and services. Local businesses will also be consulted to determine their specific needs, with supports such as education and facilitation of solar and storage solutions to aid businesses in continuity and other initiatives aimed at the recovery. This is a result of speaking out and fighting for better standards when we know we are not getting appropriate services.

I want to thank everyone in the region who contributed and shared their stories with me. It was so important to hear from those impacted by these power outages and understand the very real effect this is having on households and businesses. It does remain to be seen if these solutions will make a tangible difference to the current system and its reliability. However, I am glad to hear that AusNet are making changes and are taking the matter and the concerns of our community seriously.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (17:36): I also rise to speak on this legislation, the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. I was just listening to the member for Euroa and the accounts of people in her electorate and the terrible experiences they have had. It really is a terrible situation. I agree that the privately owned electricity and gas industries really are not looking after the people. That is the very reason why we are proposing legislation such as the legislation that we are here debating today.

This legislation I think has got to be seen in the context of the many pieces of legislation and action that the Allan Labor government has taken in providing more and more protections for consumers, for Victorians, so that they are not completely at the mercy of the power and gas companies and also by understanding that climate change does exist and that we have to take action to ensure that the planet is going to be around for our children and the future generations. I think it is really disappointing that many on the opposite side – there are very few people left – do not actually believe in climate change. It is really offensive when people say things like the Allan Labor government is not caring about regional Victoria when here we are taking strong action around climate change. Regional people are bearing the biggest brunt of the results of climate change, such as extreme weather events, whether it is drought or whether it is flooding. These are the things that climate change causes, and it is the Allan Labor government that is taking action to ensure that we do have a climate plan into the future and can therefore hopefully stop the tide of extreme and catastrophic events in terms of the weather.

This piece of legislation that we are debating today is actually a fairly narrow bill in terms of what it is about to do. Basically it is harmonising, if you like, or standardising legislation and adopting the National Energy Retail Law retailer of last resort scheme in Victoria, which is not actually addressing climate change in this instance but is all about protecting consumers by ensuring that they have an ongoing supply of power in the event that a power company or gas company goes bust. This is about ensuring that there is a retailer of last resort where consumers can go to continue to have power and gas supplied to their homes and for the things they need. The power and gas industry is an essential service. We all need it in order to live, and it is absolutely vital that the supply to consumers is kept up as best as it can be. In the Victorian jurisdiction we already have legislation for a retailer of last resort, but it is not really as up to date as the national legislation. Therefore Victoria is adopting the terms of that legislation, just as many other states and of course the federal jurisdiction have.

Some of the changes, or some of the things that will ensure that there is a bit more of an update to the legislation, will bring it up into more modern times and ensure that experiences or oversights or unintended consequences are addressed, and this national framework is able to best do that for Victorians. For example, when it comes to ensuring supplies of gas, this legislation talks about ensuring that when a failed business supplies gas or electricity, any contracts that they have continue on. They can be taken over by the new retailer that is going to provide for that consumer. This often gets into the more jurisdictional legislation around federal–state roles and responsibilities and that sort of stuff. The national law is better able to provide strong legislation and regulation around that, and of course it is the national energy regulator that will be overseeing these types of actions.

Of course Victoria has really paved the way in Australia around action to mitigate climate change, whether it is the solar panels on roofs or the great programs providing incentives and rebates and subsidies for those that switch to renewable electricity, for example. There have been programs about supporting and financially assisting people changing from gas heaters and coolers and things to electricity. We have also, of course, had the power saving bonus. I do not think there is a person in the Thomastown electorate that does not agree that was a great scheme. They have all taken up the opportunity to do that and it really has helped just that little bit extra when it comes to the cost of living in the area.

This legislation really, as I said, talks about protecting the consumer in a better way, particularly when a power company retailer fails. In the case of Victoria there have been to this point four retailers that have failed, and therefore those customers have been left struggling to get another provider and ensure that their gas or electricity continues. This legislation ensures that there are no disconnections and there is more of a seamless transfer to a different retailer so there is no disruption to the household.

Of course a lot of these problems have arisen due to the privatisation of the power and gas industries. We are still bearing the problems of that many decades after it first happened. I think there are still some people in the opposition who think this was a great idea, but really I think time and time again the legislation that we have to pass just to fix up some of the issues that have been caused by the privatisation of power shows the absolute negligence of the terrible actions of the Kennett government way back in the 1990s. It would be good if some of these people could be held to account for some of the decisions that they made which caused so many problems and hardships for the people of Victoria.

Again, the retailer of last resort scheme, as I have said, is a key consumer safeguard. It will make sure that there is that continuity of supply when a place goes bust. This adds to the ongoing work that the Allan Labor government is doing to protect consumers. I think it was after the first cycle of elections, after we were elected in 2014, when we introduced some of the default programs so that electricity and gas providers had to provide, by default, a reasonably priced scheme, so that they could not have particularly vulnerable Victorians on really high-priced programs just because they were not able to compare prices. They did not have the information in order to see whether they were getting the best deal or not. Those sorts of protections have continued, and I know that we get really good feedback from some of the residents of Thomastown around things like that.

This legislation is much needed. It brings us further in line with Australia, but it also allows Victoria to continue the work that it is doing to ensure that we do all we possibly can to move to renewables as quickly as possible in order to do our part when it comes to addressing the catastrophe of climate change.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:45): I rise to speak today on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. The core of this bill is around consumer protections when things do not quite go right, and I will have a little bit more to say about consumer protections and the government's different approaches in different areas. Here this is about if your energy retailer exits the market. I just want to mention first of all that this is not a novel bit of legislation by the government at all. This is a move to adopt the National Energy Retail Law, which operates in other jurisdictions, with the South Australian

act being from 2011. Victoria is essentially just adopting the provisions of the National Energy Retail Law.

But also included in this bill are amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and the Gas Industry Act 2001. What we have here is protection for consumers if your energy retailer, whether that be gas or electricity, exits the market. They can exit the market for a variety of reasons. Markets are pretty flexible, and sometimes things do not go as planned. You could have a failed retailer, and when you look at some of the figures on the east coast in the last 12 months there have been nine failed retailers, with four in Victoria. There are a lot of reasons why your retailer may exit the market: the company can simply want to change direction and leave that space; maybe they cannot compete anymore because the wholesale price of the gas or the electricity rockets, and they are not competitive; global events, and I know the government are particularly good at blaming global events for all of their failures – we have seen them blame COVID consistently and we have seen them blame Ukraine consistently; change of ownership; and insolvency.

I want to mention here that in the Gas Industry Act, for example – it is in I think clause 26, but I could be wrong – the commission may grant or refuse an application for a licence to distribute or sell gas for any reason. They have that option there that they have the discretion to do what they want. What happens here is we have got the introduction of the national retailer of last resort scheme, which as I said, is operational in other states. This then provides the government with the power to direct customers to a new retailer. There are multiple retailers that can be involved, so they are not putting all the eggs in one basket. But it gives them the power. What they want to be able to do is quickly transfer customers from the failed retailer – the exiting retailer – to the new retailer. It is looking, really, for a uniform framework for that retail failure and looking for some sort of consistency, and I think what is important is reducing the risk of unintended consequences. We know there are always unintended consequences, and it is something that we need to look out for. But one thing that is of concern to me is that with the changes to the government's policy around gas and looking to ban gas, which is really quite significant and I think will have devastating consequences for consumers, they need to make sure that those who they transfer the customers to have the capacity to deliver, that they have enough reserves of gas or are hands-on able to get that quickly, and the same with energy. This, as I said, is going to become harder and harder.

I want to focus for a moment on consumer protections, because the framework that we are talking about, the retailer of last resort, is about protecting consumers. But I think that the government are really quite duplicitous in this area, because on one hand they talk about protecting consumers – and I am all for that – but on the other hand they take it away.

One of the things that seems to be consistent here is the government's failure to listen, the failure to consult adequately with communities. More and more we see consultation via Engage Victoria, and that is a real furphy because people are not watching the Engage Victoria website; they do not know what is there and what is on. The other thing that the government does is tell; they think consulting is telling. That is not consulting; it is a two-way street. The government are also removing appeal rights, and they are really starting to ride roughshod over communities. They are ignoring any ideas, suggestions or feelings because they have the power or the authority to do so. The government more and more are riding roughshod over communities because they have the power, and I think that is quite duplicitous. On the one hand you are saying, 'We've got to protect consumers, listen and look after them,' and on the other hand you are doing the complete opposite.

I see this a lot, too, with some of the large renewable energy projects. I live off grid, so I am all good with renewables. There is not a powerline within cooe of my house. You cannot see one. They are kilometres away in every direction. But I see the way that the companies are not working with consumers, with locals, about how to develop some of these big projects. I have one that is bordering on my electorate, with the renewables, with wind turbines in the southern Strathbogie Ranges, impacting people in Highlands, Terip, Ruffy and even Gobur. It overlaps a little bit with the member for Euroa's electorate as well. One of the things that does concern me is how these companies do

business. They play landowner off against landowner and tell people or imply that ‘Actually you’re the only one who’s not agreeing with this. Your neighbours on either side think this is a great project, but you’ve got to keep this discussion confidential,’ so they get you not to talk to people. When people start talking to their neighbours they say, ‘I actually wasn’t in favour of it. I don’t want that,’ and they are like, ‘Well, the proponent said you did.’ This happens time and time again, and I hear this consistently.

We have had this proposal for the southern Strathbogies, in the community called Highlands in my electorate, where they are playing off, first of all, communities and landowners about the location of wind towers and whether or not to have them. But that is only part of the issue, because then you have got to connect those turbines – and we have seen the failures of government to do this consistently – with the grid. It is how you get to the grid. All of a sudden it is not just the people who may be neighbouring the turbines but all those that are going to have these massive 330-kilovolt transmission lines going through their properties. Again, we see the companies and people go around and have confidential discussions and really play people off. They are not listening to communities, and they are just trying to work out the best path that they can get this through, because they think the government has given them a licence to print money for this because of the support for particular renewable projects. That is really what happens: they think they have got a licence to print money; they think they have got a licence to ride roughshod over communities.

What we see now happening through many communities in my electorate is there are multiple proposals about where the transmission lines will go, and it seems to change every 5 minutes. Every time I turn around somebody is telling me they have had a meeting about it because it is now going through their property. I am thinking, ‘Gee, I thought it was going to be going to Eildon via Gobur and Yarck,’ then I find it might be going through Whanregarwen and Molesworth and then I find out it actually could be at Killingworth or it could be just out of Yea at Homewood, so communities are really left in the dark.

There was a meeting at Yea on Saturday 20 April – standing room only – in the Country Club Hotel, with 200 people there to hear about it. This was new information for them, because they have not been told. They might hear about wind turbines in a certain area, but they have not been told about how that is going to impact them with the transmission lines. They have got to be hooked up to the Melbourne to Sydney transmission line somewhere between Glenburn and Alexandra, so it can impact on a large number of landholders. There has been a huge vacuum of information left by Fera. They have not consulted beyond little groups of landholders here and there, and they have got a few local champions who are really trying to push it, but one of the things that came out of the meeting was the number of people, through a show of hands, who were in favour of it, and overwhelmingly people were not in favour of it.

Some of the ways that they seek support are a bit misleading as well. If you ask a question, which happened at the Seymour Alternative Farming Expo, like ‘Do you support renewable energy?’, people say yes. That is a very different question from ‘How do you feel about this project in the southern Strathbogie Ranges?’ It is quite different. This is where I think they are not honest with communities, and they are losing their integrity. The government have to decide whether they want to protect consumers at all times or they want to work with communities rather than ride roughshod over them. Having the National Energy Retail Law in place is not a bad thing, though.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:55): It is great to rise this evening and speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024 and follow the contribution of the member for Eildon, who with a lot of contributions carries the coalition as one of the most frequent speakers on that side. When we have a bit of a chastising of those opposite for not fronting up and not speaking regularly on bills, you could never make that criticism of the member for Eildon. I will get to some of the points she made, because I am in a bit of disagreement, but I welcome the consistency in contributions.

This is a really important bill in the context of supporting consumers in our state and indeed across the nation who are impacted when a retailer goes under. I note that a number of members on this side are

contributing to this bill in the context of our real policy drive both at a state level and federally on investing in renewable energy, supporting retailers and consumers and their rights and protections. I have a great turnout of colleagues, who will all get up as well, behind me. It will look good on Facebook later on when I download this absolutely sensational speech. I did request it, and I owe them all a Diet Coke later on, but it just shows the interest in this policy area and the importance of the model rules that have been put forward by retailers.

We have seen four retailers fail in Victoria recently, nine across the nation, and that causes a lot of uncertainty and distress for consumers, particularly those that a lot of us interacted with when we had the power saving bonus. The anxiety around the cost of living and what people were confronting, the nervousness around changing retailers with the thought of an impact on their cost of living, not trusting a brand name they might not know and then the journey that we went on with a lot of people around changing retailers – for a lot of constituents that we met within Mordialloc, it was a big step to take. They felt loyalty to a particular organisation. That loyalty was not necessarily shown to them in discounts unless they rang up and said, ‘I’m going to change my provider,’ and then suddenly a 20 or 25 per cent discount floated into the ether. That kind of loyalty, that kind of respect, was not shown to those consumers who for years would stay with the same provider, consistently pay bills, get the discount for paying early. They were never shown that kind of respect.

When we saw the power saving bonus come through, there was a great opportunity to hear those stories of constituents who had been trying to make ends meet, who had seen their cost of bills go up and who were aware as well of the context that we find ourselves in – investing in renewable energy, transitioning our markets and the whole story around the policy inertia coming back to the impact on their bill, on their bottom line, and needing to act on that as well. The stress and duress that comes from your provider going under and not knowing where you transfer is really where the National Energy Retail Law comes into play. We have had a state-based system that had one provider, but the national reforms will provide greater flexibility. Given the uncertainty and the changing nature of the retail market, I think on behalf of my constituents that is a sensible and reasonable position that we find ourselves in. As best we can, where circumstances change quickly, people are given that certainty of continuity on a particular utility that they so desperately need.

Going further into some of the importance there and what we have seen in that time, we have seen a really changing environment with the market. We see a number of other players come in, and we see the power saving bonus during that time being a really good catalyst for people to really engage in the complexity of issues around their bills and what goes into this work as well.

I think it is also important to reflect on why we find ourselves in these circumstances and the uncertainty and the fragmentation as well. We saw at a federal level policy inertia in this space and inconsistency until a federal Labor government came to power. We had states who really shouldered the burden on renewable energy targets. When federal leadership under the coalition was claiming renewable energy achievements, it was actually on the back of state jurisdictions acting time and time again in the lack of policy engagement. One only has to see the huge upheaval in the federal coalition that occurred with the national energy guarantee, which was not really a controversial policy position.

Dylan Wight interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: As the member for Tarneit says, it was for them. If anyone is tuning in tonight and you have not seen *Nemesis*, like 3 million other Australians, it is high viewing and it gives you a good window into when it is all about politics first and policy second. That is where you find yourself on the wrong side of history.

Right now we have an interesting discussion that is occurring around what could be a substitute for baseload power, and we see a really interesting discussion around nuclear and where that might go. You see Peter Dutton, the federal opposition leader, leaning into this space and wanting to call for nuclear reactors to be established. The six sites we are not too sure about. We know the position and

the concerns that the member for Morwell has put on the record in recent times, so I am really interested in whether members like the member for Morwell will, alongside his federal colleague Darren Chester, welcome the Leader of the Opposition down to announce nuclear reactors in his community, because that is what has been described. That is what has been discussed around our communities. Where will these nuclear reactors be established? Who is going to volunteer up their communities in the face of more than 10 to 15 years of needing to bring that on line and the insecurity around that?

It just shows that, when you see the contribution that was made recently on *Insiders*, it is more about kicking the can down the road of New South Wales and Queensland Nationals than it is about actually a serious policy debate. They were meant to announce the sites only recently, and still we have absolutely no idea how this policy would be achieved. It will be interesting, when the member for Morwell gets up, whether his community is the one that will be put forward for the nuclear intervention that has been made by the opposition leader federally. We have seen a very quiet policy space. We heard the Leader of the Opposition say, 'We should have a discussion' – a great way to say, 'I haven't actually asked everyone in my party room yet or know where the numbers are on that' – not wanting the ire of federal Liberals or Nationals as well, such is the unpopularity of some of their policy position.

You cannot blame them for some of that policy inertia, because the former leadership of the Liberal Party here, despite trying to reform themselves as champions of climate change in recent times when teals ran through some of their eastern suburb seats, are on the record as opposing the Climate Change Bill 2016, the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Bill 2017, the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Amendment Bill 2019 and the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Fairness) Bill 2021 and on the record as supporting a market-led intervention in coal-fired power, which was the policy position of those opposite in 2018.

Not to have a bit of a crack, but it is worth reflecting: remember that David Speers interview with the Liberal candidate for Frankston, the one that said that we would leave it up to the markets, that the free markets would determine where the next coal-fired power station would be built, which could have happened at any moment. After being asked 12 times, the then candidate conceded that it would be funding intervention from the state Liberals if they were in government that would actually be how they build more coal-fired power stations. That just showed how failed their policy was.

It does not stack up on the market, and it is why our intervention with the renewable energy supercharge that is the State Electricity Commission coming back and the whole policy investment is really important, because we have to provide that certainty to communities and that investment. That will take away some of the risk that we see where international investment comes in, where scale-up of renewable energy happens. That is the kind of certainty, that is the kind of investment attraction, that comes from having a long-run policy indication that says, 'Invest, transition and help us on that journey, whether it's in that baseload or storage and how we scale that up over time.' That is an important mix as we move towards an 80-plus per cent renewable energy target by 2035 and then net zero by 2045. It is something we are really passionate about across portfolios.

I say as well that every single area of our communities and government services is doing that work. We have a policy to transition government services to net zero really soon. We see that in the health industry – we see fully electric hospitals being established for new builds. That policy engagement and the transition that will happen in our existing built forms – that is some of the policy energy and transition that we are looking at.

This bill is all part of that broader mix of supporting consumers in their homes, in the grassroots, supporting them with their bills and their transition as well, because to not do that hard work and that policy work over a number of years would fail all Victorians and leave them in a worse circumstance year on year. We need to make that transition, and we need everyone's shoulder to the wheel on that work. I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:05): I rise today to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. As our lead speaker the member for Brighton said, we do not oppose this bill. It is good to see that we are not opposing the bill, because we do need to make sure that consumers, who sometimes get lost in the bigger picture if an energy provider falls over, have got that mechanism, that they have the security to know that they will be moved on to another provider. They do not have to spend their time looking for a provider. It does make it a little bit hard when you are a little bit nervous that your provider is not there anymore – is your power going to be able to stay on, do you need to do it quickly? To take that impost off the consumer for a little bit is great.

The bill is designed to make the Australian Energy Regulator responsible for ensuring Victorians are not left in the dark if their provider is no longer a viable option. If an energy provider does go by the wayside, the AER will automatically transfer its customers to another provider, which is great. The main purpose of the bill is to apply the laws of Victoria, subject to any necessary modifications. The provisions of the National Energy Retail Law – because this does go on in other states at the moment – provide a retailer of last resort's arrangements and other provisions of the law to support the effective operation of those provisions. We are talking about electricity and we are also talking about gas. The bill makes other minor technical amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and the Gas Industry Act 2001 to improve their operations.

As I said, this is a good thing for consumers. I do not know how many people have had to use an option if their provider has fallen over, but I know the impost if you do have to change your provider, the hoops you do have to jump through, as the member for Mordialloc said before – all the stuff that is set up when trying to change. You say you are leaving the provider, and then they come and say they have a 25 or 30 per cent offer to give to you. We take that out of the hands and the worry of consumers and do that. It is a good bill that will protect Victorians. Why should they be left in a worse situation, as I said before, if it is not their fault? Households are under enough stress at the moment with the cost of living. I have had my gas bill and power bill. I think the power bill I have to pay at the end of this week. They are not going down at the moment. They are continuing to rise. Households are stretched right across Victoria at the moment, so to have a safety net like this is a good thing.

It has been a very wideranging debate, as we have gone through. It is not a debate actually, because we are all in agreeance, but our time line to move into renewables is starting to be questioned by a lot of people. We have moved to Yallourn shutting in 2028, and Yallourn actually provides about 22 per cent of Victoria's power. In 2028 that will come offline as we transition into renewables. I listened intently to both sides of the house as they talked, and I think everybody now realises the impact that renewables are going to have and how good it is going to be for the environment and so forth. But we need a structured time line that does not make people worry, because the clock is ticking and there does not seem to be a lot of infrastructure in place at the moment. We will follow with Loy Yang B shutting in 2035 – they pump about 30 per cent of the power resources that we need into Victoria.

I listened to the city MPs talk about how they engage with their communities – we do the same thing in regional Victoria – and how right across the board constituents really welcome renewables. To a certain extent I think most Victorians welcome the transition to renewables. I listened intently before to the member for Albert Park saying that renewables do not pollute. Well, by the time the infrastructure is done for the wind turbines, with the steel that needs to be made, the turbines being put in place, the footings that are below the seabeds, the ships that transport these wind turbines out to sea and install them and the oil that needs to go into the turbines, yes, they are nearly pollutant free. We talk about the pollution that we see from the wind turbines. It is the visual pollution that we talk about, whether it be wind turbines or transmission lines. We have spoken about it often in the chamber.

We have farmers and people that live in communities who are going to be subjected to 80-metre transmission towers. If you look around the state – you probably see them as you come through the major transmission lines on the way into Melbourne – they are 40 metres high. The new transmission lines that are to be put in place for the upcoming change to renewables are 80 metres high, so they are big, cumbersome structures that people in regional Victoria will have to wear, looking out of their

windows and across their farms. Then there are the wind turbines – the visual pollution there. These wind turbines are going to be as high as the Rialto building. They are going to be 300 metres high. The blades that they are currently saying will be on the turbines are up to 150 metres long – each blade. There is a lot of visual pollution, and that is the pollution that we talk about, which people in regional Victoria will for the rest of their days have to look at.

We know this stuff needs to be done, because we have made the decision to move out of fossil fuels and we need to transition into renewable energy. I think everybody is on board with that. But as I said before, it is just the time line of how it is all going to work. There are questions that I get asked in my community – because we are the hub; we have the two power stations that are currently there – about what we are going to be left with, because all the transmission lines are going to come into Loy Yang, as such. What are we going to be as a part of the manufacturing scheme moving forward – a hub down in Latrobe Valley for renewable energy?

The other thing that we do get once the power stations close is the rehabilitation of the mines. Speaking with the mine owners – and Hazelwood power station has started the rehabilitation process – about what they are looking to do, we have the Big Battery that everybody wants to talk about. It is in Hazelwood, which is in my patch. I have driven past it a few times. They are also looking to put in solar farms, which I hear about from the other side of the house – all these solar farms that we are going to need to create the power. Well, there is also going to be a big new one set up in Morwell, and they are going to be part of the rehabilitation of the mines moving forward. It will be interesting to see the amount of solar panels that we do need to power Victoria. We are just starting to get the information out about how many that will be. There is talk that up to 70 per cent of our farmlands will have to be covered with solar panels allegedly, at this stage, to make sure that we do meet our targets and keep the lights on in Victoria. We have had the minister come down and speak to people at Loy Yang, but that is in a closed environment. We have a minister in the other place who does have an office in Morwell, and they need to come down and talk to the people of the Latrobe Valley, which they have not done as yet, because we do have questions that we need answered. So it would be great for them, and I do invite them to come down.

But I think one of the most important things we do need to do – because we do have the member for Euroa, the member for Kew and the member for Ripon now that are going to be starting new families – is we need to make sure the power stays on so their baby monitors and everything they need for their babies are on in the future.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (18:16): Acting Speaker Mullahy, it is great to see you in the chair, looking resplendent. I also rise to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. It has been a wideranging debate, so I am going to be controversial and seek to talk about the provisions of the bill itself. In some respects it is a technical bill, but it is an important bill. It is an important bill because it speaks to really significant dimensions of consumer protection in the context of markets. I talked in my first contribution in this place – and I am sure you remember it well, Acting Speaker – about the way in which markets can, when they function effectively, create wealth, spread wealth and act as vehicles of efficient distribution of goods in a society. But markets can fail, markets can be imperfect and markets are not the only way in which goods and services can be allocated and distributed, and in contexts where markets fail it is people who suffer. In contexts where markets are imperfect it is the role of government to ensure that there is still the adequate and efficient distribution and allocation of goods and services.

This bill is an important one in that it seeks to provide for the national retailer of last resort scheme in Victoria by, in doing so, applying parts of the National Energy Retail Law, or NERL, in Victoria but with modifications of its application provided for in Victorian regulations made under the bill to ensure consistency with existing Victorian energy retail law, while simultaneously giving effect to that national retailer of last resort scheme, or ROLR – and there are some good acronyms in this bill. The crucial part of the bill that I want to talk about is the way in which the proposed bill will enhance protections for Victorian consumers while simultaneously strengthening the retail energy market by

transitioning, as I say, Victorian consumers to the Victorian retailer of last resort scheme within that national retailer of last resort scheme.

This is needed and important because the energy market as we know and utility markets generally are quite complex, sophisticated entities but they really matter for people's lives, because keeping energy, whether it is electricity or gas, connected and in people's homes is fundamentally what enables people to heat their homes, to cook, to bathe – those really fundamental building blocks of life. So these are markets, but they are markets which must be properly regulated. So when we talk about markets in the context of utilities, particularly electricity and gas, as this bill touches upon, the concomitant dimensions of regulation are really important. You cannot just have the free market running wild; it is absolutely imperative that there is effective regulation that protects consumers and ensures the efficient distribution of electricity, gas, whatever it might be – but in this context it is those specific goods, which are integral to people's lives – because if that breaks down then it has real costs for society, and I will talk about those in just a little while.

We know that the energy market is volatile and complex, particularly at the moment, but also fundamentally unpredictable. The collapse of retailers perhaps could be defined as grey swan events in that we know that they might happen because some retailers are ineffective, poorly run or whatever the case might be, but we do not know where or when they will collapse. In that context there needs to be provision for consumers to be supported through the collapse of their retailer. In the context of a market, they have imperfect information. They do not know what is behind the facade of a retailer; there might be trouble. Whatever the circumstances are, it is not the consumer's fault that that retailer has collapsed, but there is a real problem if that retailer does collapse and there is not adequate protection for consumers to be able to transition to another retailer in as seamless a way as possible, because if that does not exist then it is consumers in Victoria – residents, families, businesses and fundamentally people – who suffer the consequences of a retailer collapsing. So this is an important bill because it seeks to pre-empt that unpredictable outcome, one which we know has occurred nine times since 2022, I believe, and which may occur in the future.

I just want to thank the minister and her team for the consultation that they have engaged in with regulators across the country to ensure that the provisions of this bill go as far as possible to embedding that kind of adequate consumer protection in our energy market. I understand there have been substantive discussions with the Australian Energy Regulator, Australian Energy Market Operator and of course the Essential Services Commission (ESC), which already is best standard in the country for regulating the energy markets in this state. It is another substantive piece of reform on the part of this government and particularly this minister. Just in the last few months in this place you will recall that we have discussed and debated significant pieces of legislation looking at the generation of energy, particularly in offshore wind settings, and also bills looking at the transmission of that energy from offshore settings onshore, ensuring that there is the capacity to get renewable energy, which is getting Victoria on track for those ambitious targets to be met, onshore into the wholesale market and then ultimately to consumers.

This is another tranche of important substantive legislation that will make a material difference in the lives of consumers across Victoria. As I say, it really is needed, and it is particularly important to support the work that the ESC is already doing, which ensures that Victoria's energy laws are catering for Victorian conditions. But also we are a government that consult closely with other governments and with national regulators to ensure that our provisions are aligned with national schemes where it is in Victoria's interests and, crucially, the interests of Victorian consumers for that to be the case.

I have talked a little bit about the importance of robust regulation in the context of utility markets and talked about how we do this in order to pre-empt and respond to, as I say, perhaps those grey swan events which arise from time to time in utility markets but which have a real and negative consequence on the lives of consumers, businesses and Victorians generally if they are not anticipated through effective regulation with provision to respond to them. A particular example that I want to think about today is what is happening in the water market in the UK at the moment. Of course we have not

privatised the water market in Victoria for a very good reason – fundamentally it is a natural monopoly. It makes no sense to have a privatised water market in the context where water is collected in reservoirs, piped into treatment plants and then on to people's homes. It makes no sense for there to be parallel systems conveying that water – it is, as I say, in effect a natural monopoly – but yet the UK conservative government in its wisdom privatised its water system in the 1980s.

London and the south-east of England now find themselves in a position because of the weakness of regulation and consumer protection which did not accompany that privatisation whereby Thames Water, the water distributor and retailer in the south of England, is labouring under £15 billion worth of debt. Not being compelled by regulation to invest in its distribution networks, it is still distributing water through Victorian-era pipes with vast amounts of leaks, not treating water, pumping raw sewage into waterways – things which we, I think, in a modern society would not expect to see. Labouring under that £15 billion of debt, Thames Water has effectively defaulted upon it, and yet because it is a natural monopoly and an absolutely essential utility the government really has nowhere to go. It is too big, and the debt burden is too big to absorb onto the public balance sheet. It cannot magically create another water retailer or another water distribution system because, as I say, it is a natural monopoly. The 15 million people in the south-east of England rely upon that water to be distributed to and utilised in their homes and their businesses.

There is no capacity to have a retailer of last resort scheme in that circumstance. But as a consequence of the lack of capital investment and as a consequence of weak regulation and of weak consumer protection, the UK – the southern part of the UK particularly – now finds itself in a position where its water market is fundamentally broken. The reason that is relevant to this bill is that particularly in the context of utility markets there are crucial dimensions of those markets that people rely upon every single day in every single aspect of their day: the lights being kept on and the capacity to heat their homes, to feed their children, to feed themselves, to wash and to bathe. All of those things, which are the fundamental building blocks of life, are put at risk if markets fail, if markets are imperfect and if government does not play its role to ensure the effective functioning of those markets and also to guarantee consumer protections. That is why this bill is so important. I commend the bill to the house. In doing so I thank the minister and her team for bringing it here. I hope it has a speedy passage.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (18:26): I rise today to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. Energy of course is something that is spoken about quite frequently in my electorate, for many reasons. They are around the cost of living and energy prices continually being seen to escalate between bills. Whether they are looking at their electricity bills or their gas bills, it is causing an enormous amount of pressure for people in my electorate. It is not just people who are in the lower socio-economic band, it is also people who are really struggling with the cost of living across the board. There are so many things that people are seeing where those little increments are adding up over time. It is when you go to the supermarket. You fill up your shopping trolley and you notice that your groceries are costing a lot more than they used to. Of course this is flowing on from the freight costs going up and up and up; the registration costs – something imposed by the state government – are increasing; and the cost of running a vehicle is increasing because of damage to vehicles because of our pothole-riddled roads. We also see so many other issues. It is simply costing a lot more through regulation and the quality requirements that are required as well.

So we see this incremental creep with little changes – and maybe it is one of the 53 new taxes that the Allan Labor government has brought in and imposed on Victorians. This is what is pushing up the prices of so many things in Victoria and the reason that the cost-of-living crisis is a homegrown crisis. It is not something that is being generated overseas; it is not something that is external to the state of Victoria; it is something that was created through policy decisions of this government – and I think it is very, very important that everybody in this place understands that and articulates that very well to their constituency. When people are facing these price increases for energy, for electricity, of 25 per cent since 2011 and when they are looking at increases in their gas bills of 27 per cent, they are wondering, 'How on earth am I going to keep the lights on and the house warm? How am I going to

cook food for my kids over this coming colder period?’ – particularly for older people. We always hear of a terrible story at some point over the wintertime of where a pensioner is shivering under a blanket or a pile of blankets and ends up in a critical condition with pneumonia in hospital. We know that often that can have devastating outcomes and the loss of life. It has implications when you push up the cost of living, the cost of electricity and the cost of gas.

What we have seen from the government is some relief for Victorians through the power saving bonus. We had four rounds of \$250 each of the power saving bonus, but just as we started to see that massive creep in cost-of-living pressures and when people were starting to feel it with interest rates also rising, we saw the government all of a sudden scrap that program. We have got the budget next week. I am very, very hopeful that the Labor government will focus on opportunities to take the pressure off Victorians who are struggling with the cost of living. This program was one mechanism; I do not necessarily think it was the best mechanism. I think that if the government dealt with supply shortages in the first instance it would have helped to bring down the overall power costs, but as a backup, as something that is interim, that really would help a lot of pensioners make sure they could keep the lights on and keep their houses warm this winter. It is something that I believe the government should reconsider. I know that it would be welcomed by so many elderly people across my electorate. We know though that for this government, as I mentioned earlier, it is not the best solution to just have a handout of money to Victorians who are struggling with cost of living.

What we have got are some faults in the policy planning by the Labor government when it comes to ensuring we have sufficient supply of energy across the state. We all learned back in high school about supply and demand. If demand exceeded supply, then that would automatically push up prices, and that is exactly what we are seeing in the state of Victoria. By no means does this side of politics oppose renewables or oppose the need for us to reduce our carbon emissions. We absolutely accept that, but we need to do it in a way that is balanced, ensuring we have sufficient supply to keep the cost of energy down. This race to renewables we are seeing in Victoria, with the early closure of coal-fired power stations – we have also seen the banning of gas – has cut out two of the cheapest energy supplies in the state. It also has put a block in place that international investors and even local investors are not looking at building a new coal-fired power station which might have lower emissions, the HELE power plants, the high-efficiency low-emission power plants.

I did see that finally we have seen the Labor government follow a policy that we took many years ago now – I look at my neighbour the member for South-West Coast next door – where we made the announcement looking at waste-to-energy projects as well as how we could look at increasing the energy supply into the state of Victoria. The concern is that by making these early decisions to cut off alternative suppliers, this race to renewables is pushing up prices of energy in the short term. We also know that there is no interim plan to meet that supply, so it is not, like some of you are talking about, just for this budget or just for this year. This is something that is going to escalate and grow year on year into the future.

This comes into another aspect which is quite important to constituents in my electorate, which is how we balance renewables with the right to farm and the access to agricultural land. Of course my electorate is the largest electorate in the state. It is 20 per cent by land mass of the state, and that is because we grow a lot of Victoria’s food. We know that there already is this intricate balance of wondering: is the priority for this state to grow food and fibre, or is the priority about expanding renewables across the state, trading off our agricultural produce and the injection that that gives to the local economy?

This is not something I am just making up. There was a report that was published on a government website by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action in March of 2022 which clearly stated up to 70 per cent of agricultural land could be required for wind and solar farms if offshore alternatives are not secured. It is no surprise that the government has since taken this report down. It is no longer publicly available, and that is because I think there is a realisation that this is not going to be acceptable for the Victorian public. They want to be able to buy food and fibre which is

grown in Victoria. We recognise that our rural and regional communities rely on the agricultural sector to drive their local economy. We can be protected from so many other events around the world if we can support that local agricultural economy, and it is so, so important that we continue to support that. But there is great concern amongst the agricultural community that Labor have a policy which is to shut down agriculture in Victoria and just move totally to renewables, and I will be deeply concerned if 70 per cent of our agricultural land is lost to renewables.

We also look at the other aspect of the right to farm, and that is around the rollout of transmission lines across the state. I refer specifically to VNI West, a project that will connect the grid in Victoria up to New South Wales. There is an alternative proposition which has been put on the table by Professor Bruce Mountain. He has put forward plan B, which is upgrading the existing infrastructure, and I was so pleased to speak to Professor Mountain recently, because it was actually something that I was saying 9½ years ago when I first entered this place – that we need to look at upgrading the existing lines, which are brittle and flow in the wrong direction. We have not got a grid which actually is designed to collect energy in the far reaches of the state and drive it back into Melbourne from the west of Victoria.

Plan B is a fabulous proposition. Not only is it a shorter line length, it uses mostly new easements. If you do a comparison, VNI West takes up 1270 kilometres of new easements over existing agricultural land whereas plan B is just 130 kilometres of new easements. It is much cheaper to go with plan B; it is half the cost to roll that out. Let us not forget that the cost of any new transmission lines ends up on the power bills of Victorians. That is what we are very concerned about – the hidden costs when it comes to these great, big transmission line projects. It will actually result in an increase to everyone's power bill. I have heard that there will be increases doubling or tripling bills for commercial businesses and adding between \$300 and \$600 a year for residential businesses. We need to ensure there are protections in place, and while we do see that there are elements of this bill that will bring us into line with the national standard, we also need to ensure that we have got a state government that can ensure we can deliver lower power prices.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarnait) (18:36): It gives me great pleasure this evening to rise and speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. Contrary to the contribution from the member for Lowan just previously, this is not a bill about cost of living at all. This is not a bill about our energy transition. What I will say to the member for Lowan is that it is slightly rich to stand up in this place and blame solely the Victorian government for a cost-of-living crisis.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: What I will do is point the member for Lowan – if she cares to listen – to shipping costs in the Northern Hemisphere. I will point the member for Lowan to oil supply issues throughout the Middle East causing significant rises in the price of goods in places like supermarkets and also rises in petrol prices. When those two key indicators happen, typically what you get is higher interest rates, which cause inflation, which causes a cost-of-living crisis.

What this bill is about is building on the Labor government's landmark energy reforms over the last 10 years, providing cheaper, more reliable and in this particular case fairer energy for all Victorians. As I said, this bill is not about a cost-of-living crisis. What this bill is about is protecting consumers from market failures. The way that this bill will do that is by playing a pivotal role in safeguarding Victorian consumers in the ever-evolving energy sector as we progress towards our ambitious renewable energy targets. As I have said many, many times in this place, it is not just the most ambitious in Australia but one of the most ambitious anywhere in the world – 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035. The bill will also provide a critical framework to ensure reliability and stability in energy supply.

I have also heard many contributions, one from the member for Morwell – I am not having a go at him; he is a great guy – and also one from the member for Lowan just then, that consistently quote

this report that says that 70 per cent of Victoria's agricultural land is going to be required to reach our renewable energy targets, but that is exactly why we are pushing on with our offshore wind agenda. That is exactly why we are doing that. It actually quotes that. It is disingenuous to stand up here and say that 70 per cent of Victoria's land is going to be needed to meet our renewable energy targets. It is utter, utter dross.

The National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill will introduce a national retailer of last resort scheme for Victoria. Unfortunately, we have seen over the last little bit, over the last small period, four retailers fail in Victoria, nine across the country. When that happens, that can cause obvious and significant distress for consumers. As I said, what this bill is designed to do is protect those consumers from market failures. The scheme is part of the national effort to standardise consumer protection right across Australia, adapting the existing Victorian measures to align with the national standards. By doing so, the bill ensures that all customers enjoy uninterrupted access to energy services, fostering a resilient energy market capable of handling the challenges posed by retail failures and also market fluctuations. Simply, if you are with an energy retailer today that may go into liquidation, that may fail, when the market fails it is the government's job – it is a requirement of government – to intervene to protect the consumer. That is exactly what this bill is about.

Previously the costs incurred – as I said, it has happened four times in Victoria previously – from a retailer failure could lead to increased charges for the affected consumers. So you not only have a business, a consumer, that is stressed out that their retailer has failed, is no longer providing their energy, but then they will also incur and be hit with higher costs as well. This bill changes that by allowing such costs to be distributed more widely across all energy consumers, reducing the financial impact on individuals directly affected by a retailer failure.

Since coming to government, I think almost 10 years ago now, this government has had a consistent energy policy all the way through. This government knows that we have to transition from coal and from gas to renewable energy. A large portion of that will be offshore wind – we know that – but there will also be a mix of solar, a mix of offshore wind and even a little mix of gas as well as we get to 95 per cent. But contrary to those opposite, we have had a consistent policy. They still do not know what their energy policy is. Some, depending on where they reside, would like to continue with coal and would like to continue with gas. Some would even like to start fracking gas out of the ground again.

Members interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT: Jesus. We get some that speak really glowingly about renewable energy. Typically it is those that live around Brighton, a little bit further into the inner city, because their constituents do not mind renewable energy. Then we get some that speak about nuclear. The member for Mordialloc's contribution, talking to the member for Morwell – it was completely fair enough. I would love to ask the member for Polwarth: is he willing to go into his electorate, to go into the communities of Anglesea, to go into the communities of Aireys Inlet, to go into the communities of Torquay, and tell them that he would like to plug in a small –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, while I understand it has been a somewhat wideranging debate, I believe that the member for Tarneit has significantly strayed from the bill that is before us today, and I ask you to draw him back to the legislation that we are debating.

Vicki Ward: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I think it has been, as the member indicated, a wideranging debate that does talk about energy, and when those opposite, including an upper house member, have got an intern looking into nuclear energy, I think it is entirely appropriate that the member continue in this vein.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): I draw the member for Tarneit back to debating the bill before the house.

Dylan WIGHT: As I said, it would be incredibly interesting for me to see if the member for Polwarth was willing to do that. As I said, those opposite have not had an energy policy since we have come to government, for 10 years. As I said, it would be interesting to see if the member for Polwarth would do that, but he would probably have to go and ask the real leader of the Liberal Party first, the heavy hitter Mrs Bev McArthur in the upper house.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Tarneit is misleading the house in saying that the Liberals and the Nationals have not had any energy policy for the past 10 years. I therefore ask that you request the member for Tarneit to withdraw his comments, because alternatively he is misleading the house, which has significant consequences.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): It is not a point of order, it is a matter for debate.

Dylan WIGHT: What have I got, 8 seconds left? I had better touch on Tarneit. Tarneit is absolutely pulling its weight in Victoria's renewable energy transition with its great neighbourhood battery.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (18:46): I rise to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024, because energy is a very significant topic in South-West Coast. South-West Coast have taken a huge amount of the burden for the onshore wind farms because we happen to have had the transmission line. Frankly, we are not against renewables. We absolutely endorse the journey that we are embarking on as a world to improve the environment and reduce emissions, but sometimes it has to be taking a bit of a fair share for others around the state. If you look around this chamber, you see most of the transmission lines and the wind farms on properties are mostly in my electorate and some of the electorates in Gippsland, like the member for Gippsland South's electorate and the member for Polwarth's. I do not see these onshore wind farms in the electorates of members from across the chamber in the Labor Party.

When we see a Labor Party saying, 'We are rushing ahead, beating everybody else to improve the reduction in emissions and get towards a renewable future,' it is admirable in itself in some ways, but it is certainly not admirable when we have people struggling to pay their bills, because Labor have not actually got a real plan. They have got a false plan that just relies on solar and wind. There is not a country in the world that can do that without some sort of power to back it up. They have banned gas and are telling people constantly that gas is really bad. Well, the reality is we have to have some baseload power, and gas in Victoria is not as impure as it is in other countries, like the UK, and we certainly are not fracking or intending to or thinking about that on this side of the chamber. The Liberal Party have had a moratorium against that, unlike Labor. We have had every single extraction licence delivered by them in the state of Victoria. All those exploratory licences before the moratorium were issued by Labor. They put out a lot of propaganda, they say they are going to improve the environment, but they are prepared to risk the environment often.

That brings me to the offshore wind farm projects that they have announced with absolutely minimal, if any, consultation with the people of Port Fairy and Warrnambool, who are absolutely outraged, and rightfully so. I will stand shoulder to shoulder with them to fight this offshore wind farm. It is not appropriate to be in South-West Coast, where we have a whale migratory pathway and a whale nursery. Harpooning, when we settled this country, nearly annihilated the whale populations. Now we have worked so hard to get them back, and I was told recently by a renewable environmental scientist that there is nowhere in the world that a whale migratory pathway has been a place where they have put offshore wind farms. Why risk that in Victoria?

We know we cannot trust the Allan Labor government. We know that they are intending to override an internationally acclaimed Ramsar wetland site in Hastings to go ahead with their renewable port hub despite their own Minister for Planning just two years ago saying you cannot touch that area. Then the federal government environmental minister stepped in just a few months ago saying exactly the same thing. Yet we heard from the Premier, 'We will find a way, we will proceed regardless.' Using the environment as an excuse to destroy the environment does not make sense, and that is why I apply

the same theory to South-West Coast, where you say an offshore wind farm will be placed in a whale migratory pathway and a whale nursery when there is no way you can possibly give me the evidence, because it has never happened before, that it will not disrupt the whales.

These are turbines that are massive in height and do interfere with the wind and make current changes. And not only that, while those wind farms are being built – and it will take many, many years, those transmission lines going under the seabed, all that construction noise for all the people in the area for a long period of time – of course that is going to interfere with the whale migration pathway. It just does not make any sense, and it is not something that we can consider in South-West Coast, our pristine coastline with our fishing, our vistas. It is a massive tourism area. It is just not the area for an offshore wind farm. The community are really angry about it, and rightfully so. The government needs to think about where they are going to place offshore wind farms, and there are many places that are not whale migratory pathways, for a start, and that are not whale nurseries, that the government can consider.

This bill talks about going towards an energy future. The government are putting forward lots of bills around energy. But really I do not see progress when we see the energy prices going up – I mean, a 25 per cent increase in electricity, a 27 per cent increase in gas. The government have the levers, and they have chosen to pull them in a direction that is raising the cost of living to the point where families are struggling to pay their bills. They open up their gas bill, their electricity bill, and they are really concerned about how they are going to pay it. Elderly people – I have seen this in my nursing career, where they come to winter and they just refuse to put the heater on and genuinely end up in hospital with pneumonia. I have seen it. So how are they going to be feeling this year when they see the price of energy when they are having to turn on a heater? I will be very shocked if we do not see an increase in deaths over winter in the elderly from this exact issue, caused by viruses that they could have avoided if they had used the heating, which I am sure they will turn off.

This government have actually even brought out the \$250 power saving bonus. Whilst I do not actually think handouts are the answer, I think the government has the levers to pull to make sure we can have affordable and reliable power. But honestly at the moment they have done such damage to the power bills that that is probably why they introduced it. And now to pull them when many pensioners will have no way of paying their electricity – it is the wrong time. The budget is next week. I think surely the government can see that they will need to reintroduce that bonus to just assist people with their power bills at this point in time.

So this supply and demand of power – the reason the power has gone up is because the government have shut down the power companies. They have put taxes in place and sent a clear message that they are not wanted here. But to not have a plan to transition smoothly is ludicrous, because what we are seeing is that prices are just pricing families to a point where they are hurting. But it is not only families, it is the restaurants, it is the family businesses, the coffee shops, all the businesses. Last week the circus was in town – \$180 for the circus to get a family ticket for four. Well, you can only imagine the costs they have got – insurance, which this government have increased through their 53 taxes that they have increased over the last 10 years they have been in government. Insurance costs, registration costs, electricity costs and staffing costs have gone up purely because of the levers of this government here in the state of Victoria.

I know it is hard for the community to see where the taxes from Victoria go. They do not get a bill like we do from the local council with our rates bill. But it is quite clear that the policies of this government have resulted in increased electricity costs and increases in 53 new taxes – and I think one more even has been put into the media today that is being introduced. I am sure next week in the budget we will all be horrified at the state of Victoria and the budget that comes out due to the fact of the mismanagement of a government who cannot manage money, who cannot manage projects and who are trying to fund their way out of the massive cost blowouts and the hole that they have created in the budget through taxing hardworking families who really cannot take much more. Next week let us see this budget. I cringe for the families of Victoria who are very much struggling under the cost of living,

created, once again, I say by the mismanagement of this government and the policies that they have brought forward, such as their energy policy, which has increased the price of gas and electricity.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (18:55): I rise to speak on the bill, which is the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. It is a vital piece of legislation aimed at better protecting Victorians in the energy retail market – and that is what this government is all about: protecting our constituents – and giving them a smooth experience when it comes to their electricity supply. This bill is really important because, as we have all experienced in recent years, the energy market can be a bit volatile. This bill contributes to alleviating that uncertainty and pain for consumers. As the minister has noted, the legislation will also strengthen the resilience of the energy retail market in alignment with the national energy retail rules administered by the Australian Energy Market Commission. It applies part of the National Energy Retail Law in Victoria with some slight tweaks to keep it consistent with Victoria's energy retail laws. It might sound a little dry and it probably is, but that is what is in the details to better protect Victorians.

It is worth recapping what our energy market actually looks like. Victoria is currently leading one of the fastest energy transitions in the world, and the Allan Labor government is clearly focused on moving to a more sustainable energy ecosystem that will provide for the energy needs of Victorians for years to come. This has included things like giving Victorians control over their home energy through our Solar Homes program and giving over 100,000 rebates to Victorian households as they take part in that program. We have installed the Victorian Big Battery – the largest in the Southern Hemisphere – and made Victoria the home of batteries.

In the electorate of Bass we have a \$10 million Phillip Island community energy storage system. In addition our Allan Labor government committed millions to installing 100 community batteries around the state as part of our 2022 election commitment. And just last month our Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources was on Phillip Island – Millowl – where we celebrated the announcement of the first 25 in the first round. Of the 25, seven are for the island at locations including Berninnet in Cowes, Rhyll, Ventnor, the YMCA, the senior citizens club, Wimbledon Heights and pole-top power at Smiths Beach. All 25 will bring over 4.2 megawatts of new capacity to the 20 towns across Victoria, soaking up clean renewable energy when it is plentiful and dispatching it when it is needed most, improving energy security, improving our local network resilience, increasing the uptake of rooftop solar, delivering community dividend payments for locals and driving down energy bills.

I was delighted to join with the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action Sheena Watt in the other place, Cowes Primary School captains Matilda and Jasper, Mondo and AusNet and a solar array of community catalysts and organisations all focused on the transition to renewables, including Totally Renewable Phillip Island, Westernport Water, Energy Innovation Cooperative Ltd, Destination Phillip Island, Bass Coast Shire Council and nature parks. Targets are set for energy storage and renewable energy, and we are on track for 95 per cent by 2035.

Energy is an essential service. Our homes, workplaces and in fact our whole lives cannot run without guaranteed power flowing in, so it is vital that we protect citizens from adverse consequences in the private market. Victoria has what is known as a retailer of last resort scheme, which has been in place since 2007. This scheme means that if an energy retailer should fail, its customers will be quickly moved to another retailer to avoid any disruption to their energy supply. Although our state-based scheme has been successful, we have seen lots of ups and downs in the energy market recently with four retailers collapsing in Victoria over the past 12 months, so we are looking to unify our system with that of the rest of the country, adopting the national retailer of last resort scheme through this bill. The national scheme ensures consistency across the country when it comes to dealing with retailer failures. It ensures that customers –

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Family violence

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:00): (611) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Police. As the minister finds himself amidst the festivities of the May racing carnival in Warrnambool this week, I implore him to seize this opportune moment to do more than just revel in the atmosphere. I encourage the minister to take the opportunity to visit with families and the police who are dealing with the challenges of inadequate laws which are failing to keep women and children safe from domestic violence perpetrators. I would be happy to help arrange meetings with the affected families. Our police do all they can to support women who are subjected to domestic violence. However, they confront a disheartening reality that offenders persistently violate court orders, leaving police powerless and victims living in fear.

Last week I was contacted by the father of a woman who has been violently threatened by her ex-partner, who has breached his intervention order on multiple occasions. The father told me the initial IVO was taken out due to threats of harm against his daughter by her ex-partner. The ex-partner has now breached the conditions of the IVO no less than four times. On the fourth breach of his IVO the ex-partner attempted to make physical contact with the woman after being arrested for contacting her just nights before. The father who contacted me went to his daughter's aid on the night in question and found the ex-partner, armed with a knife and a shovel, damaging property and threatening to harm the people at the property, including his daughter and grandchildren. The father was scared, and the daughter was terrified for her safety. The police arrived and arrested the man. However, he was released soon after with orders to appear before the magistrate. This is despite having weapons charges, multiple IVO breaches and criminal damage charges. The father is at a loss to understand the lack of police power to act in this situation. He is sick of the ex-partner breaching his IVOs, being released and then breaching his orders again while he waits for the court hearing. Meanwhile his daughter lives in fear for her and her children's safety. I urge the minister to listen to the stories of these families. This is just one example of many. Yesterday in the local paper there were another two reports of IVO breaches.

Minister, let us cut to the chase. Your government committed to the national domestic violence plan back in 2022. Here we are in 2024, and instead of seeing a decline, we are witnessing a rise in domestic violence. Families in South-West Coast or anywhere else should not be living in fear. Almost every four days a woman loses her life to domestic violence. Let us let that sink in. It is a damning statistic that should shake us all to the core. The Premier and Deputy Premier attending the anti-violence rally last weekend was nothing more than virtue signalling. Let us not forget that it is your government that has been in power for the last 10 years and you have had the tools to make change, yet the damning statistics of women dying at the hands of their partners have only gotten worse. Our community demands better. Women demand better.

Alchester Village, Boronia, road safety

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (19:03): (612) Keeping our roads safe is a huge priority of mine, and one of the safety upgrades requested by locals was to improve safety at the Alchester Village intersection. That is why I am excited we are going to signalise the intersection to deliver safer outcomes for locals. The action I am seeking is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to join me at the intersection once works have kicked off. The new intersection will deliver the removal of the

roundabout and the installation of traffic signals, new lanes and dedicated turning lanes, new and safe pedestrian crossings, a resurfaced intersection and a redesigned bus stop on Albert Avenue. The installation of signals, additional lanes and new pedestrian crossings at this busy intersection will improve the flow of traffic and make it safer for pedestrians to access the Alchester Village shopping precinct. I am grateful for our community's patience on this one, and like all of you, I am looking forward to seeing this delivered.

Mobile phone coverage

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (19:04): (613) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action that I seek is that she write to the federal communications minister to ensure that all areas that currently receive the 3G network in Victoria receive 4G coverage after the network is closed mid this year. The reason that I am asking for this is because we have a number of communities that currently receive 3G that are not being guaranteed they will receive 4G because they are not on Telstra's 3G coverage map.

The scenario that presents itself is that in very high bushfire-prone areas, as all members of this house will know, we now have communities relying heavily on mobile phone coverage at those times when bushfires hit and other emergency situations arise – they might be car accidents or other events – and we need to ensure that we do not have a diminishing coverage of mobile phone reception.

Whilst some of these communities are not on the official 3G map where Telstra is guaranteeing that they will receive 4G – they sit outside that – I have been in one forum where that was described by a Telstra representative as an anomaly. Well, whether it is an anomaly or not that they are receiving coverage outside this map area, the reality of it is they are receiving coverage under 3G, and they need to be guaranteed that they will receive coverage under 4G. I ask for the emergency services minister to please write to the federal communications minister to make sure that we do not have any areas that have diminished service under the transition to the 4G network.

Ballarat Specialist School

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:05): (614) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Wendouree to celebrate the practical completion of construction works for new classrooms and facilities at the Ballarat Specialist School. The Ballarat Specialist School caters for the educational, social and emotional needs of children with mild, moderate and complex intellectual disability. Students are aged between three and 18 years and are grouped across four mini schools, being the early years, junior, middle and senior schools. In the 2020–21 state budget the Ballarat Specialist School received \$10 million, and what a wonderful and joyous day that was. The whole school community was so overwhelmed that the Ballarat Specialist School was one of 39 Victorian specialist schools sharing in \$388.8 million to upgrade and modernise schools, including constructing additional permanent buildings – investment that they had always dreamed of. There were tears that day. The principal was in tears, I was in tears, the parents were in tears – it was incredible. It was one of the happiest days because we honestly had worked so hard, and we really want the best facilities for Ballarat students who go to the Ballarat Specialist School.

The fact is that the construction is now coming to an end. We are ready to open this, and I really want the minister to come and see it. But I would also like to say that there is more, and that is that I want to thank the minister for his ongoing support for the Ballarat Specialist School, including the recent announcement of a brand new hydrotherapy pool at the Ballarat Specialist School senior campus. It is one of seven pools to be built across Victoria as part of the Allan Labor government's \$25 million Hydrotherapy Pools at Specialist Schools Fund. Having spoken to the Ballarat Specialist School principal, he let me know how significant this investment will be for his school community and the benefit it will provide students, as they will be able to access hydrotherapy treatment at the senior campus. I look forward to welcoming the Minister for Education to the Ballarat Specialist School, introducing him to principal Sam Sheppard and the dedicated teachers and support staff as well as the

wonderful students and celebrating the \$10 million investment our government has made into this outstanding school.

Mornington Peninsula bus services

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (19:08): (615) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek is for the minister to provide my constituents with an update on proposed bus routes and route changes, including the Mornington to Hastings bus service and the much-needed 781, 784 and/or 785 bus route changes in Mornington. On the latter, proposed changes to routes 781 and 785 to stop at existing bus stops at Beleura Village and Peninsula Grange retirement villages, St Macartan's Parish Primary School and Mornington Gardens Holiday Village would benefit thousands of residents, visitors, families, parents and students. Locals and I have been advocating for many years for a change to these bus services. During the 2022 election campaign the coalition committed, if elected, to amending these bus routes straightaway and to implementing the Hastings to Mornington bus service. The Labor government, however, came to power, sadly having not matched our commitments at the time. I have continued my advocacy since the election. Then last year, for the first time since Labor came into government in 2014, the government announced that planning was underway for a cross-peninsula bus service between Hastings and Mornington. The government also announced that route 781 would be changed to extend to Dromana, but this did not include the requested changes to include stops near the retirement villages and the school.

As I understand from contact with various members of Parliament in the other place and here, the 781 and 785 route extensions are being considered, but the priority is the cross-peninsula bus service. The department committed, in an email that I have seen, to a recommended solution being a network change with the future cross-peninsula bus route, which will realign the local bus routes 784 and 785, with 785 to serve the retirement village area on Bungower Road. However, a simple change is all that is required, and this should not have to wait for a cross-peninsula bus service. A 2-minute route extension is all that is required to service thousands of locals. This will be a cost-positive announcement, given residents currently rely on cars, even when they should not, or on taxpayer-subsidised taxis. It will also offer positive physical, social and health and wellbeing outcomes.

It is absurd that the government can make other changes to route 781 – say, for Dromana – but not make this simple, 2-minute addition to incorporate two retirement villages, a primary school and a holiday park. Locals in this area should not have to wait for the Mornington to Hastings bus service. They should not have to wait any longer for this simple service change. These residents have no public transport options altogether, and this is impacting thousands of residents, including mainly older citizens. I call on the government to take action on these matters as soon as possible.

Clarinda electorate early childhood education

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:11): (616) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Children in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting the Springvalley preschool in Springvale South. I am really hoping to get to Springvalley preschool in Springvale South sometime in the near future. This is a wonderful local preschool, and it is the recipient of a Building Blocks inclusion grant, receiving over \$120,000 for the redevelopment of the sandpit and the cubby area to make those more accessible for all abilities. This is very exciting, and I hope the minister can join me to celebrate this and to see the great work happening at Springvalley.

We have had some fantastic results recently through the Building Blocks inclusion grant scheme. Acacia Avenue kindergarten in Mentone is another one of the recipients, which is a fantastic result for the kinder and for the community. I was really proud to visit last month to have a chat about the over \$45,000 in support for the acoustic treatment for the three- and four-year-old kindergarten play space. That is really significant and something that will help to make sure that all children at Acacia Avenue get the best start to their lives, no matter their ability.

These are fantastic initiatives that this government is very proud to support, making sure that everyone has the facilities and equipment they need for a great start in life, no matter their ability. We can see the commitment this government has to early childhood education and care, leading the nation and delivering unprecedented investment in early childhood services so our youngest learners have a world-class local kindergarten to learn and to grow in. We have seen that investment in the Best Start, Best Life reforms – some \$14 billion invested by the Allan Labor government, transforming early childhood education to help children thrive, save families money and support parents, especially women, to return to work or study if they choose to. These are amazing initiatives. I commend the minister and hope she can join me in visiting these amazing local preschools, and I look forward to her response.

Electric vehicles

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (19:13): (617) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action that I seek is support for constituent Colin Dayman. He is trying to get a 2017 electric vehicle registered, and we know how important it is that electric vehicles get a right of passage here in Victoria. He is trying to import this vehicle into Australia, and he has come up against a few barriers, Mr Dayman has. He is trying to get it imported, but he needs a permit from VicRoads to even start that importation process. Mr Dayman says that the exact same car –

Tim Bull interjected.

Tim McCURDY: It should be easier – thank you, member for Gippsland East. Mr Dayman says the exact same car which is not an electric vehicle – it is, in his words, a ‘petrol guzzler’ – is not a problem to get imported.

Tim Bull interjected.

Tim McCURDY: Yes. He is trying to do the right thing and look towards the future, but he is just not getting any support from VicRoads. So he seeks the support to complete the paperwork to allow the car to be imported.

As I said before, electric vehicles are extremely important as we move forward. That same vehicle, if it was not electric, would be done no problem at all. Hands down, it would be straightforward.

Juliana Addison: Tim, what type of car is it?

Tim McCURDY: It is a vehicle. It is a four-wheel car. It is a four-wheel drive. He has spoken to two different VicRoads advisers, and two different VicRoads advisers. The first one’s response was saying it can be done.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Tim McCURDY: That is the question he asks: why is it so complicated? The second one said the car is noncompliant. This noncompliant car –

Tim Bull interjected.

Tim McCURDY: VicRoads would not tell him under what basis. This noncompliant car – he cannot get the paperwork. He cannot get the answers. It is really important that he tries to get this to make it move forward. He is getting mixed messages from VicRoads. I sincerely hope that the minister for roads can help to get that paperwork moving, because if he gets that paperwork moving, then he can start the process to get the importation done, and then all of a sudden he can get it through. So I seek that support from the minister for roads.

Watson Street, Wallan, interchange

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (19:16): (618) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to come to Wallan to

visit the site of the Wallan ramps. Our community is looking forward to the improved travel times and reduced congestion that will come from this important project. As someone who rides and drives on Watson Street every day, I know how annoying it can be to be stuck in the school traffic or how frustrating it is to have to go through town when you just want to get onto the highway. I am so proud that this government will be building the southern ramps at Watson Street onto the highway. I know that the community is really looking forward to this. I am really proud that along with the Wallan ramps we are also building the new Wallan East primary school and another kindergarten. We have just invested \$10 million in a new community centre, and we have got those new nature trails coming as well. It is not just houses that are being built in Wallan; we are building community. I look forward to the minister visiting.

Parliamentary precinct safety

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (19:18): (619) The matter I wish to raise is for the Premier, and the action that I seek is for the Premier to do whatever is necessary to ensure that there is safety within the parliamentary precinct for everybody that works here and for everybody that visits here. What we have seen unfold particularly in the last 24 to 48 hours is very disturbing. I have actually just come from my office after watching footage of an incident that happened yesterday involving an individual, somebody that I certainly do not agree with on a lot of things. I will put his name publicly: Avi Yemini. I do not agree with a lot of what Avi does and what Avi says, but in this particular incident Avi came to the Parliament, was assaulted and was told by one of the lead protestors out there that 'This is my precinct'. He verbally abused the PSOs very aggressively, said that he was going to come after his mother and do horrible things to his mother. This is horrific footage. There has been an escalation certainly in what we have seen.

Only 48 hours or 24 hours before that we saw a Sydney Swans supporter come out of a pub and be assaulted simply because he asked what the protesters were doing. We are one step away from something horrific happening here. I am really concerned for everybody. I am concerned for members of Parliament. I am concerned for visitors that come to this Parliament. I have had two schools that have cancelled visits to the Parliament because of their safety. I know that one of the schools did not attend an Anzac Day service because of safety concerns. I just feel enough is enough. Nobody owns this precinct; this is the people's precinct. Anybody should be able to come and visit safely and not have to think or look over their shoulders.

There have been times when I have had to take a long walk around to get to my office because of the threats and intimidation that I have had. I have had people follow me from the precinct to the coffee shop. Enough is enough. No-one should have to operate like this. No-one should have to work in any workplace like this.

Everybody has a right to protest, everybody has a right to have their views heard, but nobody has a right to intimidate, to threaten, to bully, the way that we have seen these people out the front here do. These people have encroached beyond the public steps into the precinct. Enough is enough, and I ask the Premier to take action to ensure that those individuals stay where they belong, in the public precinct, and do not own this particular Parliament like they think they do.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Pakenham, in regard to the member for Caulfield's adjournment item, as it related to the parliamentary precinct, that falls outside government administration, as *Rulings from the Chair*, 24 February 1998 from Speaker Plowman, says. Is the member able to maybe rephrase the action to relate it to government business for the Premier?

David SOUTHWICK: Sure. I would ask for the Premier to work with the opposition to look at how we can ensure that there is safety for all those that work on and visit these premises, and also work with Victoria Police.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

James Bathe Community and Sports Hub

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (19:21): (620) My adjournment is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me to visit James Bathe reserve in Pakenham. This sports and community facility was funded through contributions of over \$513,000 from the Community Sports Infrastructure Fund 2018–19 and \$500,000 from the Growing Suburbs Fund in 2017–18, along with funding from Cardinia Shire Council. It is a significant place for me personally, as this was where scrutineering occurred for the 2022 election, and the car park in particular was where I found out that I had won the seat of Pakenham.

This facility opened in 2021 during the pandemic and was used firstly as a vaccination centre. Now it is coming into its own as a multi-use sporting club. Aussie rules footy, netball and cricket clubs are now calling this venue home. The reserve is now operating with a full schedule of activities and has two ovals, two netball courts and a playground with integrated skate areas. The site also has multipurpose cricket practice nets and a multi-use ball court. Inside the pavilion there are three community spaces, three meeting rooms and a social space with a community kitchen, plus for game days a canteen, change rooms, universally accessible amenities and umpires rooms. I look forward to visiting the sports precinct with the minister.

Responses

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:23): The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Police to visit families and police in her community who are dealing with the issue of family violence, and I will make sure that matter is passed on to the minister. The member for Bayswater raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety asking that the minister join him at the redeveloped Alchester Village intersection in Boronia. That will be passed on. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services to write to the federal communications minister to ensure that there is no diminished emergency service coverage in the transition to 4G technology, as I understand the issue that was put forward. The member for Wendouree raised a matter for the Minister for Education that the minister visit to celebrate the practical completion of construction of the Ballarat Specialist School, which sounds like it does fantastic work in the Ballarat community and will continue to do so after a \$10 million upgrade.

The member for Mornington raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport which sought an update on proposed bus route changes in his electorate and in his contribution outlined a number of those proposed changes, and I will ensure that that matter gets passed on to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the Minister for Children asking that the minister join him at the Springvalley preschool in Springvale, and it sounds like they have had some wonderful upgrades there, \$120,000 worth of improvements. That is a wonderful story. The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the minister for roads to get some assistance, as I understand it, for VicRoads to assist Mr Dayman to obtain import permits for his vehicle.

The member for Yan Yean raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to visit Wallan at the site of the Wallan ramps at Watson Street, which is an important project in that local community. The member for Caulfield raised a matter for the Premier in which he sought the Premier to work with Victoria Police, the opposition and the Parliament I think to ensure the safety of all people in the parliamentary precinct. The member for Pakenham raised a matter for the Minister for Community Sport to visit the James Bathe reserve. It sounds like a wonderful sporting precinct, and I will ensure that matter is passed on to the minister.

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

House adjourned 7:26 pm.