

JAMES NEWBURY MP

Member for Brighton



PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

Selected Parliamentary Speeches

2024



FOREWORD

As Premier Jacinta Allan keeps saying, under Labor, Melbourne is set to double its population and grow to the size of London by the middle of the century. To cater for that growth, the Bayside community has been left reeling by the Premier's announcement that the State Labor Government intends to turn our community into a mega-suburb filled with 20 storey high-rise towers.

Under Labor's plan, the Premier, who lives 150 kilometres away from Melbourne, intends to turn our city into mega Melbourne. Rather than sharing growth across all municipalities, the Premier is targeting certain communities, including ours. Sadly, that plan hasn't been accompanied by a commitment for a single new dollar of infrastructure funding.

The State Labor Government's plan to house new population growth follows their ongoing refusal to adequately fund police resources in Bayside. Bayside only has one Police Station. Our community knows that we are regularly faced with vicious violent crimes. There would be few streets that have not been touched by a home invasion or car theft, over recent years. Crime didn't even spare our Christmas Carols! Despite the crime crisis, late last year the State Labor Government announced that 43 police stations will partly close – including the closure of Bayside station at night.

Sadly, we know the real cause for the Government's wrong decisions is that the State Budget is out of control, and we are \$188 billion in debt, even after the Government has collected revenue from the 57 new or increased taxes they have introduced.

We need to get this State back on track and I will continue to work seven days a week to be a strong voice for our community.





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	03
Parliamentary Speech Definitions	09
Parliamentary Contributions Tally	11
Brighton Electorate	15
Rusden Street Bus Stop	16
Hoon Driving	17
Elster Creek Canal Petition	18
Montclair Aged Care – Dairy Australia Visit	19
Crime in Bayside	20
Elster Creek Canal	22
Lilly The Fairy	23
Elster Creek Canal	24
Caitlin Houston	25
Local Grocer Crimes	26
Pantry	27
Brighton Bathing Box Break-Ins	28
William Almeida	29
Church Street Crime	30
Hampton Drain	31
Elwood Park Pavilion	32
New Street Railway Gates	33
Nepean Highway Noise Barriers	34
7 James Street, Brighton	35
Brighton Planning Consultation	36
Brighton Community Walk	37
Homes Victoria New Street Site	38
Brighton Community Walk	39
Community Groups	41
Great Bayside Swim	42
Brighton Central Combined Probus Club	43

Lions Club of Brighton	44
Bayley House Christmas Concert	45
Bayley Birds	46
St Leonard's Uniting Church – Coffee Cup Challenge	48
Brighton North Rotary – International Women's Day	49
Elwood Cricket Club	50
Brighton North Rotary – Recycle Regatta	51
Brighton Soccer Club	52
Elwood Sailing Club	53
Antonio Cipriano	54
Bayspeak	55
Andrew Lawrence	56
Elwood Toy Library	57
Brighton Hebrew Congregation	58
Probus Club of Bayside	59
1st Elwood Scout Group	60
Bayley House – Football Day	61
St Leonard's Coffee Cup Challenge	62
Elwood Shule	63
Schools and Kindergartens	65
Brighton Primary School	66
Hampton Primary School	67
Hampton Primary School – Grade Six Visit	68
Hampton Primary Policy Ideas	69
Elsternwick Primary Fundraising	70
School Funding Broken Promises	71
Hampton East School Crossing	72
Daisy and Animal Welfare	73
Glen Huntly Road Pedestrian Crossing	74
Bayside Kindergartens	75
School Sustainability Festival	76
St Mary's Pre-School	77

Issues of Importance	79
Building Legislation Amendment (Domestic Building Insurance New Offences) Bill 2023	80
Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023	90
Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024	101
Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023	105
Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024	112
National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024	123
National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024	132
Matter of Public Importance: Economic Recklessness	141
Benjamin Johnson	145
Ken Hawkins	146
Bill Debate: Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill 2024	147
Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024	152
Anti-Semitism	155
Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024	157
David Macca rthy	160
Vale Benjamin Johnson	161
Youth Justice Bill 2024: Council Amendments	162
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024	165
Constitution Amendment (Sec) Bill 2023: Council Amendments	168
Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024	171
Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024	181
Matter of Importance: 'Housing Policy'	191
Parliamentary: Manager of Opposition Business	197
Government Business Program: 6 February	198
Debate Be Adjourned: Greens Apology	201

Attempt To Introduce Bail Amendment (Indictable Offences Whilst on Bail) Bill	203
Government Business Program: 20 February	205
Government Business Program: 5 March	207
Government Business Program: 19 March	209
Government Business Program: 30 April	211
Debate Be Adjourned: Members Be Heard	213
1 Day Adjournment: State Tax	215
Government Business Program: 28 May	217
Government Business Program: 30 May	219
Government Business Program: 18 June	226
Attempt to Introduce Payroll Tax Amendment (Schools) Bill 2024	228
Debate Be Adjourned: Crime Crisis	231
Government Business Program: 30 July	233
Attempt to Introduce: Bail Amendment (Strengthening Conduct Conditions) Bill 2024	235
Government Business Program: 13 August	237
Debate Be Adjourned: Wrong Priorities	239
Debate Be Adjourned: Greens on Middle East	241
Government Business Program: 27 August	243
Government Business Program: 10 September	246
Debate be Adjourned: Protests and Greens Behaviour	248
Government Business Program: 15 October	250
Debate Be Adjourned: 7 October Motion	252
Debate be Adjourned: Move to Building Bill	254
Government Business Program: 29 October	256
Government Business Program: 12 November	258
Attempt to Introduce: Corrections Amendment (Assisted Reproductive Treatment) Bill 2024	260
Government Business Program: 28 November	262
Debate be Adjourned: Berwick Sledge Motion - One	264
Debate be Adjourned: Berwick Sledge Motion - Two	266

PARLIAMENT SPEECH DEFINITIONS

As set out in Parliament, Members speak on various debates in the Legislative Assembly. Different rules and time limits apply for each type of debate. Debates allow Members to cover a wide range of issues that are important to them and their constituents.

Debate on Bills and Motions

Members may speak on proposed legislation or a motion that is before the Parliament. An example of a Motion being a 'No Confidence Motion' or a speech on a Bill being referred to as a Second Reading. The contribution must be relevant to the issue and is time limited. The Chair decides whether or not a Member's speech is relevant.

Government Business Program

Each Parliamentary week, the Government moves a Motion, called the Government Business Program, which sets out what proposed laws will be debated that week in the Lower House. All divisions on those Bills are delayed and completed at 5pm on Thursday afternoon, at the end of the Parliamentary week.

Matter of Public Importance

Two of every three sitting weeks, Members debate a 'Matter of Public Importance'. Each Party and the Independents rotate who proposes the topic for discussion. The debate covers current issues of public interest.

Grievance Debate

Once every three sitting weeks, Members debate the question: 'that grievances be noted'. The debate is wide ranging. Members use the debate to raise concerns about individual constituents or other significant issues. Each Member may speak for fifteen minutes.

Adjournment Debate

The Adjournment gives Members the chance to request action on topical issues from the relevant Minister. A Minister is then required to respond to the issues raised, either in the Chamber at the end of the debate, or within thirty days, in writing.

Members Statements

Each sitting day, Members may make statements on any topic of concern. Members often use this time to speak about individual constituents or organisations in their electorate.

Constituency Questions

Members have the capacity to ask 'Constituency Questions' of a Minister. The questions must relate to matters in a member's own electorate. Any Member, except a Minister, can ask a Constituency Question. Members have one minute to ask their question. Ministers do not answer the question immediately. Instead, they must provide a written answer within thirty days. This gives the Minister and the relevant Government Department time to research the issue.

TALLY OF PARLIAMENTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

SPEECHES TABLE

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	ELECTORATE	PARTY	SPEECH COUNT
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	Labor Party	625
Newbury, James	Brighton	Liberal Party	453
Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Liberal Party	450
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	Labor Party	436
Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	Labor Party	383
Southwick, David	Caulfield	Liberal Party	295
McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Liberal Party	240
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	National Party	233
Pearson, Danny	Essendon	Labor Party	230
Wilson, Jess	Kew	Liberal Party	229
Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Liberal Party	228
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	Labor Party	221
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Liberal Party	210
O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	National Party	206
Bedham, Jade	Mildura	National Party	201
Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	Labor Party	200
D'Ambrosio, Lily	Mill Park	Labor Party	181
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Liberal Party	177
McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	National Party	171
Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	National Party	169
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Liberal Party	167
Pallas, Tim	Werribee	Labor Party	161
Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Liberal Party	161
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Liberal Party	159
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	Labor Party	159
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	Labor Party	157
Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens	156
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	National Party	151
Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens	143
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Liberal Party	140
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	Labor Party	140
O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Liberal Party	140
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	Labor Party	139
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	National Party	134
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	Labor Party	133
Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	Labor Party	133
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	130
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	Labor Party	128
Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	Labor Party	128
Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	Labor Party	128
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	National Party	127
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	Labor Party	127
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	Labor Party	123

Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	Labor Party	122
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	Labor Party	120
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	Labor Party	120
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	119
Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	Labor Party	119
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	Labor Party	118
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	Labor Party	116
Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	Labor Party	116
McGhie, Steve	Melton	Labor Party	116
Ward, Vicki	Eltham	Labor Party	116
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	Labor Party	114
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	Labor Party	114
O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	National Party	113
Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Liberal Party	112
Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	Labor Party	112
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	Labor Party	111
Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	Labor Party	111
Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	Labor Party	111
Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	Labor Party	110
Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	Labor Party	109
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	Labor Party	107
Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	Labor Party	107
Andrews, Daniel	Mulgrave	Labor Party	104
George, Ella	Lara	Labor Party	102
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	Labor Party	101
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	Labor Party	101
Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	Labor Party	100
Werner, Nicole	Warrandyte	Liberal Party	96
Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	Labor Party	96
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Liberal Party	95
Settle, Michaela	Eureka	Labor Party	92
Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	Labor Party	91
Couzens, Chris	Geelong	Labor Party	87
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	Labor Party	86
Hall, Katie	Footscray	Labor Party	83
Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	Labor Party	83
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	Labor Party	82
Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	Labor Party	82
Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	Labor Party	78
Wells, Kim	Rowville	Liberal Party	76
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Liberal Party	72
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	Labor Party	59
Cheeseman, Darren	South Barwon	Labor Party	57
Fowles, Will	Ringwood	Labor Party	46
Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Liberal Party	41
Foster, Eden	Mulgrave	Labor Party	37
Smith, Ryan	Warrandyte	Liberal Party	



BRIGHTON ELECTORATE

RUSDEN STREET BUS STOP

Wednesday, 21 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:44):

The Labor Government promised to temporarily relocate the bus stop at 23 Rusden Street, Brighton, during the works at the nearby public housing redevelopment.

The Minister said in 2021 that “the existing bus stop would be temporarily relocated during construction works and would be reinstated close to its original position”.

Labor has since broken that promise and concerned residents have started a strong petition calling on the Government to reverse their broken promise.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

HOON DRIVING

Wednesday, 21 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:44):

Brighton residents are regularly reporting that unsafe drag racing is taking place at night along major roads in our community.

The noise and behaviour are dangerous, and it is scaring residents. As Errol recently said to me, 'At night it is a drag strip on Hampton Street and Nepean Highway. When someone gets killed, maybe someone will get something done'.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

ELSTER CREEK CANAL PETITION

Wednesday, 21 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:44):

The Elster Creek canal runs through my community like an artery. It deserves to be protected from plastic litter and toxins.

The growing volume of plastic and polystyrene litter is causing harm to wildlife and humans.

Residents have started a strong petition calling on the State Government to partner with other authorities and the community to both dredge the canal and remove toxic waste from our beautiful Elwood.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

MONTCLAIRE AGED CARE – DAIRY AUSTRALIA VISIT

Wednesday, 6 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:44):

The residents of Montclaire Aged Care in Brighton recently had a special visitor: Buttercup the cow.

The visit certainly sparked the memories of many residents who as children had milked for fresh milk. Resident Hadyn, who grew up on a farm near Deniliquin, recalled:

When I was a child, I started to help milk the cows in the morning, it was just what you did growing up on a farm.

The visit was part of an event that included Dairy Australia.

University of Melbourne researchers found that when the dairy consumption of aged care residents was increased from two to 3½ serves, there was an 11 per cent reduction in falls, a 33 per cent reduction in all fractures and a 46 per cent reduction in hip fractures.

Thank you to Montclaire and especially to Buttercup for her forbearance in allowing me an attempt at milking.

Wednesday, 6 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (19:09):

My Adjournment is directed to the Premier, and the action I seek is for the State Labor Government to issue a public apology to my community for ignoring the invasive crime increase in Bayside, following confirmation from Victoria Police that the wave first started in Bayside, contrary to the denials of former Premier Daniel Andrews.

We know that over the last year Victoria Police has decreased in size by 3 per cent, and it has come down by 5 per cent over the last two years. On top of that, there are currently 1000 vacant positions that remain unfilled.

This resourcing problem comes at a time when there has been a 33 per cent statewide increase in aggravated burglaries, and in my community of Bayside there has been a 43 per cent increase year on year, with 183 in 2023, up from 128 in 2022. In terms of burglaries, there were 24,881 recorded home burglaries across the state last year. That is a staggering average of 68 burglaries a day.

Appallingly, late last year the State Labor Government announced that 43 police stations will partly close. Bayside only has one station, and disappointingly it is one of the 43 slated for partial closure.

Victoria Police recently held a neighbourhood policing forum in Sandringham. The event allowed a panel of senior police to brief the community, and the information police provided to the forum was alarming.

Police confirmed that resourcing is so scarce that police command was forced to shut stations to keep officers on the road and able to respond to emergencies.

Police also confirmed that a group of around 290 young offenders are committing the majority of serious crimes, with 80 offenders having been arrested more than 10 times each over the past year.

This is at a time when Labor plans to raise the age of criminal responsibility and weaken the state's bail laws on 25 March by abolishing the offence of committing an indictable offence whilst on bail.

Police also acknowledge that the court system is overflowing with cases and that it is not keeping up with offending that is occurring.

But one of the most locally relevant confirmations at the forum was that the aggravated burglary crime wave started in Bayside.

My community knows that when local mother Bec Judd and I first raised these crimes in May 2022, the then Premier Daniel Andrews victim-blamed her and said that we did not understand the data and needed to learn more. Shame.

Given the recent confirmation from police, I call on Labor to stop ignoring these pernicious crimes in my community and apologise.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTION

ELSTER CREEK CANAL

Thursday, 21 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:48):

My constituency question is to the Premier: when will the State Labor Government start to genuinely address the environmental issues in the Elster Creek canal and catchment area in my community?

The Elster Creek canal and catchment run like an artery through my community. It deserves to be protected from plastic, litter and toxins.

Over recent years we have seen works begin in Elwood to help mitigate flooding at the Yalukit Willam wetlands.

The once vibrant Elster Creek canal catchment area in Port Phillip Bay deserves an immediate remedy to the growing volume of plastic and polystyrene litter causing harm to wildlife and humans.

Almost 800 residents in my community in recent weeks have signed a petition calling on the State Government, in partnership with surrounding councils, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, the Environmental Protection Authority Victoria and interested groups in the community to find solutions to eliminate rubbish.

As part of the State Government taking a leadership role, the community has also called on the Minister for Water to personally receive a copy of the completed petition.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

LILLY THE FAIRY

Wednesday, 1 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:34):

We are fortunate to have mythical creature Lilly the fairy living in Brighton East. Her home is in a tree in Cluden Street.

Children leave little letters for Lilly, which she diligently responds to.

Sadly, the Bayside Council ogre threatened to evict Lilly, but I hope the ogre has gone back into his cave.

We must protect the little magic that we have in this world.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTION

ELSTER CREEK CANAL

Wednesday, 1 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:55):

My Constituency Question is to the Minister for Water in the other place.

When will the State Labor Government meet with Elwood community leaders to commit to addressing the environmental issues in the Elster Creek canal and catchment?

My community cares deeply about our natural environment, and we care about the Elster Creek canal, which runs through our community like an artery.

In a call for action, residents commenced a petition which calls on the State Government to work with appropriate agencies and find an immediate remedy to the growing problem of plastic and polystyrene litter in the canal, which causes harm to wildlife and humans.

A staggering 1100 local residents have signed the petition and called for our canal to be protected from plastic litter and toxins.

What we need is a focused effort on protecting the canal and Port Phillip Bay now and into the future.

The first step in that effort is for the Minister to formally agree to meet local representatives and me to receive a copy of the petition, and I ask: when will the Minister meet with those representatives?

CONSTITUENCY QUESTION

CAITLIN HOUSTON

Wednesday, 29 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:46):

My question is to the Premier, and I ask: how can my constituent Caitlin Houston access the support she deserves?

At 5:20 on 18 September 2023 Caitlin disembarked at tram stop 41 along route 67 onto an unparallel pavement which exceeded the allowable variance.

She fell because of the condition of the tram stop.

This fall led to Ms Houston incurring medical expenses and costs of roughly \$5000, not including ancillary pain and suffering.

A secondary injury then occurred, and she made a claim to Yarra Trams, who have stalled, delayed and obfuscated their responsibility, eventually finding that:

... Yarra Trams advises that there is insufficient information to substantiate any liability of Yarra Trams and deny your claim.

Their determination includes a statement that it was raining at the time, despite the Bureau of Meteorology stating that it did not rain at all that day.

Caitlin is not asking for much. This is about Yarra Trams admitting to the injury, and after eight months they still have not. They have given the family the run-around.

Caitlin and the Houston family deserve better.

LOCAL GROCER CRIMES

Thursday, 20 June 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:48):

On Saturday afternoon four southern local grocers, including Dockendorff's in Cochrane Street, Brighton, were violently robbed.

The criminals attacked violently and monstered young workers. Only one of the suspected four offenders has been arrested. Lincoln Wymer, Chief Operating Officer of the Reddrop Group said:

The violence and terror our staff were subjected to on Saturday highlights our industries concerns with youth crime in Victoria. These youth are targeting young staff, and mum and dad operators, who are seen to be easy targets ... We are just trying to do our jobs and service our communities. We strongly advocate for state government reforms to bail laws ...

Bayside is scared. And we are also angry because we know that Jacinta Allan is ignoring these crimes and refusing to toughen the law.

Thursday, 20 June 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:47):

The Pantry cafe has been at the heart of Church Street for 30 years.

This week The Pantry team, hundreds of people who have been given their first job over the years and the broader Brighton community celebrated the 30th milestone.

The owners do not like being the focus, but they deserve it. From the people of Brighton, thank you to Dan Vaughan and Guy Mainwaring.

BRIGHTON BATHING BOX BREAK-INS

Thursday, 1 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:51):

Last week, 20 of the Brighton Beach bathing boxes were broken into over three nights. The break-ins caused extensive damage and property was stolen.

For background, the boxes are listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. Bayside Council are custodians of the Brighton foreshore and box owners hold long-term leases, but Council imposes all costs on the box leaseholders.

Disappointingly, Council refuses to provide any security or proper lighting of the beach despite it being a magnet to hundreds of thousands of tourists.

Box owners are wrongly being forced to pay tens of thousands of dollars for private security to patrol the site and let us not forget the Treasurer shamefully and mistakenly trying to charge owners land tax earlier this year.

Given ongoing crime, we need enhanced security at the site and more broadly across Brighton.

Tuesday, 27 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:54):

This year will mark the centenary of the death of Orlando Street commercial bank teller William Charles Almeida.

The 22-year-old was killed by two of Squizzy Taylor's gang when they robbed the bank.

Despite being shot, William held one of the robbers, Francis Perkins. The other, Douglas Robertson, was later arrested in Sydney.

A publicly erected water fountain commemorates Almeida in Triangle Gardens in Hampton.

CHURCH STREET CRIME

Tuesday, 27 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:54):

Ram raids, swarm shoplifting and knife fights are happening every week in Church Street, Brighton.

Last week just after school pick-up a knife fight started. Signage was being used as shields, chairs were thrown, and glass bottles were being used as projectiles.

Church Street traders are sick of the attacks, and Brighton residents are tired of this Labor Government ignoring these crimes.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTION

HAMPTON DRAIN

Tuesday, 10 September 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:44):

My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the State Labor Government address the collapsed drain on Hampton beach?

The Bayside community is fortunate to be custodians of a unique natural environment, including roughly 7 kilometres of Port Phillip Bay foreshore. We believe the environment must be preserved so that it can be enjoyed and passed on to our children.

My community knows the State Labor Government's record of neglecting that foreshore. Labor closed the Middle Brighton Pier until it was shamed into funding basic safety upgrades, tried to illegally charge bathing box owners land tax and had a secret plan to get rid of the boxes.

The Hampton open drain opposite Orlando Street in Hampton has collapsed, and the Government has refused to fix it. The site is extremely environmentally damaging, with drain water pooling on the beach. It is unsafe for thousands of passers-by each day. All Labor has done is erect cheap tape.

The Minister is yet to even acknowledge community representations.

Premier, Labor needs to stop ignoring this dangerous issue.

ELWOOD PARK PAVILION

Wednesday, 11 September 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:15):

In 2009, when the Elwood Park Pavilion was built, 21 sporting teams with 880 members used the site. There were no girls' teams; now there are 10. Seventy-two teams with 4120 members now use it.

The pavilion is not girl friendly. The Liberal Party committed funds for an upgrade at the last election; Labor refused to fund it.

Elwood deserves proper sporting facilities.

NEW STREET RAILWAY GATES

Wednesday, 16 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:52):

The New Street railway gates and gatekeepers' cabin are listed on Victoria's Heritage Register.

The infrastructure was first built when the line was duplicated in around 1900. There are few gates and cabins left.

Despite the historical significance of the site, the cabin has deteriorated, and the State Labor Government has not funded improvements.

Thank you to the Brighton Historical Society for their ongoing advocacy.

NEPEAN HIGHWAY NOISE BARRIERS

Wednesday, 16 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:52):

The State Labor Government refuses to install proper noise mitigation barriers along the Brighton side of Nepean Highway.

For three years the residents of Primrose Crescent have advocated for their broken fencing to be repaired. Recently the fence blew over.

As one resident recently said, not having a dividing fence at the moment is presenting a noise, security and safety issue for residents.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTION

7 JAMES STREET, BRIGHTON

Wednesday, 17 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:54):

My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier address safety concerns of residents at 7 James Street, Brighton?

The residents of James Street are living in fear. Many of the residents are elderly, and as one said to me, tenants are now talking about moving out in order to get some quality of life back and some peace. It is not fair.

For background, 7 James Street is managed by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. A new tenant has moved into one of the units whose behaviour is alarming.

As one tenant described it, that tenant is constantly screaming, day and night. A number of tenants are frightened and scared of what the tenant might be capable of doing. Incidents have been so serious that Victoria Police has been involved.

Despite many attempts by the local community to seek Government support, as one resident has said, the ongoing inaction from the Department of Housing is deeply concerning.

Premier, the residents around James Street should not be in a position where they are forced to flee their homes because this Government will not protect them.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTION

BRIGHTON PLANNING CONSULTATION

Wednesday, 31 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:48):

My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier consult with Bayside about her intention to allow 20-storey high-rise towers in my community?

Without showing any community respect, the Premier recently snuck into a locked Brighton building to announce the Labor Government's intention to approve high-rise towers around Church Street and Bay Street in Brighton and Hampton Street in Hampton.

This follows the previously announced approval of high-rise towers at Hampton East's South Road intersection.

We know that Labor has not just approved towers, but they will also allow six storey buildings in suburban streets almost 1 kilometre away from shopping strips.

An immediate community petition against the Premier's attack has gained 3500 local signatures.

To date the Premier has not released any of her secret mapping or any of her secret planning changes or guaranteed any proper community consultation.

My community knows that the Premier is sacrificing the liveability of our city for population growth. Her record will be of wrecking our city, despite living 150 kilometres away.

Tuesday, 12 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:52):

My question is to the Premier, and I ask: will the Premier's consultation with Bayside about her intention to allow 20-storey high-rise towers include the planned community walk this Sunday in Church Street, Brighton?

The Bayside community has been left reeling after the Premier announced that the state Labor government intends to turn Brighton, Hampton and Hampton East into mega suburbs filled with high-rise towers.

Under Labor's plan the Premier, who lives 150 kilometres away from Melbourne, intends to turn our city into mega Melbourne, making 50 suburbs mega suburbs.

As the Premier keeps saying, under Labor, Melbourne is set to at least double in population, growing to the size of London by the middle of the century. Labor's plan is without any consultation or mandate.

As of today, 4238 residents have signed a petition opposing Labor's attack on Bayside. In addition, 16 residents have voiced their support, which equates to some 99.6 per cent of respondents being opposed to our community being turned into a mega suburb.

This weekend a community-organised walk will see Church Street filled. If the Premier has any integrity, she will attend.

HOMES VICTORIA NEW STREET SITE

Wednesday, 27 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:01):

My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier review the ongoing safety concerns at the Homes Victoria New Street housing site?

Victoria Police now visit the site most days. Once inside the building's garage there are no security protections, and all five buildings are open.

As resident David recently said to me, home invasions, vehicle and property theft, drug trafficking, domestic violence, sex trafficking, substance abuse and aggressive antisocial behaviour are commonplace.

As he said, residents live a life of fear.

Police visit so regularly that officers now wear lanyard security fobs as part of their daily uniform.

Only two weeks ago a violent offender broke into the building where his former partner now lives. He broke into her apartment and attacked her. He then broke into another apartment, and finally he committed an aggravated burglary in a third apartment and attacked an elderly blind woman.

He was arrested, but as is the case in Victoria, the next day the violent offender was out on bail.

The State Labor Government must improve safety protections at the site.

BRIGHTON COMMUNITY WALK

Thursday, 28 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:15):

Thousands of people joined a community walk which filled Church Street recently.

People from Bayside, Boroondara, Moonee Valley, Stonnington and Whitehorse joined the walk to push back strongly against the Premier's plan to stuff 20-storey high-rise towers into our community.

The plan is to enable the Premier's agenda to grow Melbourne into a megacity through massive population growth. Labor has no mandate.



COMMUNITY GROUPS

GREAT BAYSIDE SWIM

Wednesday, 7 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:47):

Crowds of thousands descended onto Brighton foreshore on Australia Day to see 1000 registered swimmers participate in this year's Great Bayside Swim.

Organised by the Rotary Club of Brighton, the event is a cornerstone sporting occasion that also raises funds for those in need.

I gave out hundreds of Australian flags to local children.

Congratulations to Rotarian Stuart McIntyre for your leadership.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

BRIGHTON CENTRAL COMBINED PROBUS CLUB

Wednesday, 7 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:47):

Probus is a powerhouse in Brighton.

There are 10 local clubs, six of which meet in my electorate.

I recently caught up with 100 local members of Brighton Central Combined Probus Club for their first meeting of the year.

We spoke about protecting our suburbs from inappropriate development and the increase in crime.

A special thankyou to President Helen Wartman and Gaynor Johnson.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

LIONS CLUB OF BRIGHTON

Wednesday, 7 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:47):

The Lions Club of Brighton work tirelessly to raise funds for those in need.

Over the weekend I joined Club members as we ran a sausage sizzle in Church Street. Hundreds of sausages were sold to raise funds for important causes.

Thank you to Club President Kim Low and Vice-President Tony O'Herlihy for their master chef skills and their leadership.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

BAYLEY HOUSE CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Wednesday, 7 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:48):

The best event in Brighton each year is the annual Bayley House Christmas concert. Brighton is abuzz in the lead-up and following.

Many local traders take all of their staff to what is always an incredible night of laughs, tears, dancing and singing.

This year was particularly special after we acknowledged Bayley Birds, who have supported the organisation for an incredible 50 years.

Thank you so much, Bayley Birds, for your commitment to our community and your commitment to our organisation. We love you, we miss you, and we hope you enjoy your retirement.

Tuesday, 20 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (19:07):

My Adjournment is to the Premier, and the action I seek is to call on the Premier to join me in offering words of support and congratulation in celebrating the work of the Bayley House auxiliary club, the Bayley Birds.

Bayley House is a not-for-profit organisation based in Brighton that provides exceptional support for people with an intellectual disability.

Each year the clients put on an incredible Christmas show. Several hundred Brighton residents, Church Street traders with all of their staff in tow, and families of Bayley House clients fill one of the biggest halls in Brighton to sing, laugh, dance, and often shed a tear.

The most recent concert was an incredible event, but it was also a little different. Many more tears were shed as the Bayley House auxiliary club, the Bayley Birds, announced their retirement after 50 years of volunteerism.

Premier, in February 1973, Mrs Ditridge had the idea of putting an advertisement in the local paper, seeking support from other Brighton mothers to start an auxiliary and fundraising club. The advertisement led to four women, who worked on fundraising at the children's hospital, responding. Three of the four women are still part of the group: Gwenda Hance, Margaret Templeton, and Janet Walter. After the four women met with the Bayley House board, and then Brighton council, the Bayley Birds were formed. The group is currently led by founding member Faye Barrow. Over the last 50 years, the group, which at times included up to 15 women, have made a life-changing impact in my community and on the clients of Bayley House.

Amongst their many good deeds, the group has fundraised \$1.5 million in support of Bayley House. That fundraising has come through many incredible events, including grand balls at the Hyatt Regent. Menzies Rialto and Kingston Heath Golf Club, tennis days, fashion parades, card luncheons, golf club luncheons, film nights, open gardens, quiz nights, fetes, Christmas concerts and weekends away with the Bayley Birds' husbands, affectionately called the Dicky Birds.

When Faye Barrow announced the retirement of the Bayley Birds at the most recent Christmas Concert, she said:

We, the Birds, have given our very best because Bayley House is a special place and will always remain as a special place in our hearts.

The Bayley Birds are right – Bayley House is a special place. But I say to the birds, you too have a special place in our community's hearts. Genuinely, thank you.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

ST LEONARD'S UNITING CHURCH – COFFEE CUP CHALLENGE

Wednesday, 6 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:43):

The congregation of St Leonard's Uniting Church in Brighton have turned their innate spark of giving into Statewide leadership through their Coffee Cup Challenge.

The Challenge asked parishioners to set aside the cost of cups of coffee in aid of supporting the homeless.

This year the Brighton parish will have raised a remarkable total of \$100,000 since the initiative began.

Last year's efforts saw \$22,000 donated to provide seed funding to the Ruffy Swag initiative, where backpack swags of bedding are provided to rough sleepers in the Albury region.

Thank you to Minister Kim Cain and Barry and Judy Schofield for their continuing leadership and compassion and for making a real difference for those in need.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

BRIGHTON NORTH ROTARY – INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Thursday, 21 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:48):

Brighton North Rotary recently celebrated International Women's Day with a sold-out dinner that heard from a panel of inspiring women.

The incredible speakers included Chloe Chang and Rebecca Leith, who led the Monash Uni lunar rover team. The team and their pink rover recently placed second in the world rover challenge.

A big thankyou to Club President Lyn Mortimer for organising the huge event.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

ELWOOD CRICKET CLUB

Thursday, 21 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:49):

Finally, the Elwood Cricket Club has had an incredible season, bringing home two premierships.

The Club won the F-grade flag, captained by Andrew Byrns, and under-16 flag, captained by Wilson Crawford.

The Club has a proud history, having been formed in 1972. To raise money on formation, the Club had a beer bottle drive on Sunday nights at 9 cents a dozen.

Special congratulations to Club President Luke Stanley on the incredible year.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

BRIGHTON NORTH ROTARY - RECYCLE REGATTA

Thursday, 21 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:49):

The Brighton community headed down to Middle Brighton Pier on Sunday for the second annual Recycle Regatta, a Brighton North Rotary event that encourages participants to build floatable recycled boats for mental health.

With thirty boats crafted and a hotly contested Titanic Award for the best sinking boat, all had fun.

Thank you to Rotary volunteers and Club President Lyn Mortimer.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

BRIGHTON SOCCER CLUB

Wednesday, 1 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:33):

The Brighton Soccer Club celebrates its 100th year this year, and the Club recently unveiled a new kit, which has been redesigned to build connection with Indigenous peoples.

The Dendy Park based Club are the largest soccer club in Victoria. This year they will field 76 teams, with many dedicated girls' teams.

Congratulations to President Elliot Epstein on the centenary celebrations and his leadership.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

ELWOOD SAILING CLUB

Wednesday, 1 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:33):

On 20 May 1924 Elwood Sailing Club was formed as the Elwood Sea Canoe Club.

In the late 1920s members started fitting sails to their canoes. The first sailing canoe inspired the Seahorse-class yacht, hence the genesis of the seahorse Club logo.

The Club recently launched a centenary book written by Barbara Lloyd. Congratulations to Commodore Ross Lloyd on his leadership.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

ANTONIO CIPRIANO

Wednesday, 1 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:34):

Antonio Cipriano is an outstanding contributor to Bayside through his leadership with the 1st/14th Brighton Sea Scouts. The group is a powerhouse in Australia.

Tony was recently awarded Bayside Citizen of the Year for his contribution to the club and for providing leadership, mentoring and life skills to our young people.

Over his time, he has also mentored 20 leaders.

Heartfelt congratulations, Tony.

Thursday, 20 June 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:47):

This week the finalists of the Bayspeak competition held their finals in Parliament House. Bayspeak is a Rotary-led youth public speaking competition for Bayside secondary school students.

Speakers chose issues like mental health, the importance of connecting with our heritage and where all our missing socks go.

Congratulations to Junior Winner Sarah McCowan, Senior Winner Sanuli Mudannayake and runner-up Carey Tong.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

ANDREW LAWRENCE

Thursday, 15 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:09):

The Hampton Life Saving Club is a hub of Hampton. Each year the Club trains hundreds of children and ensures the safety of thousands of beachgoers, and it has helped countless people over its long history.

After ten years on the Board, with the last four as President, Andrew Lawrence has stepped down. His leadership has been exceptional.

As President he has led on inclusiveness, holding events in recognition of equality, the environment and mental health awareness, and he has been a strong supporter of the Starfish Nippers program and advocated for Bayside Council to improve disability access to the beach.

Thank you, Andy, for your incredible service.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

ELWOOD TOY LIBRARY

Tuesday, 27 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:53):

The Elwood Toy Library makes a big impact on our community.

Last year they joined 264 families as members, facilitated 15,160 hours of play and saved the average family \$1914 on toys.

Thank you to the families who contributed 800 volunteer hours to run the library, and a big thankyou to coordinator Simon Hall and the whole committee of management.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

BRIGHTON HEBREW CONGREGATION

Tuesday, 27 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:54):

The Brighton Hebrew congregation welcomed me for Shabbat recently.

Together we spoke about the deep antisemitism that exists and the need for Western countries like Australia to stop extremists from coming to our shores.

Only hours after my visit, Hezbollah terrorists were firing hundreds of rockets into Israel.

Thank you to rabbi Alex Tsykin and President David Wittenberg for your leadership of the shule.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

PROBUS CLUB OF BAYSIDE

Wednesday, 11 September 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:14):

In August 1994, 30 years ago, the Probus Club of Bayside was formed.

Today it remains one of the outstanding Probus Clubs in Bayside.

It has a strong membership of over 100 members who uphold the values of friendship, fellowship and fun.

The Club recently celebrated their wonderful 30th, and I congratulate President Jaan Enden and the whole Club on the remarkable achievement.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

1ST ELWOOD SCOUT GROUP

Wednesday, 11 September 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:14):

The 1st Elwood Scout Group is an important part of the Elwood community.

The growing group recently set up a fun activity day at the Elwood Community Market, and before long it was packed.

With Parliament sitting this week, I practiced the axe-throwing activity, knowing the skill might come in handy in Spring Street.

Congratulations, Group Leader Regan Della-Porta, on your leadership.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

BAYLEY HOUSE – FOOTBALL DAY

Wednesday, 16 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:52):

Kitted in their colours, the clients of Bayley House recently broke through the footy banner onto Wilson Street Reserve to celebrate football day.

Bayley House is a wonderful not-for-profit Brighton-based organisation that provides exceptional support for people with an intellectual disability.

Thank you to the Bayley House team, the AFL and past player Brendan Fevola for being part of the event.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

ST LEONARD'S COFFEE CUP CHALLENGE

Wednesday, 16 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:53):

Over the last seven years St Leonard's Uniting Church in Brighton has raised almost \$120,000 to combat homelessness.

A significant portion of their fundraising has been directed towards the Ruffy Swag project. The project produces swags that are distributed to rough sleepers around Wodonga. The Brighton donations have already funded 90 swags.

Thank you to Barry and Judy Schofield and Reverend Kim Cain for their dedication.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

ELWOOD SHULE

Thursday, 28 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:14):

With their foundation stone laid in February 1956 and the building opened in September the next year, the Elwood Shule has been an ark of faith and sanctuary in my community.

The Shule recently congregated to celebrate the induction of Rabbi Gavriel Fogelgarn.

I wish Gavriel, his wife Leah and their three boys' blessings of success, and congratulations to the President Mark Kuran and the board on their event.



SCHOOLS AND KINDERGARTENS

CONTITUENCY QUESTION

BRIGHTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Thursday, 8 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:51):

My Constituency Question is to the Premier.

When will the State Labor Government stop ignoring the genuine investment needs of Brighton Primary School?

In April next year Brighton Primary will celebrate 150 years of educating the young children of Brighton. It is almost as long since the school has received any meaningful capital investment.

The lack of capital investment is a significant concern to my community, with over 750 residents recently signing a petition calling on the Minister for Education to commit much-needed funding to this school.

As year 6 student Aleksandar recently wrote to the Minister for Education:

One of the most pressing issues we face is the state of our classrooms, particularly the 50-year-old relocatables that currently house two-thirds of our students.

For the Premier's background, Brighton Primary is home to one of the few specialist hearing units in Melbourne. Those children with hearing difficulties are taught in the demountables. The demountables are located right next to a train line.

These children deserve better. The State Government owes these children much, much better.

HAMPTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Wednesday, 21 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:43):

Hampton Primary School deserves the capital funding Labor promised them during the state election would be committed in the Budget.

The school has finalised a game-changing plan. With Hampton growing and the school being a community hub, the school deserves the money they were promised.

Congratulations to Principal Joshua Sheffield on his leadership and vision for the future of the wonderful school.

CONTITUENCY QUESTION

HAMPTON PRIMARY SCHOOL – GRADE SIX VISIT

Thursday, 21 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:49):

The students at Hampton Primary School always ask a lot of terrific questions, and it was no exception when I recently visited the grade 6 students.

The students wanted to understand Parliament and Government better, but it was their insights into policy in the future that were most powerful.

Thank you to School Captains Tasman and Emma and their teacher Anne Hostein for the invitation.

HAMPTON PRIMARY POLICY IDEAS

Thursday, 30 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:53):

Grade 6 students from Hampton Primary have shared with me a number of proactive initiatives for the Parliament to consider.

Concerned that less than 20 per cent people are properly hydrated, Mark and Tasman propose increasing water station infrastructure, which they feel also would reduce the use of plastic bottles.

And with concerns about mental health, Isaac and Jamie have proposed that more schools have pets in classrooms as animals improve mental health.

Thank you for the wonderful ideas, students.

ELSTERNWICK PRIMARY FUNDRAISING

Thursday, 30 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:53):

There are four very special leaders in my community – Max, Alby, Charlie and Oscar.

These four young people from Elsternwick Primary School have made a real difference and shown how one selfless act can make change.

The four students recently shaved their heads to raise money for Lung Foundation Australia following the diagnosis of a loved one.

Through their collective efforts these four young community leaders managed to raise \$23,000.

Thank you, Max, Alby, Charlie and Oscar. We are so proud of you.

SCHOOL FUNDING BROKEN PROMISES

Thursday, 30 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:53):

Before the last election the Labor Party promised two schools in my community funding upgrades.

These promises of \$9.8 million for Hampton Primary School and \$11.7 million for Gardenvale Primary School were ironclad commitments matched by the Liberal Party.

Yet after the election Labor broke their promises and have refused to provide the money in the Budget.

Only a pack of lying cheats would rip off children, and that is what the Labor Party is – a pack of lying cheats.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTION

HAMPTON EAST SCHOOL CROSSING

Thursday, 20 June 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:48):

My Constituency Question is to the Premier, and I ask how my local community can ensure the State Labor Government funds a much-needed pedestrian crossing in Dane Road.

The crossing will service the students from Hampton East School, a school that provides for students with additional needs.

Hampton East School is newly merged and educates young people from Prep to year 12. With the increase in students at the site, there is a new need to enhance local safety.

As young student Connor said to me, 'We've already had some near misses of students getting hurt,' and as student Danny said, 'It's difficult for students to cross the road safely.' As student Kelsey said to me, 'We have no crossing to make it safe to cross our road.'

We need to remember these pleas come from young people with special needs.

The community agrees with the calls and has started a petition in support.

Premier, this school and the local community deserve to be safe, and we call on the Labor Government to ensure their safety.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

DAISY AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Thursday, 15 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:09):

One of the big-hearted schoolchildren in my community, Daisy, shared her strong care for animal welfare with me.

Daisy is concerned about sports involving horses and Australians spending too much on gambling.

Daisy is heartbroken to know that horses are injured and die each year.

Thank you for your big heart and advocacy, Daisy.

CONTITUENCY QUESTION

GLEN HUNTLY ROAD PEDESTRIAN CROSSING

Thursday, 15 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:50):

My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the State Labor Government live up to its ironclad commitment to replace the existing school crossing on Glen Huntly Road with a proper pedestrian-operated crossing?

The Labor Government has failed to replace the crossing for years. The replacement is needed, the site is dangerous, and the crash data shows it.

The crossing supports several schools and a childcare centre and is heavily utilised as a pedestrian thoroughfare which joins both sides of the Elster canal walking path.

VicRoads has acknowledged the need for a proper crossing at the site, having previously confirmed it as a high priority.

The Department of Roads initially consulted with the community about installing a crossing but mistakenly proposed to install it 200 metres away from where it was needed.

A year ago, the Department confirmed they had got the location wrong, but since then the community has been stonewalled.

In August last year the Minister confirmed the ongoing intention to install the crossing in writing, but for the last year the silence has been deafening.

Premier, Labor should live up to their promises.

Thursday, 29 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:43):

My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the State Labor government accept that its kindergarten policy is having a detrimental effect on providers based in metropolitan Melbourne?

We know that the first years of life are the most important for learning and development. Sessional kindergarten offers quality preschool education to both three- and four-year-old children.

Bayside's community kindergartens recently met to talk about the future of services in our community and the need for council to communicate better, improve delivery of infrastructure upgrades and improve long-term strategic planning.

The group also discussed the importance of a sustainable funding model. Adequate funding will ensure that our kindergartens can continue to provide high-quality services.

For Melbourne kinders, the cost of rent and overheads is greater than the government's funding model, and by blocking providers from seeking support from parents to fill the shortfall Labor is risking the medium-term viability of quality Melbourne kindergarten providers.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY FESTIVAL

Wednesday, 11 September 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:14):

Each year Bayside schools come together to celebrate and acknowledge their environmental and student leadership achievements.

Elwood Primary School proudly showed me their wonderful project about Elster Creek.

This year 25 schools participated in the festival.

Thank you to the Port Phillip EcoCentre team, led by executive officer April Seymore, for a successful 19th festival.

ST MARY'S PRE-SCHOOL

Thursday, 28 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:14):

This year St Mary's Pre-School community kindergarten celebrates its 65th anniversary.

Based in Brighton East, the kindergarten provides high-quality kinder education to local Bayside three- and four-year-old children.

Local families enjoyed a wonderful celebration for the anniversary recently.

Thank you to the centre business operator Sophie Craig and President Myles Harris for their ongoing effort and leadership.



ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE

BUILDING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DOMESTIC BUILDING INSURANCE NEW OFFENCES) BILL 2023

Tuesday, 6 February 2024

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:23):

I rise to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Domestic Building Insurance New Offences) Bill 2023, and at the outset I do want to note how difficult this debate is for so many people.

This debate will touch on, throughout the discussion in both this place and the other place, issues that have absolutely wrecked people's lives, frankly speaking. People have had their dreams crushed. There is no greater dream perhaps than being able to buy your home, to go into a home and to – if you choose to – have a family in that home. That dream is crushed in many cases because of bad behaviour. We have seen that play out publicly, unfortunately, especially over the last year. We saw with the collapse of Porter Davis almost a year ago that there is a serious issue in terms of the industry and how consumers are protected.

At that time, in the middle of last year, the then Premier said:

... it can't continue operating the way it has been. It has got to be better, and we're determined to do that.

It was 270 days ago that he said that, in the fallout from the Porter Davis collapse and with so many people being so devastated by that collapse. Something needed to be done about it. I think a lot of people looked on, heard him, and said 'Perhaps there has been a wake-up call. Perhaps the Government has had

a wake-up call, and we are going to see action. We are going to see greater protections.'

What this Bill does is nowhere near enough. The Coalition will not be opposing the Bill, because it does do something, but it does not do anywhere near enough. I will speak to what the Bill does, some of the industry feedback to that and also the depth of the problem and note how little is being done.

The Bill, as I mentioned, is a consumer protection Bill effectively. But what it does not do is go to the root cause of the problem. I was at a series of homes recently where the builder had not taken out insurance. The buildings were in a state that I will describe later. One of the homeowners, who was just crying her eyes out, said to me, 'I have more protection if I buy a toaster than if I buy a home, and I am broken.' Her neighbour was living in a van opposite the site in Frankston. That is a site in Frankston. I know that the Minister is aware of the site, and I will speak to it a little bit later.

We all want to see greater protections. We all want to see the issues that exist fixed; I know it sounds simple. This Bill, unfortunately, does not do enough. As I said, it does do something, so the Coalition will not be opposing it. But we will move a reasoned Amendment, and I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this House refuses to read this Bill a second time until the Government commits to comprehensively protect victims and their families from rogue behaviour from a small minority of dodgy builders and the potential loss of their deposit if a building company collapses'.

270 days ago, we heard that something would be done. What does this Bill do? If you strip the Bill down to its basic core, what it effectively does is insert new offences for builders who demand or receive money under a domestic building contract if the builder has not ensured that the work that is to be carried out is covered by insurance. That is the core of what this Bill does. It inserts new offences, and when looking at those offences it is hard not to agree with the need for those offences.

Of course, no-one should be demanding money where they are not appropriately insured. We have seen too many examples of the hurt, the devastation and the pain where that has occurred, where builders have not been appropriately insured and families have been left with no funds, clearly because they have been ripped off, so an offence is appropriate. Unfortunately, that does not go far enough.

I will turn to some of the specific feedback from industry in relation to the Bill, because it is important to put that on record. I will start with Master Builders Victoria, which called for the Government to prioritise the review of the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 before the Parliament considers this Bill.

It is important because what the Master Builders are saying is there are bigger issues, not that this is not important but there is much more to be done, and we are not doing enough at a macro level. A further quote:

The legislation must be clearer and fit for purpose. The current legislation contains a notable grey area concerning the timing of domestic building insurance contract signing and deposit collection.

Further, preliminary agreements or holding deposits paid before the formal signing of a domestic building contract are some of the issues raised. A number of other issues in relation to the definition of 'builder', which is a change that is made in this act, have also been raised. Effectively what the Master Builders association is saying is that there is a bigger problem and more needs to be done – and that would be my contention and the Coalition's contention also.

I will move to the Housing Industry Association and their feedback on the Bill, because they have raised concerns as well. They have raised concerns about the breadth of the Bill:

The fact is that the regulations are not being improved. It is just being added to, and it is causing more complexity. A lot of the time the Government comes up with proposals to change the laws because they have not been able to enforce or make use of existing laws. I think there is a real fear here that we are going

to see a lot more regulation imposed to try and deal with people who are not doing the right thing, and what will happen is we will see more rules for those who are trying to do the right thing and more rules for those who do not want to do the right thing ignored.

Those are important points in relation to the Housing Industry Association's feedback. So, we have the master builders, who were talking about a broader, much bigger problem, and the Housing Industry Association effectively saying the changes do not fix the problem.

The Association of Consulting Architects have made similar points but also made the point that the Victorian Building Authority do not have the capacity or expertise necessary to cover the workload required for the depth of the issues that exist.

I do think that it is important to have a conversation around the VBA, because at the end of the day it is the role of the authority to ensure that behaviour is appropriate, to ensure that the industry is performing as it should be. The VBA has previously publicly talked about the fact that it is on builders to make sure they do the job right, and that is a notable point, but at the end of the day it is also up to the authority to ensure that work is being checked appropriately and to weed out bad behaviour.

You see as you look at New South Wales a need to expand upon that work. I note they have a Building Commissioner, who has recently both received support from the former Government and had a significant increase of funds under the new Labor Government to do work around inspections. I am not proposing that as a solution, rather it is by way of noting the difference in models in states, because clearly we have issues that are not being resolved in Victoria, and other states – Queensland, and I spoke about New South Wales – have dealt with those issues differently and fairly recognise that the depth of the problem is greater than anybody would want, especially at a time when we need to build more homes.

We need to build more homes, which means people want to build more homes more quickly, and the proportion of people doing the wrong thing in effect will clearly require further oversight, because if you are building more and you are trying to rush that build, you will see either a level of performance that sometimes is not up to scratch just through the sheer speed of the work – but also you will see people come into a market to try and make money out of a growing industry. And we have seen that in a number of ways in terms of public policy over the years. I think we all saw the pink batts rollout as an example of speeding an industry up and there not being enough oversight and regulation around that growth in industry. And as we need to build homes, we need to assess whether or not we are appropriately ensuring that industry, who for the overwhelming most part are doing a good job – the overwhelming most part are doing a good job, but there is a small minority, a very small minority, whose behaviour is not just egregious but is just breaking people's dreams, destroying people's dreams. So, we need to make sure that we are doing more.

I mentioned a number of peak bodies who had spoken about their concerns, and I do also note Oldham Fairweather Legal, who said the fine associated with the new offence in this Bill:

... is kind of useless ... The only reason why this becomes relevant is if the builder has taken the deposit and kind of scurried off.

That is an issue, and what he is saying is that the root cause of the problem is not being addressed. If you look at the feedback to this Bill overall as a package, I think it would be fair to say the central theme of that feedback is the root cause of the issue is not being addressed. And that is what the Coalition is contending today: that we do not oppose the offence being put on the statute book – of course we do not oppose it – but the root cause of the problem is not being addressed.

Further, the firm said:

It's going to overload an already jammed and massively under-resourced justice system ...

and:

They've got these avenues to justice but no justice ...

All of the feedback that I am pointing to makes those same points that we have a very big problem and not enough is being done. So, when we consider the Bill, we do have to recognise that this is not an issue that happened yesterday.

I spoke about the former Premier 270 days ago saying: 'We're going to do something about it.' Well, 270 days later this Parliament is considering one new offence – 270 days to write one new offence. I mean, is that a lot of work over the last 270 days? Is that doing enough?

We have been shocked, I think, over recent weeks to see the example of Montego Homes appear in the media. In that circumstance there have been an estimated 63 people and families affected. Unfortunately, these Victorians are not eligible for the very limited scheme of payment that the Government announced following the Porter Davis collapse, and the difficulty with the payment that was announced in that circumstance is there have been more instances since, but they are not eligible for compensation. So, I would say one thing the Government could look at is where we have an instance as we have seen in recent days – and I will mention some of the Victorians that have been affected because they deserve to have their voices heard – the Government should consider offering them a lifeline, as they have with other collapses.

I think it is just not right to say that because of a time frame they are eligible, as some collapse victims have been, but that more recent ones are not eligible. For what reason? Of course, every time you add a time frame it does cost you more money. Of course, it does. We definitely have budget constraints as a State, but I think we need to look at our priorities and say, 'How do we look at 63 people and their families who are affected in this instance and say, "Because of the cut-off only recently none of you are eligible for support"?' It is just wrong – 63 families.

I will mention Tiana Hutcherson and Matthew Coppen, who said:

Losing this deposit and trying to work out where we're pulling the money from is an absolute nightmare ...

an absolute nightmare. And further:

I'm praying something like –

the Porter Davis payment –

... can be done for us ...

She and her partner are about to get married. Can you imagine the heartache they are going through as a family, the two of them – and the broader family, I am sure – at this time to know that they do not have a lifeline? They are saying to the Government, 'Please, please extend that payment to our circumstance.' Those families will be coming to Parliament over the week, and I would strongly say to the Government to please think about their cases. Please find it in your good conscience to consider those 63 families, because they absolutely deserve a level of protection similar to others and should not be cut off purely because of that time frame.

That example is not the only example. I am sure that every Member of this place has come across someone who has been affected in this way, and it is just heartbreaking.

I recently went to Frankston to a site. I know the Minister is aware of it; there have been representations over a long period of time to the Minister in relation to that site. There are two builds, one of them is in Frankston South. The site has some 15 to 20 townhouses. When you walk onto the site it is actually jarring that anything of that nature could have been built. I will not go into the details surrounding the case specifically, but there are issues, clearly, around the builder, and there are issues around who approved what. Are there questions perhaps around relationships and whether appropriate relationships existed around that process?

You walk onto the site, and you meet dozens of people who do not know what to do and have run out of money with nowhere to go. The first person I met at the site was living in his van across the road. He had been living in his van for – he could not tell me for how long. I then met a number of other residents, but this first man really struck me. He took me into his home, and it was very kind of him to allow me into his home. As I walked through the hallway the water damage was so bad that you could not breathe because of the mould in the walls. You could not breathe.

One of the other residents who lived in a different block had come to walk in with us, and she had to leave because the smell was so bad, she thought she was going to vomit. We walked into his property, and part of the roof had fallen in, and the balcony above had collapsed. I do note the Government has assisted with funding in relation to cladding replacement, and I do acknowledge that funding, but in terms of the structural damage to the buildings themselves you are almost at a point where those buildings need to be stripped right back to frame. They are just so bad. As you walk along there is so much water that it seeps out of the ground as you walk. You cannot go into the underground car park because it is a pool, and you need to be very careful as you walk along because balconies have collapsed.

I do not think anyone could look at that level of building – can you even call it a building? – or that level of construction and say, ‘That type of construction is fair, reasonable or what we would hope any Victorian should have to live in.’ But there are no avenues for the people who own those properties. There are just no avenues. The more people you talk to who have been touched by these, for want of a better word, crimes – I do not know what other word to use; I just do not know what other word to use – you see that these properties in many instances are very new. In most cases they are very, very new. You visit them, and they are almost demolition quality the moment you see them. What you will hear from the victims on every occasion is they have gone to the VBA – on every occasion – and they have tried to get support.

Discussion around the Authority is a difficult conversation to have. Some of the issues in relation to the Authority have been aired. They have been aired, and some of them are very difficult. I will not go into some of the internal issues in relation to the VBA that are difficult to talk about, because there are some very, very concerning cultural issues that have been aired and that have had the worst possible impact upon people associated, so I think it is important to note that.

In relation to the site in Frankston I visited, I should mention the Member for Mornington, who first became aware of that particular site when he was the Federal Member. Because he is a good person – and that is the reason – he has kept a strong friendship with the victims involved and been a guide to them in trying to get support, in trying to advocate in whatever way that he could advocate. Not the local Member – the local Member does not sit on our side of the Chamber – but the Member for Mornington, even when he was not a Member of Parliament, was a point of contact for these victims, so I do want to acknowledge the Member for his work in relation to those victims and thank him for his advocacy on their behalf. I am sure he will speak to some of those matters in his contribution.

But I was speaking about the VBA and some of the issues that have been raised publicly. Some that can be touched on are things like inspections being conducted by iPhone, not once – a level of poor inspection that was so systemic industry leaders have formally raised it. They have formally raised it publicly, have put out media releases about it, have raised it with the Government. You cannot expect to be properly inspecting a property if you are doing it by iPhone.

The issues surrounding quality of inspection are important to highlight. They are important to put on record because we need to do better. The Government needs to do better to ensure that there is a level of quality in terms of inspection, and that is clearly an issue. We have seen for probably the last year most major bodies talk about lack of compliance around the Building Act 1993. We have heard people talking about concerns over the technical capacity of inspectors, so not just how they are performing the inspection but also their capacity. In

no way am I reflecting on the staff, because I am sure there are a lot of staff who work very, very hard in the authority. I am sure that there is more work for them to do than they have time to do it in, but we do need to make sure that for the type of work they do they are fully trained – I do not think that is an unreasonable thing for them to be – and that the type of work they do is appropriate to the job they are doing.

You look over the last year and a number of issues have been raised not just in terms of types of inspection – I mentioned the iPhone issue – but also things like roof checks being done from the street and people in industry saying things like there is blanket noncompliance in roof construction on most major new developments. That is scary. That was a comment from Russell Kirkwood, a licensed plumber, who further said:

It's the wild west out there – roof plumbers are certifying whatever they want to certify because there is nobody checking. And the consumer is the one that suffers.

When we look at this Bill, what we are seeing is a Bill that is a drop in the ocean, frankly. It is a drop in the ocean in a space where there are so many people who are being hurt and not being protected. There is not a level of consumer protection that should exist. In the instances of people who have been so much victim to poor behaviour, those victims, unfortunately, have not been given a fair or reasonable level of cover. Montego is a perfect example of 63 people and their families who have not received a level of protection.

The Coalition will not be opposing the Bill. We have proposed a reasoned Amendment to say we need to do more. We cannot keep saying we are going to do something at some point as a Government. The Government cannot keep saying that it is going to do something. For the last year in this space that is what we have heard: we are going to do something. When, Government, are you going to do something? When are you going to do something to protect the people that deserve protection and ensure that we have a system that we would all expect as Victorians?

BILL

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (RENEWABLE ENERGY AND STORAGE TARGETS) BILL 2023

Tuesday, 20 February 2024

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:55):

I rise to speak on the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023.

I start by saying that the Coalition will not be opposing this Bill that we are considering today. What we have seen over the last week is something I know every Member of this place is concerned about. We saw last week 530,000 people go without power. Today, right now, 3170 still do not have power connections, and 2620 homes remain unconnected.

We must have energy that is reliable, affordable and clean, and what we saw last week was the biggest blackout in our State's history.

When you listen to the Government, the first thing they will say is, 'It is not our fault. A weather event was unforeseen, and we could not have done anything about it.' We know that is not true.

So, when we consider this Bill today, although the Coalition will not be opposing it, we have serious concerns, because we know that the Government is not providing secure and reliable energy for Victorians.

Over recent days we have heard of multiple examples where the Government was warned about the issues that we have in our grid. It was warned by very informed peak bodies of concerns about the grid, the infrastructure and the potential impact of significant events. I refer to just one example, the energy market operator warning last year that:

The story for Australia is becoming more and more clear, but also more and more urgent ...

Quite simply, Australia's energy transition is happening at pace. Our coal fired power stations are closing down at the same time as demand for electricity is increasing and without urgent and ongoing investment in new sources of electricity, and the transmission that we need to connect it to consumers – there are significant risks to reliability.

That is what played out only a week ago with 530,000 people left without power and thousands still without.

We know from media reports that one in seven of the 13,000 electricity transmission towers is damaged by patchy or extensive rust. The system needs investment, and the system needs upgrading, because if we want to ensure that the community is provided with reliable, affordable and clean energy, we must make sure that the system works, and it is not working. And the human costs of the last week was, frankly, catastrophic – the worst blackout in our State's history.

So, when we consider this Bill, we are not just considering targets. What we are also considering is how we ensure the plan for our energy transition works to guarantee that we have reliable, affordable and clean energy into the future, and each of those aspects I will be speaking to later today. But we know that there are no guarantees when it comes to reliability. We absolutely know that the cost of energy has increased 25 per cent over the last year, so the issues around affordability –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for Question Time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:52):

Just to reiterate, the Coalition will not be opposing this Bill. What this Bill does at its core is set climate targets and put those in legislation. On principle at the last election the Coalition put a policy forward to legislate targets, because if you are doing 30 years of transformational change in your economy, it is only right that you understand what you are doing, that you track what you are doing and that you also transparently make it clear to the community what you are doing. So at the last election the Coalition put forward a commitment to legislate targets.

I recall in this very place having an argument across the Chamber in Question Time with the Premier, who said something like it will be a cold day in hell before he listens to the advice of legislating targets. We stand here today with the Government committing to legislating targets, and I note their acceptance of that policy position that the Coalition took to the last election.

We will not be opposing the Bill, but I will be moving a reasoned Amendment. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this House refuses to read this Bill a second time until the Government:

- 1) guarantees secure and reliable energy for every Victorian, noting the recent system collapse which led to 530,000 people without power;
- 2) commits to energy being affordable, noting the 25 per cent price increase over the last year;
- 3) details how Victoria will have adequate baseload power, noting the state government's ban on gas;

4) sets out a plan to upgrade 57-year-old transmission infrastructure, noting that almost one in seven of Victoria's 13,000 electricity transmission towers is damaged and experts warned the Government in 2020 of the risks in extreme weather events;

5) reveals to Victorians exactly how the new planning powers, and Ministerial directions, will operate, and why the Government is stripping communities from planning decisions;

6) explains what the impact will be on agricultural land, when analysis from the Government's offshore wind policy directions paper of March 2020 shows that to meet net zero targets up to 70 per cent of Victoria's land will need to host wind and solar farms;

7) provides an update on how Victoria will reach the 2032 wind target, noting the collapse of the flagship project in Hastings; and

8) provides public transparency on climate measures through a website with live measures covering emissions, renewable energy, battery storage, and wind energy.'

The Coalition will not be opposing the Bill, but there are serious concerns around the capacity of this Government to deliver reliable, affordable, clean energy.

We know that because of what we saw last week, and I touched on those tragic events earlier – 530,000 people without power, the worst power outage event in the State's history. But we also saw frankly one of the most embarrassing State displays at the start of this year with the Federal Government's knockback of the Hastings project, which is referred to in the Amendment. It was so tragic to see a policy space where a Premier would stand up in front of the nation's media – because it did become a National issue – and not understand what her own Government was doing.

We must ensure that energy is provided in a reliable way, and part of what this Bill does is legislate targets on wind energy. To deliver wind energy you will have to have projects that are in place, where the turbines are turning, by

2032. There are serious commitments at law for energy to be provided by 2032. Sadly, what we know is that there is currently no plan for wind energy. There is no plan to ensure that we have any projects committed to. The Premier, when she spoke to the media and referred to the Hastings project and spoke to the work that she was doing in lobbying the Federal Government to change their position and approve a project on a Ramsar site, which will never happen, did not understand that her own Minister had referred the matter off for further investigation. The Premier stated at that press conference that her own Government had approved the project, which clearly it had not.

When it comes to how we ensure there is a transition of energy, we need to make sure that there are plans in place to do it. Obviously, part of that work does involve setting targets and monitoring those targets – it absolutely needs to ensure that there is a transparent overarching plan to do that – but what it means is that all the pieces underneath need to be in place, and they are clearly not in place. We know because we have heard the warnings repeatedly. I referred to some at the start of my earlier contribution, but if I can go back to the energy operator's warnings of late last year:

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

Further:

The projected electrification of traditional gas loads, particularly heating loads in Victoria, increases forecast consumption and maximum demands in winter. For Victoria in particular, winter peak demands may exceed summer peak demands by the end of the ...Electricity Statement of Opportunities horizon.

What the operator has said and warned repeatedly is that we have an imminent and urgent problem in ensuring that we have the electricity that we need, that we have a system that provides reliable and affordable energy, and that is what this reasoned Amendment speaks to.

I spoke at first about the need for secure and reliable energy given recent events but also a commitment to affordable energy. In the last year we have seen a 25 per cent increase in cost. The Government will ignore that fact, but no matter who you talk to in the community, the cost of energy is almost always their first cost of-living concern. The cost is crippling people. It is absolutely crippling people, and a 25 per cent increase in cost is not something that any Government should sit idly by and allow.

If we want to see a transition in terms of our economy, we have to ensure that we take people with us, and one of the ways that people are taken with us is for things like affordability to be a priority for the Government, not a point to be ignored by the Government. As the transition is occurring, we are seeing a cost impact that is absolutely devastating people. The Government needs to provide a commitment, and the Coalition is calling for that commitment.

Further, we absolutely need detail from the Government on how Victoria will be provided with adequate baseload power. The ideological obsession of the Government's gas ban is frankly dangerous. I think the community are finally understanding both that the Government is intent on this ideological gas ban and the impact that it is having. You only need to look at the impact last week to see what an ideological gas ban will do to communities when they need baseload power. They need to ensure that power is available, and this ideological obsession is frankly dangerous, so the Government needs to be called to account over that gas ban.

I referred earlier to the 57-year-old transmission infrastructure and reports that have appeared in the media around that. If I can refer to a recent media report, one in seven of Victoria's 13,000 electricity transmission towers is damaged. About 8000, or more than half, are now about a decade or less from the end of their service life. If I can quote the Australian energy regulator:

All failed structures were built to historical design standards with inadequate strength to withstand convective downdraft winds occurring during extreme storm events.

What that was is another warning that we are not adequately prepared for reliable energy. The core of providing reliable energy is an adequate system and an adequate grid to deliver it to people's homes. I mean, nothing could be more obvious. To know that the infrastructure has not received the maintenance required should concern every Victorian. I know last week, when the weather event hit and pictures of the damage to the towers were circulated, that shock went through the community, to see what was happening across those lines. We need to be prepared. We need to ensure that our infrastructure is ready for the future and, sadly, it is not.

We call on the Government to set out a plan – a plan I do note that at the last Election formed part of the Coalition's policy push. Sadly, since then we have not seen the Government take any serious action in that regard. The Coalition did put at the very centre of their policy platform the two items that I have just mentioned.

We talked about the need for gas as a transition fuel and the importance thereof. We also talked about the need for our grid infrastructure to be adequate and up to date, and part of that policy included working closely with industry to see that happen. You can only look at the last week to see how adversarial the relationship between Government and industry is in these issues. When it comes to upgrading infrastructure, we need to, as Government, partner with industry to ensure that we have a reliable system for the future, so we call strongly on the Government to set out a plan to ensure that our infrastructure is set for the future.

In terms of the planning powers contained in the Bill, there are very wide ranging planning powers which effectively allow the Minister to set out a determination in relation to a Planning Scheme Amendment and take into account climate events in making that determination.

In the Government briefing, which they did kindly provide, they did make it clear that quite a lot of the detailed work around the operation of that Direction is still underway. So, though the power is being provided in a Bill, the work to see what

it will do in an operational sense has not been fully done. The Government confirmed that work had not been completed, was still underway, and you are talking about a sweeping planning power which will have significant impacts across the community. I mean, the Bill effectively gives unfettered power to the Minister to make a direction in these matters. That Direction must be considered, and I think that it would be fair to say in practice municipalities will often – even though it is not a requirement – heed to the Direction. To not understand and not know the full details of what that power may entail is concerning, and the community has a right to know what that power will entail.

Unfortunately, as the Bill currently stands the community does not know and the Government was not able to provide that information around how that power will operate, so the Coalition is calling for the Government to reveal how those planning powers – in terms of the Ministerial Directions – will operate and also to ensure that communities are fully consulted throughout these processes. Because at the end of the day community should always be at the heart of decisions about the future of those communities.

We are seeing with the planning reforms more generally a view from the Government that community should be stripped away from the centre of planning decisions, that communities should not have a say in their own future and that planning decisions should be made in Spring Street from an ivory tower, which runs contrary, frankly, to the concept of a democracy.

But the community will see and is seeing through those proposals, and you can see it in terms of the backlash from municipal bodies and peak bodies. They are meeting with the Government through their Government briefings, and then they are putting out media releases or ringing the Opposition and saying what the Government is proposing is just wrong in principle. The wholesale takeover of planning at a centralised level is outrageous, and that will play out over coming months, and so it should. We can see that there is a groundswell, a campaign in the community, to stop the Government centralisation of planning power – and so it should be.

When it comes to this particular power, the Coalition has called on the Government to fully explain what that power will entail.

I mentioned previously the Hastings issue; that was just an absolute disgrace to see at a State level the State Government propose something. I am not aware of a single instance where permission has been given on a Ramsar site for a project to go ahead. I am not aware of a single instance, so I do not know how, when that project was first proposed, someone did not just ring the Federal Minister's office and say, 'What do you think?' They would have just poured cold water on it a second later, yet we were months if not years down the track of a project which quite obviously could not proceed. To not only have it fail – have a Labor Government knock it on its head; a Labor Government knocked over the State Labor Government – effectively what they did, the Federal Government, in knocking over that proposal was say, 'Your wind strategy now has no meat in it.'

Peter Walsh interjected.

James NEWBURY: No wind in it, as the Leader of the National Party says. So, we are considering a commitment to a wind target in this Bill, a target where there is no detail as to how we can achieve it. These projects take 10 years at the best of times from idea to turbines turning. We are talking about putting in place a level of infrastructure in the sea and back to land in an almost unprecedented way, especially when it comes to Australia, so this is a significant project that will require enormous community cooperation and consultation, and to see the flagship project fall over in January says that the Government does not understand what it is going to do.

I reiterate the point with the Hastings project that it is all very well and good to have targets, and it is important to set out measures of where you are going – it is essential to understand where you intend to go, and as Government you should always set out where you intend to go – but what matters is how you deliver it.

We have seen over the last two months two central core components of the energy transition fall over, and the community is rightfully saying that Government needs to do more than set a target, they need to explain to us how we are going to achieve it. When it comes to wind – and we have just spoken to wind energy – what is the wind project that will be delivered by 2032?

Fortunately for the Minister – and perhaps that is why the Minister wrote the Bill in this way – there is not a single punishment in relation to this Bill. When the Government does not meet a target, there is literally no punishment. There is no consequence. There is nothing in this Bill that says there is anything that happens to the Minister. There is no consequence for not meeting it. In fact, on meeting the targets the Minister and the Premier just determine them. So not only is there no consequence for not meeting a target, the Minister and the Premier around the corner in the Premier's office can just determine when it happens. When it comes to things like wind energy, the Government has not done enough to explain to the community how that generation will be provided.

I will also note the transparency component of the Amendment. The community deserves to know, frankly in a real-time, easy-to-access way, where the Government is up to when it comes to the targets that the Government has set. You could suggest that the targets are hidden or not reported because the Government does not want people looking at the deliverables on the targets they set, and there is not an easy-to-use, friendly point. I made the point in the Government briefing that primary school kids should have the capacity through school to pull up a Government website which has all of the targets on it and where it is up to at that time. It is not an unreasonable thing. What this Bill does is say the Minister once a year has to come into this place and deliver an annual account for where each of the targets is up to.

Is that really good enough? Is it really good enough that we say to kids in our communities that we are waiting on the Minister to walk into the Chamber and provide an annual account? I think it is only reasonable that this information is kept available. We know why some of it is not.

When it comes to electric vehicles, the Government has a commitment of 50 per cent of new vehicles to be electric by 2030. They are currently at 6 per cent. Is it any wonder that is not being reported? The national average is 8 per cent, and this Government is at 6 per cent. No wonder that is not being reported. When it comes to wind, right now it is zero. When it comes to emissions and renewables, those numbers are available on separate websites. From memory, the last renewables figure was dated early 2023. These are not new figures, but they should be available.

I say again that the Coalition will not be opposing this Bill. We will not be opposing this Bill, but Victorians must have reliable, affordable and clean energy. If we are transitioning our economy, we need to do more than just set targets. I repeat again: the Coalition took to the last Election a commitment to legislate targets. The former Premier in this very place – I think the words he used were that it would have to be a cold day in hell for him to take my advice on legislating targets. But we stand here saying we will not oppose this Bill, because targets are an important measure. They are an important mechanism. However, it is the detail underneath, and what this Amendment does is call out so many failures in relation to the detail of how we get there.

If we want the community to follow and to understand where we are going as a state, we need to make sure that each element that is set out in that Amendment is a question that is properly answered. They are not.

530,000 people last week were without power, the biggest power outage in our State's history. We do not have reliable energy. At the same time, we have a Government that is pushing forward with an ideological gas ban to undermine baseload power security. The Government has serious questions to answer. I call on the Government in good spirit to consider the points in the Amendment and to provide public detail about all of those genuine issues in that Amendment.

FIREARMS AND CONTROL OF WEAPONS (MACHETES) AMENDMENT BILL 2024

Thursday, 22 February 2024

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:35):

I rise to speak on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024.

This debate is a difficult debate. It is a difficult debate about issues that I know all of us in this Chamber are concerned about, and we have seen over time deep concerns in our community about safety, so throughout this debate a number of Members have made important contributions about crimes that have occurred in their communities.

Only this week some terrible crimes occurred in my community in Hampton – shocking crimes where there were people, families, who were subjected to home invasion. Unfortunately, it was not the only instance where this has occurred. It has been ongoing. We have seen Members across both sides of the Chamber speak to those matters and speak to these incidents occurring across their communities.

It is important when we talk about these issues that we do it with consideration and we do it with the spirit that it should be spoken about, and that is to speak on behalf of the community and the victims, those who have been affected, and talk about what we can do as a Parliament to make sure that people are safe. At the end of the day that is what we all want, isn't it? It is safety for our broader community. We want to make sure that people are safe in their homes and on their streets. I know as I look across the Chamber and see the Minister for Police, I am sure both sides of this Chamber want to ensure that we have a

level of community safety where people feel safe in their homes – not just are safe in their homes but they feel safe in their homes – and this Bill is a measure to increase safety for the community in terms of control of machete weapons.

Sadly, it would be fair to say that crimes involving machetes have increased terribly. They are crimes that have, I think, scared the community in a way that has certainly caused increasing concern for all Victorians. The idea that you could have someone break into your home is an unimaginable fear. It is unimaginable.

As a father of young children, and I am sure for every parent of young children, the idea of someone coming into your home while you are asleep is one of the scariest things that you can imagine. To know that they may be carrying a machete scares the life out of you, honestly – it absolutely scares the life out of you. So, when these crimes actually occur and when those fears become a reality – when you see videos of those crimes and you see pictures of those crimes – as a Victorian you are just shocked to the core that these crimes have occurred. So, I am sure I say on behalf of every Member that we want to do everything we possibly can to make sure that these crimes do not occur, that they do not happen to anybody.

I have spoken about it before in this place but there was quite a shocking incident near Bay Street in Brighton where a father went out to go for a morning swim in his back pool and left the back door open. It was about 7 o'clock in the morning. It probably was not an uncommon thing, you know – Dad went out to have a swim in the morning before heading off to work, and while he did two people came in through the back door. It is not an uncommon thing to think that if you go out into your backyard you can leave your back door unlocked. The partner of the daughter of the homeowner walked out of his bedroom and into the kitchen, and there were two home invaders standing there with machetes. When you talk to the families, the victims, after an incident like that, it really shakes you in terms of how they are. Your immediate thoughts go to the

victims, of course they do. Your first thoughts are about understanding if they are okay. But you do immediately think, 'Where else is this happening? Could this happen again? Who else could be victims of such a crime?'

Knowing crimes of that nature occur in our community certainly brings fear to your mind. I do not think for any Victorian that should be part of their thinking. No Victorian wants to think that it is possible for these crimes to occur, so it is important in relation to this Bill and in relation to the law that we protect the community from these crimes occurring. Whether it be increasing penalties, whether it be enhancing the law or whether it be ensuring our bail system works and acts as a deterrent, all of these measures are important. But so too are police resources, and police resourcing is an issue in my community. I say that in as constructive a way as possible.

My community feels very, very strongly that the local police in our community do an incredible job. Many of the police force that are located in our community are known to the community through their community work and through their community engagement. We have a community forum next Tuesday night, which is a fantastic opportunity for Bayside people to speak to police to understand work that is going on in our community. I would strongly recommend to anybody in Bayside that they go down to that community forum in Sandringham. The community know how hard the local cops are working in our community, but we do need to also point out that we are seeking increased resourcing in our community, and I say that to the Minister in as constructive a way as possible.

I have spoken previously about the need for an additional police station. It is something that my community feels very strongly about, and so they should. Before the election many people in my community raised this, and we took a policy to the election of a new police station in Brighton. Post the election I have run petitions, surveys and everything that you would expect a Member to do, and thousands of people have called for that increased resource. I say that in a constructive way, and I do hope the Minister takes my comments in that way.

They are not in any way to detract from the work of our local police, because our community, to a man and a woman, knows how hard the police in our community work. We engage with the local cops in a fantastic way all the time.

I will give a second shout-out to the community forum next Tuesday evening in Sandringham, a really great opportunity for Bayside people to come to the Sandringham Yacht Club, I believe it is, and to talk to the local police about their work, their programs and what they have been doing and to ask questions. It is great for people in our community to meet the people who are protecting them and put a name to a face – nothing could be better than that – and work together in good spirit. I certainly encourage everybody in our community to do that.

But in relation to the Bill, it is important that we ensure that our laws fully protect us – that is what they are there for – and machete crimes have increased. They are concerning. Not only has there been a 68-burglary-a-day average in recent times, but we are seeing these machete crimes, so it is important that the Government implement laws that protect us from these most heinous crimes, not just the home invasions but where these types of violent, violent weapons are used. I am sure, as the Shadow has mentioned, that there are ways that the Coalition has put forward that we could have more fulsome protections in relation to these weapons and the laws more generally. This week we have had a debate in this place about bail laws and ensuring that our bail laws are more fulsome. We had a question in Question Time about that very issue today. But this Bill does something, and we need to as a Parliament do something. We must do something to protect our community from these crimes. These new laws will do something, and it is important that we do to protect our community.

BILL

CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT (SEC) BILL 2023 STATE ELECTRICITY COMMISSION AMENDMENT BILL 2023

Tuesday, 5 March 2024

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:30):

I rise to speak on the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 and State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 as a cognate debate.

Before speaking about the matters of the Bills it is important to talk about how we got here and the background to that matter. This afternoon this Parliament will be dealing with these Bills in a cognate fashion, which means that the Government moved a motion which requires that the Bills be debated together – the Bills have to be debated at the same time. When they moved that Motion, what the Government said was that we must debate those Bills together because there is no other way. There is no other way than they be debated together. The Government advised me that at 5 o'clock we will divide on one of those Bills and then we will debate one of them separately. Let me say that again so the Chamber understands: 'These Bills must be debated together,' the Government said. I have not gone back to get the Leader of the House's contribution on this debate. I have not gone back to read those comments back into Hansard, the need that these Bills could not be debated separately, but after 5 o'clock they will. So, they will be – they must be – debated cognately.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

James NEWBURY: They have to be; there is no other way – except after 5 o'clock today. That is what political expediency is about. We know because the Greens belled the cat during their debate on the Government Business Program just earlier today when they said that the vote on the Bill this afternoon is happening because it is happening at the right time to ensure, in my view, that the Members are here to reach their required 53 votes on the Bill. This is outrageous. It is outrageous that the Government has played such pathetic games with this Bill.

Only last year the Government said the Bills had to be dealt with last year. They put it on the Government Business Program. They sent the Government Business Program to the world at large and then pulled the Bills. They did not want to debate the Bills they said must be debated – how embarrassing for the Minister. And why didn't the Government want to deal with it – because they could not get their Members in to this place for a vote. How extraordinary! How extraordinary it is that the Government could not manage its own numbers to get its own Members here for a vote so they pulled the Bills – how embarrassing.

After 100 days – it has been almost 110 days since the Government introduced the Bills – we have had a third issue, and that is that the Minister has refused to provide a briefing on those Bills for over 100 days. To give the Government some credit –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

James NEWBURY: I will; I will give the Government some credit – most Ministers, in fact I would go so far as to say almost all Ministers, accept that it is only reasonable for an Opposition and Victorians more broadly to be provided with an opportunity for a briefing on a Bill. It is not unreasonable; in fact, it is a healthy part of democracy because it is not just the Opposition who is briefed, it is industry, it is key stakeholders and it is the community that have raised concerns through the Opposition. That briefing provides an opportunity to deal with those matters raised. But, sadly, this Minister does not. This Minister refused to allow the Opposition to have a briefing. In fact, she refused when her

own Department came to the Opposition and said they wanted to hold one. Can you believe it?

The Department said to the Opposition they stood ready to do it – direct quote – but the Minister said no. After pushing with the Premier directly and after pushing with the Leader of the House, the Government provided a Bill briefing yesterday afternoon. Guess how many Department officials were there to assist with that Bill briefing? To answer important questions, how many do you think were there?

Danny O'Brien interjected.

James NEWBURY: There was less than one – zero. The Government – well, the Minister – would not allow the Department to show up. I have never seen that before.

I have never seen a circumstance where the Department was gagged from attending a Bill briefing. I mean, does it surprise any of us to see that there are no Department officers here today. For most Bills you will have a Department officer here. In fact, I think that that is also a precedent. If I can say to the readers of Hansard, there are currently no Department officers sitting in the Parliament, just like there were no Department officers at the Bill briefing yesterday. It is an outrageous bungling of this Bill, and that the Government said that we must debate this Bill cognately and now we will split the Bills after debating half of them, leaving the other Bill to be debated separately, just shows the absolute sham that it is.

What the Coalition is for is reliable, secure energy, affordable energy and adequate baseload power. That is what this side of the House is for. What these Bills do is none of those things, and we know it. The only thing the Minister has managed to do with the SEC is buy a lot of jellybeans. It is not producing a single ounce of energy. It is not reducing a single cost to the consumer; in fact, it is going up at a rapid rate of knots. But the Minister has bought a lot of jellybeans

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David Southwick: Yo-yos.

James NEWBURY: And yo-yos. I forgot the yo-yos, Member for Caulfield, that is right. I personally have never been given one of the Minister's yo-yos, and I am sure the Minister spends quite some time in the afternoon playing with yo-yos in her office.

What this Bill does is none of those things. It does not provide secure, reliable energy. It does not supply affordable energy. It does not supply baseload power. So, what the Coalition will be doing is moving an Amendment, which I ask to be circulated in my name.

Amendment circulated under standing orders.

James NEWBURY: Part of that Amendment is to ensure that we have transparency around what this Government is doing, because at this stage all we have seen is a whole heap of yo-yos and jellybeans being bought. In fact, the Government did not even manage to provide an Annual Report on the SEC this year. It did not provide an Annual Report on time, and we know it was caught out for doing that. So, what the Opposition will be doing is moving an Amendment on Annual Reporting – it is not unreasonable, like when we were talking about energy targets last sitting week and moving Amendments in that same vein – ensuring there is transparency on what the SEC is doing.

What we know, because it has been publicly stated, is that the Government will be on an even playing field when it comes to the SEC's activity in the market – competitive neutrality. And what does that mean in terms of ensuring that we have those things that the Coalition stands strongly for – well, if you go to the Grattan Institute, the model doesn't stack up logically, said Tony Wood:

It's supposed to be there to be doing something that the private sector isn't doing. But if they're going to operate on a competitively neutral basis, I don't see how it can compete in what's probably the most cutthroat part of the industry.

RMIT professor David Hayward said that the State:

... was going to wean itself off the privatised and marketised national energy market ...

It has ended up as something far more modest that will support the badly flawed existing system and not replace it ...

The new SEC will do nothing to fix this mess, and, sadly, it is now clear it is not intended to do so.

An Australian Industry Group director said that:

Versus what people imagine a Government-owned corporation could do, this thing is going to be much greyer and more sober. This is not the second coming of the 1918 SEC, and it's not even a restoration of the 1992 SEC.

These words are damning. They expose why the Government is ramming the Bill through this place. They expose why. The Government does not want to be exposed for going to an election with a pledge to get the SEC through last year and not doing it. The Government do not want to be exposed for committing to majority stakes in renewable energy projects, which we know they have not done. They have invested in a project that was going to be built anyway. Talk about breaching promises one after another. But what is one of the most dangerous parts of the Government's energy plan? It is not just the way the SEC will operate and not deliver those things that we require and call for. It is the impact of their dangerous gas ban, and that is being exposed for what it is.

If we turn to the president of the Gas Appliance Manufacturers Association of Australia, Ross Jamieson, we know that the Government's ban will result in a loss of more than 1300 jobs – 1300 jobs lost, which should concern all of us – within six to 12 months in an industry that supports 4000 direct jobs. As Ross Jamieson said:

The Victorian Government is chasing an ideological outcome to achieve the electrification agenda at all costs. It removes the rights of Victorian families to choose the appliance that provides the required heat for their needs in their situation ...

Hear, hear. As we know, 60 per cent of gas appliances sold in Australia are made in Australia, and 95 per cent of electric appliances are imported. So much for a Labor Government supporting manufacturing.

I turn to the Chief Executive of the Australian Gas Infrastructure Group, Craig de Laine, and his comments following the recent largest blackout in Victorian history, where 530,000 people were left without power, which just goes to show the Government has no idea how to provide secure energy. He said that at that time:

... fewer than five of our 1.5 million gas customers were without supply during the ... storms.

So as 530,000 homes were without power, there were fewer than five without gas during the storms. Further:

It makes the case for both gas and electricity networks to operate in Victoria into the future ...

And doesn't it just. What is this policy approach doing to consumers and businesses? We know there has been a 25 per cent increase in unaffordability – a 25 per cent increase in costs to consumers. We know that – 25 per cent in the last year. No-one can afford these increases. In fact, anybody in this place would only need to talk to one constituent to have the fact of these increases raised. But also, I should get on the record the increases in costs for businesses. In terms of gas bills, recent analysis showed a 12 per cent national increase average and 31 per cent in Victoria – again, 12 per cent nationally and 31 per cent in Victoria. On electricity – this is for businesses – it was 8 per cent nationally but 17 per cent in Victoria. Is there any wonder the recent ABS stats showed a net decrease of 7606 businesses in Victoria? This is not the State to do business, with this Labor Government attacking you on every front. When it comes to your input costs, when it comes to taxes, we know that is the case.

I have spoken previously about the Government's lack of capacity when it comes to transmission and ensuring security through a network, and I note the Government has introduced a Bill today which we have not had an opportunity to see. I am sure that that is an attempted political fix to try and take away from the fact that the community is concerned about the Government not providing that security to people's homes as they should do, as they are required to do and as every Victorian would expect them to do.

I will not go for my full allotted time, because unfortunately the Government is ramming one of the Bills through within 2 hours and the second Bill within 4 hours, and most of the Members on this side of the place would like an opportunity to speak on them. That should not take anything away from my passion on Labor's mismanagement of energy supply.

The Coalition does not support the Government. We do not support the Government because we are for secure, reliable energy. That is what we are for. We are for secure, reliable energy, we are for affordable energy, and we are for adequate baseload power.

This Government is for stunts, this Government is for jellybeans and this Government is for yo-yos, and it has done nothing meaningful, as every single measure shows: security is down – 530,000 people without power – and affordability is 25 per cent up, and we know there are very, very serious concerns about baseload power into the future. The Coalition does not support the Government, and I know that the Members on my side of the place look forward to debating this Bill and this sham that the Government has brought to this Chamber.

ENERGY AND PUBLIC LAND LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ENABLING OFFSHORE WIND ENERGY) BILL 2024

Wednesday, 20 March 2024

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:46):

I rise to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024.

Victorians and Australians want to see energy that is reliable, secure, affordable and clean. That is what Australians want. That is what Victorians want.

So, two weeks ago, when the Government brought to the Parliament and considered the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023, the Coalition did not oppose it. Part of that Bill was a commitment to introducing offshore wind energy targets of not less than 2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. The Bill set out those targets, and that Bill passed the Parliament. Yesterday the Parliament considered an Amendment that went through the Council, and that Bill was passed and now will go for royal assent. So, this Parliament has come together and said that we do need to ensure that as Victoria transitions in terms of its energy production we have a plan in place which sets out where our energy generation will go – how much energy we will have in each form of energy production over what period of time – and do it in a responsible way.

The Coalition made the point during the debate that as that transition occurs, we need to see energy produced that is, as I said, reliable, secure, affordable and clean. That means we need to make sure that we do not see ongoing blackouts,

and many Members raised the recent blackout that saw 530,000 Victorians lose power to their homes, the biggest blackout in our State's history, and blackouts since – not of the same magnitude but blackouts since.

What this Bill does is take it an element further in relation to that first Bill, as the Minister has pointed out herself, as it relates to offshore wind. The Bill is quite a simple Bill in that it creates a Victorian licence system that enables feasibility of offshore wind projects on Crown land. So, this Bill creates a system whereby 21- year licences can be provided to allow feasibility and works to be done in the private sector to enable the construction of offshore wind.

This is the Victorian licensing component, if you want to put it that way, for offshore wind. What this Bill does not do and what this Government has not done is explain the plan for offshore wind. That matters for two reasons: firstly, because we need to ensure that we have enough energy supply, and when offshore wind is a central component to your future energy supply you would want the Government to have a plan to ensure that we have it; but secondly, because the Bill that I spoke to earlier, which we passed only, finally, yesterday, sets out how quickly we need to generate energy supply more generally and specifically in relation to wind.

What we have seen over primarily the last few months is a collapse of the Government's offshore wind policy. The offshore wind policy in Victoria has become, sadly, a national laughingstock, and I will get into the detail of that issue throughout the debate.

I spoke earlier about the recent blackout, and for mums, dads, families and Victorians the idea that we are now in a circumstance where our energy is not secure has been made patently obvious, with more than half a million people recently suffering in that blackout. So, Victorians have started to speak very, very strongly about the concerns they have about energy security in this State, as they should. Energy security is a must. But so too have business started to be far more outspoken about the Government's net zero target, the offshore wind component and the lack of a plan to get there.

Recently the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry held an event on the journey to net zero, and the chamber Chief Executive Paul Guerra spoke at length about some of these issues. He said:

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

And he was talking about that historic blackout. Further:

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

Further:

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

And finally:

Call out the bullshit and call out the ideology. This isn't a game. This is our future. Reliable energy at affordable prices must be aligned.

And I do apologise, but that was a direct quote from the Chief Executive.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Just to pick the Member up, unparliamentary language is not excusable because it is in a quote. I caution the Member.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. The Chief Executive was making the point that we need to have more than a target and we need to have more than ideology; we need to have a plan of how to get there, and what this Bill does not do is set out that plan.

What this Bill does is create a licensing regime, effectively. It does not do any more than that. It creates a licensing regime. It says that companies can come to the Government in relation to Crown land and they can be licensed to do feasibility work. That is really what the guts of the Bill are about. What it does not do is it does not say how this Government is going to ensure that we have the projects that we need, the build we need in terms of energy supply, the wind turbines we need and the offshore wind projects we need. How are we going to do that? That should be a concern to all Victorians.

The Chamber has done a power of work on these issues. Paul Guerra further said – and I will refer to a recent survey of 500 of their members – at that event that if the Government:

... cannot guarantee that the lights remain on in this state, then I can guarantee that many businesses will find places other than Victoria to set up.

The survey conducted of their Members – and I will read in some of the findings of that survey – found that energy policies were the top concern for 65 per cent of Victorian businesses, so two out of three. Eighty-six per cent said they believed the move to renewables would impact their output – concerning: 86 per cent, so five out of six. Seventy-three per cent said Victoria's February power blackout had forced them to close. Three out of four were forced to close throughout that blackout – extraordinary, with the impact, as we know, of the loss of stock and the loss of capacity. Eighty-one per cent cited cost as a main barrier to switching from gas to electricity. I think that the case is being made very, very strongly.

When we speak about the concerns from business about the Government's ideological push over practicality, the Government's gas ban is a deep, deep concern to all Victorians but also all Victorian businesses. It is an ideological ban and a ban that is going to affect all Victorians, both business and otherwise.

Mr Guerra further said:

We want to get behind that –

as in the renewable energy reforms –

... but it relies on having a clear plan to signal to businesses that access for reliable energy will also be affordable.

That is not unreasonable. And finally:

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.

What are some of the themes that industry is talking about? They are recognising the need for a plan, but they are also making it clear that that plan cannot be purely around ideology and that there has to be a practical element, a practical plan, and that is where the Government has fallen short and been exposed on a national stage.

You only have to look at the point raised by Mr Guerra in relation to affordability and some of the reported data that the Victorian Government has produced on things like wind energy. The Government's estimated cost of offshore wind is \$94 a megawatt hour, whereas in Britain the Government recently auctioned at \$139 and in the US at \$230. So, the Government has set out a plan or an estimate which is in no way in line with what is actually happening in markets around the world where these projects exist, and that should be a concern and goes straight to the affordability question.

We have also seen projects in total disarray in terms of offshore wind. Over the last three months we have seen effectively a total collapse of the Government's offshore wind policy. We see reports of multiple companies making applications that are in dispute – tens of applications with the Federal Government that are in dispute over borders of where the projects will occur – and concerns as to how those disputes will be resolved. We have not even got to the point of them being built, but the level of disputation, clearly because of the management of the Government strategy, both State and Federal, has led to, clearly, a collapse of our Victorian offshore wind policy.

We saw that no more clearly than at the start of the year with the Port of Hastings. To remind the House, the Port of Hastings was a project that was reportedly 146 hectares in size, including reclaimed land, the clearing of vegetation and the dredging of 92 hectares for a 600-metre long, 100-metre wide wharf which the Federal Minister for the Environment, as we now all know, rejected because:

... large areas of the –

bay's wetland –

will be destroyed or substantially modified as a result of direct impacts of the proposed action.

The Minister further stated it would cause:

... irreversible damage to the habitat of waterbirds and migratory birds and marine invertebrates and fish ...

Finally, in terms of impact on the food webs of the mudflats and coastal area, pollution is a significant risk and could result from oil and chemical spills, discharge of ballast water, shipping accidents, marinas and launching ramps, sewage and bilge water and other debris.

When the Federal Government announced its findings on the project, effectively rejecting the project, it sent a spear through the Victorian Government's offshore wind strategy, this project which was central to early generation in order to meet the Government's targets, but it also exposed the hollowness of the Victorian Government's plan to actually deliver on its targets. As I said earlier, you need more than a target – you need a plan to deliver on it.

We know the Federal Minister for Climate Change has said on the record that there is:

... a long lead-up for offshore wind.

He further said:

... we don't expect much offshore wind to be operating by 2030 in Australia ... setting up a new industry from scratch takes time. And we envisage most of the projects will be generating power post-2030.

If I can read that quote again from the Minister:

... setting up a new industry from scratch takes time. And we envisage most of the projects will be generating power post-2030.

That is why earlier this year when the Federal Government knocked down the Port of Hastings proposal, not only Victoria but Australia could see quite clearly that the Victorian Government did not have the capacity to deliver on the projects that they needed to, not only because of the supply we need in Victoria but because of now the law which requires them to do it. I should state that should the Government not reach that target, there is no penalty. There is simply no penalty. It is a target in law without a single penalty or any downside for the Minister who does not achieve it. I mean, the Minister can just snub her nose. She can amend the target. She can ignore the target.

What concerns I think business, but also Victorians more broadly, in relation to offshore wind is watching projects like Hastings go down primarily because of a lack of responsible governing in terms of this Government and the way they manage projects. We know that that particular project was warned about the risk of proceeding with that proposal. Infrastructure Victoria in 2017 was asked to assess whether Hastings or Bay West in Werribee would be best placed for future projects, and it talked about at that time the wetland risks at the Port of Hastings.

So, in 2017 the Government was paying one of its own Departments to provide advice, which they did, and yet another part of Government, which taxpayers are paying for, were proceeding with a project which they had received advice would be of concern. The issues that were raised were all of the issues which ended up being on the table when the Federal Minister provided her decision on the project. The Government could have simply dusted off the report, which taxpayers had paid for, and received the insight several years earlier, but they did not.

What was I think so concerning for Victorians was not only to see the policy of wind unravel but to see the Government unravel during press conferences that week on the actual project – unravel before our eyes day by day. It started with the Premier stating multiple times that the Port of Hastings proposal

had passed through State Government environmental approval processes. Confidently the Premier stepped out and said, 'No, this has all gone through our environmental work, it's all been ticked off.' I recall the Premier saying that the Government would start to lobby the Federal Government to change their mind. The Premier would change their mind. Embarrassingly, later that same day, we found out that the Environment Minister had not approved the project. Just for anybody who was not listening to the first point: contrary to what the Premier had gone out in the press conference with gusto to say, the Environment Minister had referred the project off for an environmental effects assessment in October the year before, several months earlier. All of that assessment was noted on the Minister's Department's website, so someone was not reading the Government's website.

But the Premier was not the only one not reading the Government's website, because then we saw the Minister for Environment come out next – so the Premier came out on Tuesday of that week, then the Minister for Environment came out on Thursday – and, when asked about this project, said, 'We can't talk about the Federal Government's decision yet.' 'Why can't you?' the media asked. Fair question – 'Why can't you?' Because the Minister had only received a summary. He said:

My understanding is that we have ... effectively a summary of the decision. We don't have the full decision yet, so it's hard to give you an answer to that question without having the actual details of the reasons the Federal Government said no

...

Let's understand what the decision is before we then commit to whether we stay on that site. But your question is, how do we mitigate it? Well, we need to find out what they're concerned about in detail, before I can give you an answer on how to mitigate it ...

It was on the Federal Government's website the week before – a week earlier, on Friday the week before.

So, we have got the Premier saying the State Government have approved it on the State website, the State Environment Minister saying, 'I can't speak in detail to the matter, because the decision hasn't been made public' – it was on the Federal Government's website. Is it any wonder Victorians are saying, 'What is the Government's offshore wind plan?' The Government needs to do more than come to this place with this Bill. It does provide a licensing regime for feasibility work; it does do that. But that is all that it does. In substance it provides a feasibility licensing regime for Crown land; that is the substance of the Bill.

What the projects are, where they are – there is no plan. The Government has not made it clear to Victorians, and when you are seeing hundreds of thousands of people suffer blackouts, when you are seeing business saying to you in the strongest possible terms, so strongly – you might recall that the Deputy Speaker, who was in the chair earlier, noted a word that they had used and cautioned me when that word was used. That was the head of one of the biggest business organisations in the State, who had used strong language in saying how strong the concerns were.

Finally, I should mention the Minister for Energy and Resources in that week in relation to Hastings. Just when you thought the Premier and the Minister for Environment had embarrassed Victoria enough, no, here comes the Minister for Energy, who had a dummy spit. There is no other way to say it. The Minister for Energy had a dummy spit and railed against the Federal Government, just railed against them: 'It's not the State Government's fault; it's not the State Government's fault.' I presume what actually happened is by the end of that week the entire Cabinet, Government and Premier were saying, 'Minister for Energy, what's going on here?' and so the Minister came out and gave one big almighty whack and said, 'It's all the feds' fault.' I mean, that is the standard go-to line for this Government: 'It's all the feds' fault.' Well, it was. 'It's someone else's fault.' It is starting –

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: Well, they are. Everything is the Feds' fault.

Danny O'Brien: Even the Labor Feds.

James NEWBURY: That is right, and that is what we saw that week. We saw the Minister in a very unedifying dummy spit blame the Feds for a project they had been warned years before would be a problem – years before. It is extraordinary. It was very, very unedifying.

We have seen only earlier this week with the Portland decision a project – and I am not in any way reflecting on the decision, but I would note for the record the decision that the Energy Minister Chris Bowen announced. The Southern Ocean offshore wind zone, which originally was meant to span 5132 square kilometres, is now a fifth of the size. The approval is for a fifth of the size. In no way is the Coalition reflecting on the decision; we are just noting that in terms of how we actually deliver offshore wind it has not been made clear to Victorians, because in that project the new size will generate 2.9 gigawatts, from the originally estimated 14.6 gigawatts.

I do note that the Coalition will be circulating Amendments, and under Standing Orders I wish to advise the house of Amendments to the Bill and request that they be circulated.

Amendments circulated under Standing Orders.

James NEWBURY: Those Amendments go to two things. Firstly, they go to social licence and ensuring that throughout the processes of this Bill there is a social licence component, a consultation with the community component, because we know that the Government is not in any way ensuring that communities are part of these decisions.

In fact, the Government is ripping away the rights of the community to have a say over decisions, which is appalling. Only last week the Government confirmed that they would extend their planning powers further in the assessment of

development facilitation program projects and add renewable energy. Under that program, effectively, the Government has absolutely no say, so we will be moving Amendments that go to community consultation but also go to ensuring that these projects are undertaken by people who are fit and proper persons. Those two Amendments are fair and reasonable: community consultation and the fit and proper person.

In terms of community consultation, I do note the Government's previous report from March 2022, which suggests that up to 70 per cent of agricultural land will need to be renewable. I have spoken to the Government about that estimate, and they have set out that that was the, I suppose, 'impossible scenario', in their terms, and to produce the most gigawatts possible, whereas their estimate is that to achieve the target we will need to produce just under half of what that scenario was. So that still says that almost 30 per cent of ag land could be covered.

The Government needs to ensure that we have reliable, affordable, secure and clean energy, and that is what the Coalition has been speaking about. We have been speaking about ensuring that we do. We will not be opposing this Bill. We will be moving Amendments. But we are calling on the Government to do more than set targets. We are calling on the Government to set out a plan to achieve them and also let Victorians know that we will have reliable, secure, affordable energy and how that will be delivered, because that is what Victorians deserve and this Government has not set out that plan.

NATIONAL ELECTRICITY (VICTORIA) AMENDMENT (VICGRID) BILL 2024

Thursday, 21 March 2024

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:20):

I rise to speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024.

Before I mention what this Bill does do, it would be remiss of me not to say what this Government has not done and what this Bill does not do.

What this Government has not done is anything effective with VicGrid since it was formed. We are here today with a Bill before us which starts to provide VicGrid with powers for works in relation to energy and transmission. But for years the community, business and the Coalition have been calling for action on transmission and on VicGrid, and the Government has done nothing. We are here to talk about a Bill and powers that are contained within that Bill, but it is important to note that and to put that on the record before the substance of the Debate commences.

I note in March 2019 in one of the first speeches I gave in this place I spoke about the NSW Transmission Infrastructure Strategy, which was released in November 2018, which in many ways does some of the things that this Bill now does. So, some five years ago there were calls for action in terms of strategy and planning on transmission in Victoria. We have, after almost half a decade, started to look at doing some of the things that have been done around this country years and years and years ago. It should be noted, though, that what the Government is proposing to do in this Bill in terms of planning and strategy for transmission is not equivalent to what has happened around the country.

I do note that some of the elements of this Bill have picked up the New South Wales approach, if I can put it that way, and the Government through their briefings prior to this Bill being debated confirmed that the New South Wales model had been looked to and had been incorporated.

The one difference that exists with this Bill and these powers as opposed to the New South Wales model is how strongly involved industry was in the development of this Bill and future planning and strategy of transmission. It is a big difference, because in New South Wales the Government worked with industry on planning how renewables primarily and transmission upgrades to the grid would take place, and that makes sense. Of course it does, because it is a partnership in terms of leading that work and then working with the community with their social licence to deliver it. That is a big difference between the way this Government operates and the way the New South Wales Government has operated in these matters.

What this Bill does in short is provide new infrastructure energy planning powers in Victoria how that infrastructure work will be brought about in terms of working with communities. That is the overarching purpose. So, the Government is empowering VicGrid to undertake planning and consultation on energy projects and to consult with the community to some degree on those works.

It will further implement a new Victorian transmission infrastructure framework, set a timeline for that planning and also allow payments for landholders who hold energy infrastructure. In short, that is what this Bill does.

If I can set the scene on where we are as a State, not just in terms of policy and infrastructure, which I will speak to in detail shortly, but in terms of how the delays in the Government's approach to dealing with these issues have had an effect on every single household, because that is what matters. What matters to Victorians is that they have reliable, secure and affordable power. That is what matters to Victorians. They deserve reliable, affordable and secure power, and the Government has not delivered that.

We know of the recent St Vincent de Paul report finding that Victorians are paying 22 per cent more for gas and 28 per cent more for electricity. The most recent ABS statistics show a 25 per cent increase in the last year on energy costs. So, the year-on-year costs are significant. We know it because we hear it from our communities. We know it because it is a key issue raised in our communities. And though I am not a huge fan of polling, polling shows that two out of three rate the issue as one of their most significant concerns. That only underlines what people actually tell us in the street, what people speak to us in the street about. We know the cost for people is up year on year on year – 25 per cent as per the ABS in the last year.

But we also know that it is not just in relation to affordability. On the reliability and security, we have as a Coalition deep, deep concerns about the Government's failure to ensure that our energy is reliably provided to Victorian households. Of course, we saw most recently the worst blackout in our state's history, where 530,000 people were left without power. But it is important to note that though that was the worst blackout in our State's history and the Government will say, 'It's not our fault; it's the weather,' over the last six years 1.9 million Victorian businesses and households have suffered a blackout. So set aside this most recent event because the Government will blame the weather, but almost 2 million Victorian businesses and households have suffered blackouts over the last six years. So, security and reliability of energy is obviously a significant issue in our State. 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. These are real issues. These are real challenges.

I am not suggesting that every single issue was caused by the Minister for Energy and Resources herself. What I am saying is it is the Minister's job to make sure they do all they can to fix it. Today we are considering a Bill that does not go far enough in terms of fixing these issues after spending years and years and years doing nothing in relation to transmission.

Many of us will have read recent reports around the transmission infrastructure

in Victoria and how alarmed we should all be in relation to the grid and the Australian Energy Market Operator warning of imminent and urgent issues in relation to our energy transition. These are serious concerns, and I quote from AEMO:

The projected electrification of traditional gas loads, particularly heating loads in Victoria, increases forecast consumption and maximum demands in winter. For Victoria in particular, winter peak demands may exceed summer peak demands by the end of the ESOO horizon.

So, we are having the peak body warn of the system and warn of the lack of capacity of our system to meet the needs of Victorians, and that is the Government's job – to ensure that supply is provided. If I can refer back to AEMO again:

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

How many warnings do we need? We are being warned by people who know more, who are experts in this field, over and over again. I refer to the warning of supply earlier. The warnings have been clear from the most peak minds, the most peak experts, that our transmission system is not good enough, that our supply is at risk, yet we are dealing with a Bill that does not do anywhere near enough and is the best part of a decade behind what the other states have been doing.

After the recent blackout where 530,000 people were left without power we saw a report of an AusNet Services assessment that one in seven of Victoria's 13,000 electricity transmission towers were damaged by patchy or extensive rust. About 8000 of them – more than half – are now a decade or less from their designed service life. This is a deep, deep concern. So, we are now having industry say, 'We're concerned about the infrastructure.' It is not just the peak experts; we are now having industry say we have issues. The report further says that:

All failed structures were built to historical design standards with inadequate strength to withstand convective downdraft winds occurring during extreme storm events.

I mean, you cannot get a clearer warning for the weather, can you? I think that even the Minister can understand that one. The report says further that, of the 13,000 towers, 12 per cent were deemed to be in average condition with patchy rust and 1.5 per cent in poor condition with extensive surface rust and that 60 of the towers were a present health and safety risk because they were next to roads. How deeply concerning. It shows clearly how urgent it is to ensure our transmission is of the standard that we will need moving forward. Without being alarmist, it is a concern that we have had so many blackouts and that a weather event caused the damage that it did.

So, we need to get cracking, and what this Bill does not do is get cracking fast enough on ensuring that we have the grid for the future.

I do think it is important to note that the Coalition spoke very, very strongly on these issues in the last term and also in the last Election. We announced policy to ensure that we as a Government would have worked very closely with industry to work on upgrading our infrastructure. It was a core part of our energy and climate policy. That was announced, from memory, in July 2022. It is almost two years later, and we are dealing with a Bill that starts to do some of that work. The Government has been so slow on these issues it is a serious concern – and should be for all Victorians.

I note the warnings the Government has been receiving do not just relate to infrastructure and do not just relate to security and reliability of energy, they also, specifically on energy today, relate to gas. We have seen AEMO again warn about serious issues in terms of gas supply at a time when the Labor Government are persisting with their mad ideological ban on gas. The CEO of AEMO said:

From 2028, supply gaps will increase in size as Bass Strait production falls significantly ...

What that means is that Victoria's total available gas supply is forecast to reduce by 48 per cent, from 297 petajoules in 2024 to 154 petajoules in 2028. At the same time, and I am quoting reports, demand is expected to hit 187 petajoules in 2024 and 176 in 2028. What does that mean? This:

... increases the probability of outages.

Further:

It is clear that more gas supply is required because the forecast decline in production is faster than the forecast decline in gas consumption ...

We have seen the Government sit on its hands for the best part of a decade as other States were doing work, and warnings come in and collect dust on the Minister's desk in relation to infrastructure, in relation to supply and today in relation to gas. How many warnings does this Government need?

We know that over the last six years almost 2 million Victorian businesses and households have suffered blackouts, so starting work frankly is not good enough and committing to creating a plan will not get us what we need as soon as we are going to need it. Planning is not good enough. Delivering is what matters, and we have seen from business very, very clearly how concerned they are about what is going on in Victoria. In fact, we have seen extremely clearly from people like Paul Guerra from the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry how concerned they are, because as he said:

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

And:

... call out the ideology. This isn't a game. This is our future. Reliable energy at affordable prices must be aligned.

When you have people like him speak to these issues with such fervour, you know that he is speaking on behalf of industry more broadly.

The Chamber recently released a survey of 500 members, and on the release said if the Government 'cannot guarantee that the lights remain on in this State',

then they guarantee that many businesses will find places other than Victoria to set up. That survey found that energy policy was a top concern for Victorian businesses, with 65 per cent rating it as their biggest worry – two out of three businesses rating it as their biggest worry, with him underlining that businesses will find other places to invest. That survey also found that 86 per cent believe that a move to renewables will impact their output – the businesses that is. These are deeply worrying concerns.

I do want to note one of the issues in relation to this Bill and the capacity under this Bill to declare renewable energy zones in terms of the Bill – but at the same time that this Bill was laying on the table, the Premier and the Minister for Planning were announcing a new renewable energy power. You can see how these two issues are aligned in terms of the Government's thinking and how this power will play into how this Bill will operate in terms of renewable planning. What the Government did last week was they announced they would extend the development facilitation program, which is in short a power that the Minister for Planning has under the act to take projects out of the system, as it were – to exempt them from the planning system and deal with them individually and personally, as the Minister or through the Minister's delegate. Last week the Minister for Planning announced that renewable energy projects would now be exempt from the planning system, at the same time as this Bill is proposing to allow the Minister to declare renewable energy zones. So yes, the Bill has a renewable energy zone power, which does include consultation, but at the same time the Government has confirmed that there will be a new power on top of that for the Minister to bring in renewable energy projects and deal with them personally or through her delegate, though when I looked, just mid-week, the details of that power had not been added onto the Government's website in relation to this particular program.

If I can give some context, the way this power works is when a project is put forward the Department considers it, and if it meets certain criteria, the Minister can make a determination completely outside the planning law. No consultation, no meaningful consultation allowed – and that is a key theme for how this Government is operating in relation to planning more generally but in

relation to this power and renewable energy projects.

Just for some context, although the details have not been released, in other priority sector criteria the average cut-in for being eligible for a project regionally is about \$10 million. So, I think it would be reasonable to expect that there may be a cut-in around that amount. Potentially there could be a cut-in of zero. We do not know, because the Government, other than by putting out a press release with very little detail and a lot of quotes, has not put the detail on their own website. So, it could be zero. It could be every project – every single project. But as I say, in other sectors the cut-in for regional projects has been around \$10 million.

What this does is undermine social licence. We see it with planning and we are seeing it with renewables more broadly; not only have the Government forgotten industry, but they have also forgotten the community. You can see with that particular power I spoke to earlier there are a number of other areas in which the Government has circumvented the planning system, and the community is rightly concerned. I have a number of my National Party colleagues with me at the table, and they would be aware of a report that was on the Department's website until it was removed which stated that up to 70 per cent of Victorian agricultural land could be required for renewable projects.

I have gone to the Government, to be fair, and said this is a concern, and they have said that that report did go to 'the impossible scenario', in their words, of providing up to 60 gigawatts of capacity, whereas to meet the targets the Minister believes that we will be aiming for 25 gigawatts, so just under half. Well, if you are on agricultural land and you see a report which is then removed from the Government website that says 70 per cent and then the Minister says, 'That is the impossible scenario, so it's just under half' – so what is it, 30 to 35 per cent of agricultural land? That is the obvious math. That would concern everybody who lives in regional Victoria, and I think that it is only fair and reasonable for a fuller explanation to be given by the Government in relation to those calculations, because it is a genuine concern that has not been properly answered by the Government. At a time when social licence is ebbing away in relation to renewable projects many Members in this place would know of

communities right across the State that are concerned about being cut out of consultation in relation to renewables. That is not how you do business; that is not how you operate as a Government. You do not cut the community out where you are going to build it, and that is exactly what is being proposed. Then, on top of that, Members are seeing reports that say 70 per cent of agricultural land will have to be covered. Well, even if it is 30 to 35 per cent, how will that look?

I do want to note that the Coalition in the Upper House will be moving a number of Amendments, and they will be moved by the Shadow in the Upper House. They go to two things primarily: firstly, to ensure that proper community consultation occurs. That would be through, in our view, a community advisory panel that would include the interests of Victorian farmers, the interests of the Victorian manufacturing industry, the interests of Victorian rural councils, the interests of Victorian small business owners, the interests of the Victorian seafood industry and the interests of Victorian consumers in Victoria. The Shadow in that place will move an Amendment that relates to that community advisory committee and all of those people and interests involved in that. Finally, the Shadow will move Amendments that relate to easement land tax, which is of course passed on to consumers in the form of higher electricity bills. So those Amendments will be introduced in that place, in relation to both the land tax easement issue and also community consultation.

There is more that this Bill does not do than what it does do. This Bill does not fix the problems that we have. This Bill does not address the warnings that the Government is receiving. So, the Coalition has deep concerns about it and cannot support it in its current form, because we cannot be ripping away the rights of the community.

We cannot be not ensuring that we have reliable, secure and affordable power. We must do those things, and this Government has not done that. The Government have not addressed the warnings they are receiving, and so until they can provide reliable, secure and affordable energy, they stand condemned.

BILL

NATIONAL ENERGY RETAIL LAW (VICTORIA) BILL 2024

Tuesday, 30 April 2024

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.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE: ECONOMIC RECKLESSNESS

Wednesday, 1 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (17:12):

I rise in support of the Member for Sandringham's Matter of Public Importance:

That this House condemns the financial mismanagement and economic recklessness of the Allan Labor Government, which is causing a cost-of-living crisis for Victorian families and businesses.

There is no greater recklessness and financial mismanagement than with Labor's approach to the great big housing con that they announced in September last year.

The former Premier stood up, as his swan song, to announce a commitment to 80,000 new homes each and every year. I understand the Department advised him to commit to 60,000 new homes, but it was not good enough for a retiring Premier. He wanted to up it to 80,000 because it was his big final commitment when leaving the Parliament after 10 years, so he said, 'Let's say 80.' Well, hasn't that been an incredible con on the dreams of first homeowners in this State. That is what it is, and that is why the con is so craven.

Kathleen Matthews-Ward: On a Point of Order, Deputy Speaker, I seek your advice. Is there a Point of Order against assaulting us with all that noise?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a Point of Order.

James NEWBURY: I understand how embarrassed the Labor Government are about being called out on the housing con that they are perpetuating on first

homeowners and Victorians. Eighty thousand homes were promised each and every year in September last year. And last year how many were delivered? 53,711 – almost 30,000 short. The end of July figures for this year have us at a historic low of 51,000. The Housing Industry Association projects that next year the Government, who promised 80,000 homes next year, will deliver 52,000 homes – again, nearly 30,000 under – and the year after, in 2025, 55,000. At no time over the next 10 years will the Government ever reach the promise they have given to Victorians to build 80,000 new homes each and every year over the next 10 years. It is an outrageous con perpetuated on people who dream of owning their first home.

What do the experts, people in the industry, say is happening in Victoria as a result of the Government's housing statement and the taxes, the charges and the assault that has occurred? Bricks & Mortar Real Estate say:

Why would you ever want to buy in Victoria? It is the most expensive State to hold a property.

Kay & Burton say:

It's creating a lot of angst. Locals could not believe they were going to be slugged with even higher taxes ...

This is what people are saying. Interstate agents are saying things like:

... investors are "arriving in droves" because of the high taxes and living costs in Melbourne.

That was Sotheby's. Property buyer says:

There is definitely an exodus heading north because of the lower stamp duty and higher ... tax threshold.

Clover Financial Solutions said:

Brisbane is hot.

That is what people are saying. They are saying there is a problem with taxes

in Victoria and the money is heading interstate. We know that is true. We know that is absolutely true, and we know that not only is the money fleeing, the investor money is fleeing in that property sales are occurring.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute's recent survey found that of 1700 investors, a quarter of the investors had reportedly sold at least one rental property in the last year. Perhaps one of the most profound interventions in recent weeks came from Mike Zorbas, the Chief Executive of the Property Council of Australia, who recently said:

Victoria is Australia's ball and chain on international investment.

The Victorian Government's positive words on investment are at odds with the state's actions on tax settings and planning.

That is a polite way of saying the Government are a bunch of liars and they tax too much.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Member knows that word is unparliamentary.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Mike Zorbas said:

They amount to system wide risk for investment in the state.

...

This is about Victorian policy settings saying the exact opposite of the claims made by Victorian Government's leaders.

Read: The Victorian Government. We know that is true. What is worse is that only a few weeks ago we saw a Council Mayor get up and look, frankly, the fool by calling for a 3.3 per cent charge on all future property investment. Quite resoundingly, industry – everybody – heard what he said and said, 'There's always some fool who comes out at the end of the show and says why don't we jack a price onto everything else Labor's charged.' Following that, the Victorian Government this week confirmed they want to scrap their growth areas infrastructure contribution charge and expand a charge on all homeowners in Victoria – so from seven councils to 79 councils. So, when this poor Mayor came

out looking quite the fool, little did he know he was actually leading the charge on what the State Government's next tax would be. Next week I am sure the 53th new tax will be a charge on every single homeowner – a great big new tax.

We know it does not matter what the Government says, because if you talk to anybody, you know that the property sector is on its knees. When you look at the numbers that are being released, we know the property sector is not building anymore. We know that investment is not coming into this State. And you ask why. Look at the Urban Development Institute's recent data, which shows that the combined taxes and charges on a greenfield site equate to 54 per cent of the lot price. That is just highway robbery. On an apartment it is 28 per cent. Seriously, why would you do business in this State? The Government is just a bunch of rip-off merchants. When it comes to apartment prices, the figures from the experts show 28 per cent on the final apartment price goes to taxes and charges, and the average on greenfield is 44 per cent, so almost 30 per cent on an apartment and 44 per cent on greenfield. I also have some modelling from a significant developer who looked at their works and the taxes and charges on what they build: on apartments it is 22 per cent and for foreign purchasers 32 per cent on apartments.

So, we know when you are buying something in Victoria what you are doing is you are paying partly for a property but you are spending a heck of a lot of your money on the Government tax take – that is what you are doing. The Government has announced a great big housing con, promising to deliver homes, when all it is is a cover for new taxes for the Government to rip off Victorians and do it under the craven promise of delivering homes. That is what this housing statement is – it is a fake promise. We know what these charges are; these charges are in black and white. The housing statement is a cover for new taxes, and in the Budget next week there will be more. We know that 27 of the 53 new taxes are property related, and next week we will see another great big new homeowner tax perpetrated on the people of Victoria who can least afford it, especially those who are dreaming of owning their first home.

BENJAMIN JOHNSON

Tuesday, 14 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:39):

My grandfather Benjamin Arthur Johnson was born 100 years ago with dough under his fingernails.

His grandfather Benjamin Easter was a longstanding Councillor and Mayor in Northcote. He launched BE Johnson Bakery. He also developed property and ran a nationally successful cake manufacturing business. His sons, including my great-grandfather George, took up the family trade and started Golden Crust bakery.

My grandfather, who was part of the business from the moment he could walk, went to school in Spring Road Primary in Malvern before boarding at Geelong College. He later ran Chris Cross, a landscape supply business.

The other family trade he pursued was horse training, and he had success with a champion thoroughbred Vain.

My grandfather has lived a century but is a gentleman of a different time. Happy birthday, Bim.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

KEN HAWKINS

Tuesday, 14 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:39):

Kenneth Francis Hawkins was a good man. He was a gentleman. That is why he stood out. He was sparing with his words, but what set him apart was that he found wisdom in every word that he spared.

Ken was a devoted family man from the moment he met Jean Louisa May Gardiner. Sixty-five years ago, Ken met Jean. They both lived in the small town of Penguin, on the north-west coast of Tasmania. Their families were neighbours – Ken lived over Jean’s back fence. They would marry, have two sons, move to the mainland, start a lifelong successful business, Caravan Court, and see six grandchildren born.

Ken was at peace when he passed, with Jean by his side holding his hand.

Vale, Ken Hawkins.

APPROPRIATION (2024-2025) BILL 2024

Tuesday, 14 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:41):

I rise to speak on the State Government's 2024–25 Budget and the associated Appropriation Bills. A Budget should set out the vision for this State; that is the purpose of a Budget. What we saw this year was a new Premier, and even the Opposition came into this place expecting to see the Premier set out her vision for the future of this State, her vision having taken the premiership after 10 years as a part of the Government. Her leadership should have been stamped onto this Budget. By the end of the Treasurer's speech, what was clear was, as has been written, the Premier is at best pedestrian. There was no vision in this Budget.

The Budget included one thing – obviously somebody devised the Budget, drafted a Budget, put a Budget forward and said, 'But hang on, there's no announceable. There's nothing in this Budget.' So, someone came along and said, 'Why don't we take core business of Government,' – that is, providing, effectively, capital required funding into schools – 'rebrand it, rebrand core business of schools, put a badge on it and we'll make that an announcement.' That is what this Budget does, and that is the only announceable in this Budget.

It is shameful to think that a new Premier has not taken the opportunity to set out her vision for this State – and that is what is clear. What is clear is that the Premier does not have a vision for this State. What we know from this Budget is that the mismanagement of the last 10 years is now recognised both nationally and internationally through the ratings agencies. Ratings agencies are calling out the impact of this Budget on the nation and the mismanagement thereof. That is clear. We also know that the economic vandalism of this Government

is now coming to a point that requires punitive tax measures which are killing investment in Victoria. You only need to talk to the property sector to understand the damage that has been caused because of the Government's tax regime.

In fact, it is a regime that was described on Budget day as hostile. This Budget has shown the clear issues in terms of the Government's mismanagement – the economic vandalism – but also the blatant pork-barrelling. We have seen for year after year the way that funding is directed straight into Labor electorates over need. So, when an assessment measure is done by the Department, Ministers are overruling those assessments and pork-barrelling funding in some of the worst ways we have ever seen. We have seen Government Member after Government Member get up and talk about funding into their electorates. Of course they have received funding, because the Government's pork-barrelling investment in Victoria. If you do not live in a Labor seat, you do not get Government funding; that is the way it now works.

It is appalling when it comes to schools especially. Our children are receiving funding based on the political affiliation of the seat they live in. It is absolutely outrageous, and the statistics show it. Before this year's Budget 93 per cent of capital investment in schools went into Labor seats – 93 per cent. You almost have to get up in the morning with a red pen if you are the Minister and actively try and cross out any proposal for funding in a seat that is not a Government seat to get to 93 per cent. I mean, you have to really work hard to make sure that you do not share out funding in the way that it should be shared, and that is what this Government is now known for. All of the things that we have known about this Government have now been put on display for all to see, and that is what is so clear about this Budget. Because it lacks any vision, there is no cover for the truth behind what this Government is doing in terms of its economic vision and strategy, or lack thereof, for the future of our State.

I do want to mention for a moment one of the most important issues that should be considered by policymakers and Government in this State, and that is housing affordability and the capacity for people to get into a home, because it is clear that more and more young people do not believe that they can get into a home. They do not believe that their dream of owning a home is achievable.

Before he left, former Premier Andrews identified the need for improving the number of homes available to Victorians as a key priority for his Government. Since he made an announcement – an announcement that will never be achieved – of 80,000 homes a year over each year for the next 10 years, you could not have seen that stone drop quicker into the water than has been the case when it comes to housing. I have not seen an example of the Premier talking or prioritising this issue to the level that it deserves. It is almost as if the former Premier left and took the commitment with him, because we know that over the coming year there will only be 51,000 homes built of the 80,000 promised, so we are 30,000 short of the promise. It is little wonder that the Government has walked away from its promise. The projections show that over the next two years less than 55,000 will be built in each of those two years. So, it is no wonder that the Government has completely walked away from its promise and its commitment and changed its language. It has gone from talking about 80,000 homes each year to a total of 800 in the 10th year, so I suspect that what we are going to see at some point is a year where the Government will walk up and deliver us all of those missing homes in that year. We know that is not true. We know that this Government has dropped the ball on one of the most important issues facing all Victorians, and that is delivering homes to Victorians.

We know that the Government will be unable to deliver on their promise. I referred to the property council talking about the tax regime as hostile. We know that the Budget confirmed \$21.5 billion in property taxes. Almost half of State tax take is made up of property taxes – 29 of the 55 new or increased taxes over the last decade have been foisted on the property industry, so is it any wonder that the impact of these new or increased taxes, 29 of them, is crippling the sector? The Government could not have its hand deeper in the pocket of the sector.

What that means is that on the cost of a home – on the cost of an apartment in an urban area – roughly 30 per cent of the cost is tax. Almost 30 per cent of the cost is tax, and in greenfields areas it is 45 per cent. When you buy a home, almost 45 per cent of the cost in a greenfields site is tax. When you go to buy an apartment, 30 per cent of the cost of that apartment is tax. These taxes are causing incredible damage in terms of housing affordability, and we know that

these taxes are parasitic. That is what they are. They are parasitic. These 29 taxes are parasitic, and the Government is causing the biggest movable damage to the sector through these 29 new taxes.

I also want to speak about some of the funding issues in my local community. I note that this Budget has walked away from the promise to deliver upgrades to 29 schools. Of those 29 schools, two are in my electorate. Hampton Primary School and Gardenvale Primary School were both promised funding and told by the candidate that that funding would be delivered in the first year after the election. That is what the schools were told. How outrageous to rip away that promise. We know that when it comes to the schools that were promised in the election to be funded, 70 per cent were in Labor seats – of course they were – and 26 per cent were in Coalition seats. When it came to ripping away the funding, 80 per cent of the schools that did get the funding were in Labor seats and only 41 per cent of those in Coalition seats that were waiting for funding were funded. When it comes to Hampton Primary School and Gardenvale Primary School, hundreds of children have been ripped off by this Government.

They are not the only schools that need funding in my community. I have spoken about it in this place before, but I refer to Brighton Primary, where we have 14 demountables. In those demountables we have one of the few assisted hearing units in Melbourne. Those demountables are placed next to the train line, so you have kids with genuine hearing difficulties who are learning in demountables that are 40 years old next to a train line. It has been over 40 years since that school received any capital funding. It is absolutely abhorrent that the Government pork-barrels in the way that they have.

And there is another school, Brighton Beach Primary School, which has not been reported. There is mould in that school, and we know how dangerous that is. The Government has known for six months about the mould – the open mould – which has now been sheeted over to try and stop children taking it in. Six months that mould has been there with children walking past.

What an absolute disgrace. That is a clear health and safety issue for those primary school aged children. It is an absolute disgrace, and for the Government to have known for six months and done nothing about it is an absolute shame.

Budgets should set out a vision. This Budget we saw a new Premier, who should have walked into this Chamber with her Treasurer, and the two should have announced a Budget with some vision, with some sense of purpose, with some sense of direction. Not that I was a fan of his in any way, but I am absolutely sure the former Premier would not have allowed a Budget to be delivered this way. I am absolutely sure the former Premier would not have allowed a Budget to be delivered in the way this Budget was delivered. The new Premier walked in, and a Budget was announced that was at best pedestrian – kindly put, beige – and they had found one announceable to take into the fact that it was a Budget with mismanagement, economic vandalism, pork-barrelling but, more than anything else, a lack of vision. This Government is now hurting Victorians, and that is on display for every Victorian to see. It is time for the Labor Government to go.

SUSTAINABLE FORESTS (TIMBER) REPEAL BILL 2024

Wednesday, 29 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:48):

When I grew up, the Labor Party stood for something. When I got involved in politics, as much as it pains me to say it, the Labor Party actually stood for something –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Can I just ask, are you speaking on the Bill or are you making –

James NEWBURY: Yes.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Oh, good – good to know.

James NEWBURY: Good. The Labor Party stood for something, and they would often talk about the fact that they stood for workers. Well, today shows there is nothing left in the values that once underpinned the Labor Party. The Labor Party stand for nothing. 15,000 workers – that does not include the towns, that does not include the community –

Belinda Wilson: On a Point of Order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the Member for Brighton seems to be not really speaking on the Bill at all.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I ask the Member for Brighton to come back to the Bill.

James NEWBURY: I am speaking to the heart of the Bill, Acting Speaker. 15,000 workers and their associated businesses, families and communities are being destroyed because of this State Government. That is what has happened –

a Government who have gone silent on the fact that all of these people are having their livelihoods destroyed. Have you seen one single Member get up and speak on behalf of these communities, on behalf of these workers? No, you have not seen any. In fact, you have seen fakeness coming out of the Government when they talk, around attacks they are making on other parties in this place and their Opposition to that what the Government is proposing. Seriously, talk about blame shifting. It is outrageous that the Government is coming in here and causing such destruction because of base ideology.

And you see it on gas, you see it on the lock-up of forests – all these issues are policy decisions that have been made purely on ideology. But what this Bill does is put the final closure to an industry of good Victorians. It is more than shameful, it is an absolute disgrace that we stand here debating. We have got a Government who has put forward a bill in this place to say 15,000 people do not get a job: ‘Fifteen thousand people, you no longer have a job, and we will be happy about it. We will put this Bill forward.’ The Government should be ashamed of themselves.

Richard Riordan interjected.

James NEWBURY: I’m asked by the Member for Polwarth what the trade-off was. I am sure there has been a trade-off. The CFMEU have been very, very quiet, haven’t they? They have also had preferred deals when it comes to other bigger Government contracts. We can all see that. We know what dirty deals and sellouts have come from this Government.

But for the Government to move a Bill forward to destroy a group of people and their communities – how can they even have the face to get up and speak on it? No wonder they are speaking for 2 minutes. I challenge any Member on that side to say a single thing in support of these good people. That shows the truth of what has become of this State Government – a Government with no values, with no principles. That is what this Bill is about, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

What we do now know is that communities have seen it. Communities now see what has become of the once – I hate saying it – great Labor Party. Communities now see it. They know, and you can see how strongly they are shifting away from Labor, who once stood up for them. They once stood up for them, and now they will not – of course they will not.

Belinda Wilson: On a Point of Order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the Member for Brighton seems to be speaking a lot about the Labor Party and not referring to the Bill at hand.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I will ask the Member for Brighton to continue but to refer to the Bill, please.

James NEWBURY: Of course. That is exactly what I am doing, Acting Speaker. I am talking about a Bill that has been moved by the Labor Government – a Labor Government who have forgotten thousands of workers, forgotten about communities – and aren't they ashamed to be hearing the truth. I have not heard a single one of them get up on their behalf. It is outrageous. I know how many people on this side of the Chamber are speaking on behalf of those people who do not have the voice that they deserve. But we are speaking on their behalf – on behalf of everybody who has not got a voice and does not have a job, does not have security and rightly has concerns about their future. What this Government has done is outrageous, and every single Member who votes for and speaks on behalf of this should stand condemned. The Government have an opportunity to hear these words, to hear these pleas, and do something about it. I would hope that in good conscience some of them go to their leadership, who have forgotten the community, and lobby them to see some sense.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Tuesday, 18 June 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:41):

I move, by leave:

That this House requires the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 31 December 2024, on the impact of social cohesion of deep antisemitism that exists in Victoria. Particularly the committee should consider:

1. pleas by the community, including the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, that the level of antisemitism has reached a point where the time for listening is over and the time for action is here;
2. that despite the State Government accepting 34 recommendations to increase anti-vilification laws three years ago only one of the recommendations has been implemented;
3. Victoria Police findings through Operation Park that between 7 October 2023 and 11 June 2024 197 alleged criminal incidents occurred relating to the Middle East conflict and that of those incidents:
 - (a) 88 reports, 44.7 per cent, related to antisemitic incidents; and
 - (b) of the 47.2 per cent where a direct motive was not clear, 87, or 93.5 per cent, were politically motivated by Opposition to Israel's Gaza policy;
4. the recent community security group findings through the Jewish community incident reporting on university campuses that 50 antisemitic or anti-Israel incidents are now occurring on campus each week, up from 11 over the entire year of 2023;

5. the ongoing incitement of violence and hatred towards Jewish people, including the recent public graffiti on a Jewish school despicably stating 'Jew die';
6. the need for stronger move-on laws, which Labor stripped away in 2015, to enable police to keep the peace and protect faith communities and others across our community from harassment;
7. the need for greater legal protections against doxxing of Jews following the social media profiles, pictures and occupations of 700 Jewish Australians being shared online; and
8. the behaviour of taxpayer-funded Victorian Government staff, including the Victorian Public Sector Commission advisory board member Tasneem Chopra and Victorian Multicultural Commission's commissioner Mohamed Mohideen.

PARLIAMENTARY WORKPLACE STANDARDS AND INTEGRITY BILL 2024

Tuesday, 18 June 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:28):

I rise to speak on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024.

I do only intend to make a number of comments. The community have and should have an expectation that their Members of Parliament behave appropriately and with the highest standard of behaviour – of course they should – not that everybody expects Members of Parliament to be perfect, because nobody is.

When Parliaments were formed, when Parliaments were created, it would be fair to say that the behaviour of Members was primarily governed by a set of rules, or Standing Orders in our case, that set out how Members should behave, and if they did not behave in that way, the House would deal with them for breaching those standards.

We have seen over time laws come in to assist and provide more guidance around Members' behaviour, and some of the driving force of that is, frankly speaking, because Members of Parliament, as the former Speaker rightly said, from all sides of all Chambers have not upheld the compact they have with the community on behaviour, and the community expects more.

You can see, certainly not just in this country but across the world, that communities are fraying in terms of their views of how their elected leaders behave. Partly that is because of a greater deal of scrutiny and probity, which is seeing behaviour in a far closer way, but it is also because the community will always have a very strong expectation of their elected representatives – and so they should.

This Bill I think adds to that work by ensuring that there is a framework that provides appropriate protections and appropriate ways in which this workplace works but also in how Members work more broadly. That is why I do want to put on record a number of things.

The Government has, in my view, on this Bill, worked outside of their own Party in a way that I have not seen before, and I think that that is worth acknowledging. The Government has definitely engaged with and amended a proposed Bill in a way that I have not seen before. They have worked on a draft, and you can see in a number of areas, including areas where I did not think there would be compromise. On things like the scrutiny of Ministers, the Government have certainly amended the framework to come into this place in a way that I think the non-Government Members will feel more comfortable about considering. I think that it is important to acknowledge the Government's work on that.

But there are other areas that have not landed yet. I know the Shadow spoke about this in relation to legal costs and the litigious nature of the community more generally. There is an allowance for a mechanism by which Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries have access to legal costs in terms of dealing with matters in this process. The Shadow did make it clear that when this Bill comes before the Upper House we will need to land on an outcome on that policy issue. The Shadow I think made it very, very clear that he has accepted in good faith the Premier and the Government's commitment to look at that policy issue before that is considered by the Upper House. We take the Government at their word, because we have certainly approached this Bill in a way that is in my view collaborative. Having been part of many conversations around the work that has been done on this Bill, we have certainly approached this Bill in a collaborative way, as have the Government.

I think what has come before this House shows, frankly speaking, that sometimes when Governments put Bills to the crossbench the crossbench can improve the Bills and make the Bills a better joint outcome. There is no doubt that that is the case, so I restate that there have been a number of Amendments that have been made around the way privileges work, the way that Ministers are held accountable and the way that certain position-holders are appointed. All of these things have, over time, improved. That is not to say that the Government

have compromised where they intended to go; I do not mean to say that at all. Often times the Opposition has been able to talk through some of the specifics and worked to a point where what has come before this place is, in my view, a better outcome. It does not mean that they are perfect, and I mention the issue of legal costs and again implore the Premier that that policy issue does need to be resolved. I just would not want to see a debate in the Upper House have to focus on that if that issue were not resolved by the time it was debated.

Many Members in this place of all sides have mentioned the frivolous complaints or the vexatious complaints and the capacity for the weaponisation of the complaints system. I have come to the view that there is no doubt in my mind that this system will be weaponised. I do not think it is possible for it not to be. I think that it is just not possible for it not to be, in that there will always be someone who misuses a system to undermine Members of Parliament they do not like. That unfortunately will form part of this system. We will see unfortunately complaints which are found to have no basis reported to the House, as is required by the Bill, even where there has been found no substance. Those reports will land in the Chamber, and all media outlets will write about them despite the fact that there has been no finding of substance. Unfortunately, that is going to happen, both in relation to Members and also Ministers. It will feature as part of the process, and there is no full protection from that. I think it would have been possible to slightly tweak the process to probably protect a little more from that; however, I accept that the Government has taken the view that everything in relation to these issues is about balance at the end of the day. To ensure there is a full framework of protection, you sometimes need to probably lean in, and that certainly is the case in relation to that element.

I wanted to put those particular matters on the record along with the hope that by the time this Bill gets to the Council, that final policy matter especially is dealt with, because the community deserves Members who behave in the best possible way, and we have seen instances where that has not occurred. I think it would be fair to say things that we saw in the last Federal Parliament shocked the community to its core. That is just a fact. I think that the framework that will be in place will certainly enhance how the community expects, but also what they can expect – because this is in place. With that, I will leave my comments there.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

DAVID MACCA MCCARTHY

Thursday, 1 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:50):

He will be very unhappy with his biggest secret being debunked, but David 'Macca' McCarthy's bark is a lot worse than his bite.

This month he steps down as President of JOY after serving seven years as President. His significant contribution as a leader of the Rainbow community deserves acknowledgement.

As a JOY member for 25 years, a radio presenter for 21 years and lead presenter of Sat Mag for 14 years, he has been a fearless and unflinching advocate for equality and the rights of the rainbow community.

What also sets him apart is his advocacy of policy, not politics, a testament to his character.

Though history in Hansard should record his efforts, I am not sure our friendship will do much for his street cred.

MEMBERS STATEMENT

VALE BENJAMIN JOHNSON

Thursday, 15 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:10):

My grandfather Benjamin Arthur Johnson lived a full 100 years and 86 days.

After an incredible life our Bim, a devoted family man and a gentleman, peacefully passed away.

His life was full of love for family, and we feel honoured to have had him with us for so long.

He was the one constant for our family, a comfort who could be leaned on during hardship and a beaming joy ready to share moments of happiness.

We will miss deeply his love, his modesty, his calmness, his few but meaningful words and the bright twinkle in his eye.

Rest in peace. Vale, Bim.

YOUTH JUSTICE BILL 2024: COUNCIL AMENDMENTS

Tuesday, 27 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:51):

What we are considering today is Amendments to law which will go only half of the way, or part of the way, to trying to fix the mistakes that this current Government made – that this current Government made.

This Government watered down the law – that is what this current Government did – and it was the current Premier that did it.

At the time the Coalition strongly spoke out about what was being proposed. The Coalition knew the effect and impact of those changes, and the Government did not listen. The Government said, ‘We know better. We are deaf to these concerns and there will be no impact.’ What we know is that there have been hundreds of people who have been affected by crime who would not have been had these changes not occurred earlier in the year. That is a fact.

We also know that three people have died. Earlier this year the Coalition called out what the Government was proposing to do, and the Government ignored it. I would say to them again today that what the Government is proposing to do today will not fix the problem. The Government will not fix the problem with the Amendments they are passing, and the community knows it. The only difference now is the community knows it and the Government has been politically pushed by the right – who are briefing – to amend the law. That is what has happened. This is an attempted political fix by part of Labor’s Party Room in response to what the community knows is a youth crime crisis.

In my particular community we are very aggrieved because over two years ago the former Premier told us as a community that we did not understand what we were talking about when we said there was a crisis starting to occur in our community. The former Premier victim-blamed anybody who stood up and said that we did not understand. Victoria Police have since confirmed that the youth

crime crisis in Victoria started in my Electorate. Victoria Police have confirmed that. So, the former Premier, who knew better than everybody else, who said that we did not understand what we were talking about – shame on him – got it wrong, and hundreds of people have been victims as a result.

Danny Pearson interjected.

James NEWBURY: I tell you what, the former Premier isn't anything like Elvis, he is a pig of a man.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Brighton, that is unparliamentary language.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, Speaker, whether or not it is true. The Amendments we are dealing with today will not fix the problems in the youth crime crisis that is occurring in our community, and the community knows it. This half-baked political fix, which is all it is, being pushed by the right, who are briefing out from Cabinet on their little wins – Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Order! The Member for Brighton, without assistance.

James NEWBURY: We know that these Amendments will not fix what has been a 146 per cent increase in aggravated burglaries in homes in the time of this Government – a 146 per cent increase in aggravated burglaries, an almost 20 per cent increase over the last year. It is massively more in my community, but the average across this State is almost 20 per cent.

We are talking about the most serious of crimes, where you wake up – oftentimes in my community people are sleeping, their families are sleeping, their little kids are sleeping – and find a gang in your home with very big weapons. It must be one of the worst possible crimes a parent can face. Having spoken to more victims than I could possibly go through, I know it is a deeply scarring event, not just for the short term but a crime that stays with victims for a very long time. I regularly talk to victims after the event and they talk to me about the long-term impact they bear, the way they cannot sleep and the types of mental health anguish they go through purely because the Government watered down the law and as a result repeat offenders have been let out again and again and again and again and again – more than 10 times is not uncommon.

The changes before us today still do not make breaching bail an offence. The reason why I can say with great sadness that these Amendments will not fix the

problem is because the offenders who are committing the worst offences know that if they breach bail, it does not matter. There is literally no punishment. It does not matter. Shame on the Government. This crime crisis will get worse, and it will continue because the fix will not solve the problem.

This is a political fix, that is what it is. It is nothing more than a political fix. It is the only type of fix that could get through their Party Room. That is what this fix is. You could see a massive difference between the Minister for Police and the Attorney-General – a clear difference in views of what they wanted to see in terms of changes or not at all, but the community had spoken. Only on Friday, at a quarter to 4 in the afternoon, there was a knife fight in the main street in my community. Chairs were being thrown and bottles were being thrown. Only minutes later I talked to people who were there when it happened, and there were mums with little kids walking along the street who were dodging a knife fight in the middle of the street. These types of crimes are not uncommon.

People have often heard me talk in this place about the crimes that have been happening in my community – crimes that are now occurring in other parts of the community. These crimes are real, and for too long this Government has denied these crimes, watered down the laws and not fixed the problem. Though we see an attempted political fix now, which will not solve the problem, what we know is the community has worked it out, because they are seeing the crimes.

Only today you saw in Hawthorn that example raised by a number of members – a car flipped, and someone being forced to make a citizen's arrest on their morning coffee run. How can this occur, and the Government not want to fix it? That is what I would ask. How can these crimes continue to occur, and the Government not want to solve it and fix it properly?

We will see these crimes continue, terribly and sadly, and we will see a continuing repeat of offences, because the laws do not put in place a proper series of protections for the community or disincentives for repeat behaviour. This political fix, which has only just been an agreement that the left in the Government's Party Room would agree to, we know will not solve the problem. Shame on the Government for their behaviour over the two years, for denying these crimes, for watering down these laws and for seeing Victorian victims continue to be hurt by this crime crisis.

DRUGS, POISONS AND CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES AMENDMENT (PILL TESTING) BILL 2024

Tuesday, 15 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:02):

I rise to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024.

I am glad to follow the Premier and her contribution and do intend to make a few brief comments. The Premier is not known to stand for many things, but one thing this Premier will be known for is giving a green light to illicit drugs. That is what this Premier will be known for.

This Parliament is a make-up of community leaders, and our role is to set standards, rules and laws for the community. The Premier just spoke about this Bill because, in her words, she is seeking to make people safe. This Bill allows any person of any age – any child – access to a Government service that greenlights their drug use. That is what this Bill does. This Bill allows a child to walk into a Government facility – there is no age limit on this service – and have their drug green-lit. Shame on the Government. This Bill is about a breach in a basic fundamental principle, and this Parliament and we in this place should say no to illicit drugs. This Premier, who is known for little, is saying yes to illicit drugs.

Victorians can see it. They absolutely can see it. There is a reason why there has been a total collapse in the support of the current Labor Government; there is a reason. It has not just happened by chance. A third of the Government's vote has collapsed, a third of the Government's vote, and that is because this Government

does not stand for principle. Shame on this Government for allowing a Bill into this place that allows children access to Government services that green-light drug use. That is what this Bill does. There are absolutely no age limits on use of these Government services. Let me tell you, the Coalition put a raft of questions to the Government, serious important questions like, for example, details around what drugs can be measured. That is not an unreasonable question. What sensitivity will there be in the testing? The Government was not able to answer it. Not only did they not answer it, but they have not been able to answer it. Not a single speaker in this Chamber on the Government's side has stood up and provided detail around those issues, not a single speaker, and there will not be. There will not be a speaker who stands up and says, 'What can be tested? How sensitive is the testing?' Because the Government do not know, and they refuse to answer.

The Premier spoke about keeping the community safe. The Government will not provide any estimate of the impact of this policy, but common sense would tell you this will not even touch the surface in terms of drug use; this will not touch the surface. Not only is the policy wrong but it is poorly implemented – only Labor could do that. It should be noted that we know that soon after the Premier took the role – following the former Premier, who stood strongly against pill testing – we saw multiple briefings where the new Premier was anonymously quoted as supporting pill testing and, by the way, open to cannabis reform – same briefings. Premier Allan is open to pill testing and open to cannabis reform, so what is next? What is next? This Bill is shameful, and what it is is craven populism. That is what this Bill is about. The Premier who stands for nothing has picked to stand for something because she thinks wins her a vote. That is what this Bill is about.

The basic questions around the operation of this program cannot and will not be answered by any speaker from the Government side in this place: the sensitivity of the testing, the types of drugs, any age limit access to these facilities. Can a 12-year-old walk in and have access to it? Can a 13-year-old? No Government Member will stand up and say, because the Bill allows for it. The Bill allows children access to these Government services. And then when you use this service, you waive your civil rights. Government Members have

not spoken about that one either. You immediately waive your civil rights. You waive your legal rights. Why? Because we know that testing will not properly and carefully assess for every dangerous substance, so it will not keep people safe. We know it will not keep people safe. We also know that workers who work in this program cannot talk about limitations of the testing. It is specifically ruled out of the Bill.

The workers who provide these services have been given specific, set guidance on what they can talk about, but limitations are not one of them, so you cannot say to someone, 'We can't test for everything, but we are going to take away your civil rights'. This is the detail of the Bill.

This Bill on principle is wrong. It is wrong. It is a green light to illicit drugs, and we know that the Premier is open to cannabis reform. That will be the next one. When the Premier chose to stand for this issue – the Premier who does not stand for things – the Premier made the wrong choice. As a community leader she made a wrong choice in saying, 'I approve as Premier children having access to drugs. 'We must always in this place stand up for what is right, and saying to children, 'Use drugs when we test them' is wrong. It is absolutely wrong. It is wrong in principle. Victorians will see and have seen through this Premier. They know and are seeing through this Premier, which is why there has been a wholesale collapse in support for the Premier – a wholesale collapse. There is no question about that. The 49 Premier is the Premier who has chosen to say, 'I choose as Premier to green-light illicit drugs.' Now, it is through pill testing, but we know what is next, because the Premier ensured that it was reported. Pill testing first, cannabis reform next. It is shameful, and Labor should stand condemned for this outrageous Bill being put to the Parliament.

CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT (SEC) BILL 2023: COUNCIL AMENDMENTS

Tuesday, 15 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:30):

I will start where the Minister left off in relation to the Amendments to the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023.

The Minister said a number of times that there would be more to say when it comes to the SEC, and that is the story of the SEC. We saw a press release before the last election – a one-sheet press release, as the former Premier was so accustomed to doing – with no detail, and from that date to now, to today, we have still seen no detail.

What this Bill does is set up effectively a shell, but it does not deliver what Victorians need, and that is reliable, affordable and secure energy. What we hear from that side of the Chamber is ideology, not just in the speech on the Amendments today. Follow the Minister on Twitter and you can see not just ideological wars in Victoria but fights with the Federal Government on energy ideology – fights over ideology with the Federal Government in relation to energy supply.

What we have seen from the Federal Government is the Federal Government calling out that there is a problem with this State providing reliable, affordable and secure energy to Victorians. You would think that this Government would put those goals at the heart of what they do – they should be a core function of what they do, ensuring that the community has that – but we know that they do not. We know that in this State, which is so reliant on things like gas – 2 million homes are reliant on gas – we are seeing an ideological ban on gas.

This Bill is nothing more than a shell. The Minister spoke in her speech about the SEC providing consumer-facing solutions. Do you know what consumer-facing solutions are? Four hundred thousand dollars on promotional junk. That is what the Government means when they talk about consumer-facing solutions. They mean the yo-yos, they mean the coffee mugs and they mean the jelly beans. That is what the SEC has produced thus far – oh, and tote bags; I forgot the tote bags: \$400,000 of junk. That is what this Government has done: spent taxpayer money on junk. What they have not done is provide energy solutions to Victorians.

We are two years effectively since the last election – two years – and when it comes to the SEC nothing meaningful has happened. We have seen broken promises and we have seen a waste of money. We have seen this Bill sit upstairs for months and months and months and months because the Government was not able to convince the crossbench to work it through – more delays, more delays. That speaks to the Government, frankly, and their lack of capacity to deal with, in most cases, Independent Members who lean their way. They could not even convince people who lean their way.

We are dealing with Amendments today which the Coalition did not support in the Upper House, because we know that in the two years after their media release announcement the Government has not done anything meaningful – two years, and there has been no outcome. Victorians now know that when it comes to energy, they do not have energy security. They know that energy is not affordable, and they know that there is chaos in the Government over which position to take on energy policy, not only in their own team in relation to policy positions but also with the Federal Government, which has called out the ideological approach of this Government, which ended up in a Twitter war from the Minister.

I mean, a Twitter war between the Minister and the Federal Minister – it was very, very unedifying to see when it came to that fight over energy security.

What I would say about the Federal Government is they have sided with the need for Victoria to do better when it comes to energy policy. That is what they have said. They have said they want the Victorian Government to do better when it comes to energy policy.

This week we are seeing Bills move before this House which are entirely contradictory. One says we want to have a structural dealing with supply of gas and the capacity to store gas for times of need, effectively, and at the same time a Bill moves forward that bans gas. It bans gas at the same time as the Premier says we are not banning gas. Is there any wonder why Victorians do not understand what the Government is doing and have lost trust in what the Government is doing?

But this Bill is about the SEC. This Bill creates a shell that enables the SEC, but what it does not do is provide detail and what it does not do is do meaningful things. What Victorians deserve is reliable, affordable and secure energy. What they do not need is the Government wasting money on SEC yo-yos and coffee cups. I do not know what happened to those yo-yos. They perhaps were provided to the Members of the Caucus. They might have just been provided to Members of the Caucus for all we know, but what we do know is that \$400,000 was wasted on junk and that did not reduce the Bill of a single Victorian when it comes to energy. So, the Coalition opposed these measures in the Upper House, and we will do so shortly.

OFFSHORE PETROLEUM AND GREENHOUSE GAS STORAGE AMENDMENT BILL 2024

Tuesday, 16 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:59):

I rise to speak on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024, and I start my contribution by saying that the Coalition supports the measures in this Bill. It is not a big Bill. The Bill itself does not do a lot, but the Coalition supports the Bill because we have now reached a point in time where we know how dire energy policy and therefore energy reliability, security and affordability are in this State.

So, when a Bill comes to this place, a small piece of work in what should be a far bigger policy agenda in relation to ensuring adequate energy security and supply, the Coalition supports that approach. We have looked at the Bill in detail and understand the need, because we know the energy market operator has forecast and warned of gas supply shortages from as soon as two years' time and we know that we will need very shortly the capacity in this State to store gas to ensure that supply is available to Victorians as it should be.

What this House is considering today is a Bill that deals with measures that, frankly, could and should have been implemented years ago. We know the Government was aware of not only gas shortages but also the need for a gas storage measure such as this, and that is what this Bill does. This Bill effectively will allow a larger storage space, in the simplest terms, for gas to be stored and made available to Victorian households. Victoria is very reliant on gas. We know that over 2 million homes are reliant on gas. Some 18 per cent of gas usage is from homes. Obviously, businesses are an enormous part of that gas demand or need, so we should have known as a State that we needed a robust and strong energy and specifically gas policy to ensure that Victorians have the energy supply they need.

Sadly, when you look at the measures of this Bill – and we will go through industry's and the broader community's response – what we are seeing is an acknowledgement that gas has been so demonised by this Government, so ideologically demonised by this Minister for Energy and Resources, that it has affected the broader Government's capacity to properly plan for Victorians in terms of their energy supply. Not only is that recognised by the community, but it is recognised by the Government, and Government Members themselves have spoken out against the Minister and the Minister's approach. The Federal Government has spoken out against the Minister and the Minister's approach. We have seen in recent times not only a calling out from the Federal Labor Government of the Minister but a slight change in the Government's approach in overruling the Minister for Energy. And we have seen the Minister approve a project for the first time in 10 years. I cannot imagine that that was signed by the Minister with any joy; in fact, I am sure the Minister's arm had to be moved with a pen in it to have her agree to that brief. I cannot imagine that she has framed that brief in approving that project. I think she would have done so almost under duress.

As I say, as a State we are reliant on gas, and there is nothing wrong with gas. I think what we are seeing both in this State and now Federally is Australian people standing up and saying to their Government's, 'Stop demonising gas because of ideology.'

That is what the Government here has done for years and the Federal Government has done, and you saw the Federal Coalition's announcement yesterday to extend the capacity investment scheme eligibility to gas projects and the commitment from the Coalition that if they were to win the next Federal Election gas would form part of the investment scheme so that no longer would that scheme only underwrite renewable projects but it could also underwrite gas projects. The Federal Coalition understands the need, as we do in Victoria as the alternate Government, that Victorians should have and deserve to have reliable, secure and affordable energy. It is something that I know the Member for Bulleen is very strong on. As Leader he announced a commitment to a Domestic Reservation Policy in 2022, and that was something that showed our commitment at that time as a Coalition to ensuring that gas was part of the energy mix for the future. Victorian households would have been

guaranteed access to Victorian gas, and that is something that this Government has never done. Not only has it not provided any local guarantee, but it has demonised and tried to ban gas, and we will deal with a Bill tomorrow where the Government is seeking to take a significant step towards banning gas in the measures in that Bill. In fact, in that Bill there are very, very sneaky measures that have been pushed into an omnibus Building Bill, which is effectively the head of power for banning gas to households – sneaky, sneaky measures that were hardly highlighted, of course, by the Minister in any of their public contributions. In the last Parliamentary sitting week, coincidentally, the Premier talked about Victorians being able to cook with gas two days before announcing and introducing a Bill into this place that would ban gas in homes. Talk about talking out both sides of the mouth on gas.

As I said, gas is an important part of our energy mix in Victoria, and the Government's 10-year ideological war on gas has just undermined for Victorians the reliability, security and affordability of gas. And you can see the community's response to it. Recent polling – not that we should ever look to polling most directly, though I am sure that many on this side have been looking at it this week – in relation to Victoria's gas phase-out showed strong support from Victorians for gas. Perhaps that is why the Premier has tried to draw a line between herself and the Minister for Energy – the great gas-banning Minister for Energy – who is notorious across this country for being the most ideologically opposed in this country and in the Labor Party, which in itself is an achievement. To be thought of as the most ideologically opposed in the Labor Party is quite some achievement.

As soon as this Bill was announced there was public discussion about the importance of a local enhanced gas storage supply, and you can look at what people like David Close, the director of the University of Queensland's Gas and Energy Transition Research Centre, said:

There seems to be a growing acceptance that gas supply will need to be imported given the lack of investment in exploration and development for many years in Victoria ...

And further:

Imports are no easy option – existing pipeline expansions, new pipelines and LNG imports all face financing, approval, social acceptance and commercial hurdles. Possibly insurmountable hurdles without a capacity mechanism that includes gas.

Increasing gas storage can decrease the reliance on gas imports during peak demand periods ...

This is just one example, shortly after this policy was belatedly announced, where you could see the sector saying, 'We see a glimmer of hope. We see a small, small glimmer of hope that perhaps the Minister's ideology has finally been overruled.'

Further, if you look at other people, Tim O'Brien, the COO of Lakes Blue Energy, said only recently:

We're very bullish about the exploration and have been for some time. It's been a frustrating road, but it looks like reality is finally dawning on the Government – we need reliable, locally sourced energy ...

And further:

People are realising we are desperate for gas because renewables are a long way from being able to provide reliable energy.

I mean, these are not words of political attack, they are words from an industry who are saying, 'Finally we might see that the Government has recognised that security of energy is almost in crisis in this State.' We know that. The experts are saying we have a problem and we need to solve it shortly.

Recent correspondence from the Minister to the Federal Minister on this very Bill confirms that the State Government was talking to the Commonwealth about the possible project in 2020, some four years ago. How could it be that it has taken four years for the Minister to actually do something? Released documents show that the Minister was consulting over the policy approach in 2020. One wonders if the community had not spoken up strongly and if the security and reliability and affordability issues were not so strongly felt by the

community, would the Minister have ever acted? I think we all know the answer to that.

There are reports in fact that informal conversations were happening, it has been reported by the media, from 2019. In those reports you can see people like the senior adviser of Royal Vopak Gary Constantine saying how much we need a policy like this. He said:

The conflict in Ukraine has caused nearly all the available floating storage regasification units to be contracted into Europe for security of their gas supply...

What he is saying is: we need to do more and we have almost missed the boat, as it were.

This Bill is belated, and as I said earlier, we know of the threats of a lack of supply. The Australian Energy Market Operator, if I can read in a quote, said:

Reduced storage facility delivery capacity may pose a risk to gas supply adequacy in southern jurisdictions on peak demand days during the winter peak demand period ...

You could not be clearer on how much industry and the experts were calling for policy action. We know that the Minister for years has been talking – not doing, talking – and the sector has been saying, ‘We need action.’ If you look at industry and business more broadly, they have been calling out the Government’s policy failures. Rick Wilkinson, the Chief Executive of EnergyQuest, has said that the situation is ‘very serious’ and that we ‘need a backup’.

Recent Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action departmental briefing notes have been reported as saying that shortfalls in 2026–27 could not be met with supplies from other States as it was:

... projected that all Southern States will be in deficit and there is limited pipeline capacity to import into Victoria.

A supply gap will remain even if all currently committed and anticipated

Southern State projects are developed ...

You could not get a more dire warning in a brief by the Department. And what was done? Nothing, and we are here today dealing with a Bill which we support, but it almost feels like we are close to the end of the road when it comes to energy policy. And we know why. It is because, as the Australian Industry Group's Chief Executive Innes Willox said, the Victorian Government has spent much of the past decade:

... demonising gas as a legitimate energy source.

And that is true. He said:

The reality is that six-sevenths of our gas use nationally is by industry, not households, and without it big parts of our industrial base face a very difficult future.

It may be that having been warned by energy regulators that it faces a strong risk of blackouts in the years ahead as well as seeing significant parts of its industrial base at risk, the Victorian Government has realised that misguided ideological intransigence has real-world consequences.

Well, why did it take so long, especially when, as the Australian Energy Producers director Peter Kos has said:

The Government's own Victorian Gas Program found there is up to 830 petajoules of conventional gas onshore – but that's just what we know.

A further quote:

The State has not been explored as much as it should have given the State's long running anti-gas policies and bans. The political will is missing.

And that has been called out. That has now been seen clearly. In fact, not only has it been seen by Victorians, but it has been seen clearly by some in this Government and certainly in the Federal Government.

There are a number of others who have called out that policy failure. Andrew Richards from the Energy Users Association of Australia has said previously that:

... if we go down this gas approach, if we're using gas curtailment to manage supply-demand balances, that's not the market working.

That's policy failure. Sorry, you can't spin it any other way.

That is plain talking, and we are now dealing with a very small piece of the puzzle in terms of energy policy that has taken far too long to materialise.

And it is not just consumers, obviously, that are concerned about the security, reliability and affordability of energy. Of course it is also business. Because as a State we should be ensuring that businesses can operate, can keep providing jobs for Victorians and can keep producing the things we need as a State to operate. We know that there have been many, many instances of business saying there is a problem. If you look at the tomato manufacturer Kagome, CEO Jason Fritsch said:

We are deeply concerned about where energy is going, not only the price, but also the supply ability going forward for us to manufacture ...

Paul Guerra from the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:

The supply issues around gas need to be solved before we lose the ability to drive the manufacturing sector, and ongoing electricity generation and transmission needs a clear solution before the lights go out ...

These are dire warnings, not just from the experts but also from industry, who keep the State going, who keep people employed and who provide the things that we need. I mentioned before Peter Kos from the Australian Energy Producers, who talked about the political will, and he has further said that:

... the political will is missing and new developments that can put downward pressure on prices and avoid blackouts will not proceed unless the Government provides a stable regulatory environment to allow investment ...

We know that every time these issues are raised with the Minister, the Minister says, 'Well, no-one's popped anything on my desk.' When you are an ideological warrior who demonises gas, is there any wonder that no-one knocks on your

door? Why would you knock on that Minister's door? In fact, you would knock on every other cabinet Minister's door and say there is a problem with this Minister.

Danny O'Brien: And they are.

James NEWBURY: And they are. That is why Ministers have been speaking out and why the Federal Government is speaking out against this Minister. We have seen, sadly, that over recent times the Minister's attitude towards energy policy has clearly put our State at risk. There is no other way to say it – it has put our State at risk. We see the Minister recently has clearly been overruled in terms of her position on energy with some extremely unedifying examples, where the Federal Resources Minister went into a Twitter war with the Minister. Federal Minister King said:

... gas will remain an important source of energy through to 2050 and beyond
...

And what did the Minister for Energy in Victoria say? 'She is wrong, she is wrong, she is wrong.' Not an ideological warrior with the Minister for Energy, I do not imagine – not a socialist left warrior. She said:

I'm happy to say that Madeleine King is wrong ...

How unedifying.

Danny O'Brien: Happy to say it.

James NEWBURY: Yes, happy to say it. How unedifying. We are talking about people having secure energy supply. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about people having secure energy supply, and our Minister, the Minister for all of us, sadly, is saying to the Federal Minister, 'We don't want you to stand up for secure energy supply.' How could you want to do that in a late-night tweet? Bizarre. Minister King called it out further, saying:

... no doubt Queensland is doing the heavy lifting in terms of gas supply for the whole of the East Coast.

And the Victorian Minister for Energy did not stop there with the Twitter rant.

She accused the Federal Minister of behaving ‘like a Coalition Minister’ – high praise indeed. There is no higher praise.

Danny O’Brien: There’s hope for them yet.

James NEWBURY: That is right. There is no higher praise than accusing the Federal Minister of acting like a Coalition Minister, because it is the Coalition who will always ensure that people of this country and people of this State have secure, affordable and reliable energy. There is no doubt about that. We saw from the Federal Coalition yesterday the announcement that gas would form part of the eligibility for the current scheme, which will ensure that gas has a very strong role to play in the future. And why shouldn’t future gas projects have eligibility through that scheme? Why should the Government be trying to only pick certain

projects? I was speaking about the capacity investment scheme. Why should the Federal Government only pick particular projects? So the Coalition announced yesterday, as I mentioned earlier, that gas projects would be able to apply through that scheme.

After the Twitter war between the State and Federal Labor Ministers, Minister D’Ambrosio simply claimed that there is no gas, which is just factually wrong – ‘there’s just no gas anymore.’ No, the Minister does not want to find gas. There is no question when you listen to the experts. Not only do they say there is gas, they do not even know how much gas there is in terms of significant capacity, because frankly the industry and investment have dried up in this State.

If you are in the gas business, why would you knock on this Minister’s door?

We have a Bill before us today which we support. We support what it does, and what it does is it says that we will build a storage supply capacity to help us when we have shortfalls. But it does not solve the underlying problem, because you have got to put something in it. This Bill says we will have a storage capacity, but we will need to put something in it, and until the Government recognises the need to do something about that, we will continue to have issues with our energy security and supply.

It is little wonder that after the ‘Coalition Minister’ comment you saw Coalition

Ministers – National Party Shadow Ministers – call out the poor behaviour of the State Minister, with multiples speaking out. But one Federal Labor Member reportedly said about the Minister for Energy, ‘On gas, it’s always someone else’s fault’. You could not say it better: on gas, it’s always someone else’s fault. That is the story of this Minister. It is little wonder that we saw the new Premier trying to talk a little bit of gas talk on radio a couple of weeks ago. The Premier spoke about allowing Victorians to continue to access gas in a very, very limited way, but then was, as I mentioned earlier, caught out two days later after introducing a Bill to ban gas in homes. I mean, how can you possibly as Premier say one thing and then allow your Government to introduce a Bill which does exactly the opposite only two days later?

It is little wonder that you see the Deputy Premier enter the debate. Is it any wonder the Deputy Premier entered that debate and said we have got gas in our homes and for a number of reasons we are keeping it. We knew what he was saying. What he was saying was the Minister for Energy is wrong. The Minister for Energy is ideologically wrong. He was saying, ‘I’m different.’ Now, I do not think he was just saying that to Victorians, I think he was saying that to his colleagues. I think he was saying, ‘We need a different approach.’ It is interesting that after he said that the Premier decided to speak about gas, so obviously he had his finger on the pulse with his colleagues and the Premier thought, ‘Well, I can’t be completely outflanked by the Deputy Premier’, so the Premier has made some recent comments too.

When it comes to energy policy, it is not words, it is actions, and we have seen inaction. There is proof positive in the number of instances I have raised that the Government has not acted to secure energy supply. This Bill is a very small step towards ensuring there is a storage capacity, but it will not do what this State needs. This State needs secure, reliable and affordable energy, including gas, and that will only happen when we have a Minister who does not demonise gas and who does not spend their time ideologically waging war against the gas that she ideologically is opposed to. Industry knows it, Victorians know it and we know it.

BUILDING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT AND OTHER MATTERS BILL 2024

Thursday, 17 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:16):

I rise to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024.

I think it needs to be put on the record at the very outset that the Parliament will only be allowed an opportunity to debate this Bill for just over two hours. Despite a whole Parliamentary week, the Government has narrowed the debate on this Bill to just over two hours. The reason they have done that is because this is in effect an omnibus Bill and most of the measures in this Bill would be supported entirely by every Member, I am sure, in this place. I will mention some of them in passing as I speak. Most of the measures in this Bill are part of a routine omnibus Bill change to current legislation in relation to building and planning in this State. These Bills are not uncommon, and most of those measures would be entirely supported by this Chamber.

But what the Government has done in this omnibus Bill is slip in a sneaky head of power to ban gas in Victorian homes. We have an omnibus Bill which is for the most part fair and reasonable and includes measures that should and would be supported, but they have tapped into that to hide a very, very concerning measure to ban gas in people's homes. They have done it separately to the normal process of doing so. Normally you would think they would bring a Bill into this place to explain why they are banning gas for Victorians, but instead they have slipped it sneakily into a Bill about a lot of other things that are innocuous, probably hoping that Victorians would not even notice, that no-one would notice what is in this Bill. They hoped that no Victorian will pick up the Bill

and flick through it and delve deeply, right down deeply, into the Bill to find the head of power which allows a total ban of gas in Victorian homes.

Every Victorian should be scared by this power. I think it is very, very concerning. You should have the right to gas in your home. Of course you should. We saw in the recent blackout, when half a million homes lost power, that the only access to energy they had was gas. They still had access to gas. Victorians should have access to a secure energy supply, yet what this Bill has is a very concerning power, that is being snuck into what would be a non-contentious Bill, to ban gas.

That is why I move, on behalf of the Coalition, an Amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this Bill be withdrawn and redrafted following stakeholder consultation on the impact of the gas ban, while ensuring the other changes in the Bill are retained.'

This makes clear that the Coalition does not have an issue with most of the measures in this Bill; they are entirely not controversial. But we will not support a Bill that sneakily bans gas on the way through. I mean, seriously, can you believe that the Government have so little courage on their policy decisions that they are now trying to sneak their decisions through this Parliament, hoping that no Members of this place will notice the gas ban in this otherwise innocuous Bill –

that no-one will actually notice? They have slipped it deep in the Bill. I am sure there are Members on that side of the Chamber who did not even know there was a gas ban in the Bill. I am sure they are now shocked to hear about it, because I feel certain that in their Caucus, they would not have been briefed on the gas ban.

They would have kept that secret from their colleagues. I cannot imagine the Minister for Energy and Resources –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: I pick up the Member for Mordialloc's interjection. He said

that in Caucus he was talking about me – instead of talking about the gas ban. Can you believe it? How embarrassing – to talk about me over the Government's gas ban. That shows you the priorities of this Government. They have just been revealed, haven't they? They have just been revealed: talking about rank politics over a gas ban.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The Members for Wendouree and Eureka will come to order.

James NEWBURY: That is why, instead of talking about the important policy issues of the State, they are talking about rank politics. But Victorians can see it. And you can see it in the community sentiment in relation to gas. I refer to the firm that I never refer to by name, but I will in this instance, considering who is in the Chamber, RedBridge communications – RedBridge communications. I might mention them a third time: RedBridge recently found there had been a decline in support, a collapse in support – like support for the Government, by the way – for the Government's ban on gas. There is now net support for a gas ban at -29. The only number close to that is 30, which is the Premier's popularity rating. And what is worse, as it is reported, critically the support amongst Labor voters has collapsed. Is there any wonder why as soon as that poll was announced the Premier stood up to say, straight after the policy was announced, 'Victorians can keep cooking with gas.' Is there any wonder why a Premier who stands for nothing except green-lighting illicit drugs and trying to con Victorians into believing that she somehow is now a convert to gas –

Juliana Addison: On a Point of Order, Acting Speaker, I do not know what the previous Bill has to do with this, so: relevance.

James NEWBURY: On the Point of Order, Acting Speaker, I was referring specifically to the Premier's comments on this Bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): I will make a ruling on the Point of Order. The Member did stray a little bit. I will ask the Member to come back to the Bill and continue with the debate.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: I do not feel the protection of the Chair right now, Acting Speaker.

But what this Bill does is ban gas; that is what this Bill does. Further to that, the other measures in this Bill, as I mentioned, are entirely supported by the Coalition. For example, the matters around building orders being able to be made in an extended way, if I can put it that way rather than being technical –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: Well, to help the Member for Mordialloc. To extend the way that building orders are made is important, because we know the system is not currently working.

We know it is not working, because we have seen horrible, horrible instances of home owners who have been caught out putting their hard-earned money into properties or building properties, and they have, frankly, been ripped off and been left with in some cases hundreds of thousands of dollars in costs to try and repair works that were in no way their fault, because the insurance did not cover them. Of course we support that measure.

VCAT limitation periods are being extended. Of course we support that measure, because it is important that we not put a cap on a timeline where it is appropriate that those who suffer have a justifiable case and the only thing that stops them from mounting that case is an arbitrary timeline. Of course we support that measure. The architects registration regime is a simple change in relation to timing of registration, and the peak body in the area has no issue with the regime change. Of course we support that measure.

There are also changes in relation to neighbours having access to the contact details of their neighbour, where building works are occurring, so that there can be communication. The Coalition throughout the process of this Bill being considered has spoken with the Government and the Department in a constructive

way and spoken about the importance of communication being free between those two parties but at the same time ensuring there are protections, because there should be protections. You need to ensure that those contact details cannot be misused or the requests for them cannot be under the guise of something else and misused and it gives people the right to contact details where they should not have or would misuse them. The Coalition has received assurances from the Government that when those processes are put in place there will be adequate protections – for example, perhaps a Statutory Declaration so that there is an assurance that people are protected from misuse. Or people will have to show a building permit, for example, or a building plan, something that justifies the request – again, a measure that the Coalition supports.

But in addition to those measures there is this gas ban in the Bill, and the gas ban is an extraordinary measure at Clause 38. What it does, this Clause 38, is put into legislation a head of power that allows regulations to be made. What that means is this law will allow the Government to make expanded laws that allow for the prohibition of gas to existing buildings or buildings under construction or buildings in a class of existing building or a class of building under construction, so defined. It also adds a prohibition on the tradesperson from conducting that work, so it effectively gives a head of power that will allow two new prohibitions both to the homeowner and to the tradesperson. But what is so scary about these new heads of power is that there are no details. What this Bill says is, 'We will deal with this by way of regulation.'

When the Government introduced this Bill they said that this power was in aid of their gas road map. However, the power in this Bill in no way aligns with that road map. The road map sets out timelines and timeframes around, in the Government's mind – they are wrong – the future of gas. What this does is give total unfettered power to prohibit gas. When the Minister says this new power is in line with their road map, it is not true. The legislation does not do that. There is no cap. There is no limit to what this power could potentially do. What this law says is, 'We will deal with this by regulation,' which effectively means off book, outside Parliament. And we know what the Government's plan is because they said it in the second-reading speech. The Minister said the plan is to transition away from relying on fossil gas to power our homes and businesses, full stop.

We know what the Minister's plan is: to transition away, not on certain homes, on all homes. Read the sentences in the in the second-reading speech that the Minister tabled. We know what the Minister's plan is, which is why the power in this Bill has no limits.

When I asked simple questions throughout the consultation process with the Government on this Bill around what the caps and what the limits around this power will be, the Government refused to provide any limit. In fact, they would not even guarantee that the power use would be limited to the substitution road map. Despite saying in the speech that this power has something to do with the substitution road map, we know that it does not. In addition, this Bill will allow two new prohibitions to be created, two new bans in law from behaviour, but the other thing the Government will not reveal is what the penalties will be. The Coalition sought to understand what the penalties would be. How much trouble would someone get in for trying to connect gas at their home? The Government will not tell anyone. They will not tell Victorians. Not only is there a ban, they will not tell you yet how much you are going to be punished for doing it. They will not tell tradespeople how much they will be punished for trying to connect. They will simply introduce with this Bill a blanket ban and then say, 'We'll deal with this off book, outside Parliament.'

No-one trusts this Government when it comes to the gas ban, and you can see it in the recent Redbridge poll. I am not a huge fan of polls, let alone Redbridge, but in this instance I point to that because Victorians now know what the Government's plans are. It is very, very concerning because at the end of the day we are dealing with Victorians having secure, reliable and affordable energy, and gas must be part of that mix. As has been pointed out by industry, the truth is, as the Australian Industry Group's Chief Executive recently said, that this Government has spent the last decade 'demonising gas as a legitimate energy source'. That is true, and we know it is true. I quote further:

It may be that having been warned by energy regulators that it faces a strong risk of blackouts in the years ahead as well as seeing significant parts of its industrial base at risk, the Victorian Government has realised that misguided ideological intransigence has real-world consequences.

We know that to be true. It is deeply concerning that the Government has been waging a war on gas, and this Bill just takes that war one step further in banning people from gas in their homes.

We have seen when it comes to this Bill, as I mentioned earlier, soon after polling was released in relation to community support for gas, the Premier's new-found interest in gas and her public comments: 'Oh, no, no. No, no, no, no, we don't have a problem with gas. No, no, no, you're still allowed to cook with gas.' We saw those comments very soon after that polling. But only when it comes to cooktops did the Premier give that commitment. When it comes to hot water, no. When it comes to anything else a household does or uses gas for, no. The Premier just said when it comes to cooktops, and the Premier was called out only two days after saying that Victorians can continue to cook with gas when she approved this Bill being introduced into the Parliament.

Two days after the Premier stood up and said, 'I like gas now. Actually, everyone stop worrying about my gas bans. I think it's okay,' she introduced a sneaky Bill into this place to ban gas in people's homes. I mean, talk about talking out of both sides of your mouth: 'I support gas. I'm going to ban it but I'm going to sneak it through.' That is what the Premier is trying to do today – to sneak through a ban, and not only sneak it through but stop the Parliament debating it. There will only be 2 hours of debate on this Bill. We saw earlier the Government packing their speakers list to stop any debate on this Bill. This debate started after 12 o'clock. The whole morning was filled with the Government packing their speakers on the previous Bill because they did not want to allow any opportunity for debate on this Bill.

When the Bill was introduced you could see what industry thought of it. I refer to Seeley International managing director Jon Seeley, who said in relation to the Premier's announcement:

Today's announcement is a cynical political exercise, an attempt to defuse widespread community discontent with their illogical anti-gas policies without making any substantive concessions ... Half the energy used by Victorian homes is gas for cooking, heating and hot water, which creates less emissions

than switching to coal-fired electricity. Of the common household uses of gas, cooking would be the smallest, and also the most emotive for many community groups.

Telling taxpayers (to) keep cooking with gas but ignoring the fundamental flaw in ... pushing households to electrify everything else makes no sense except from political perspective.

He has hit the nail on the heart, hasn't he – 'from a political perspective'. That is why the Premier came out and made the comment in relation to gas and was caught only two days later.

What is worse is the Government did not even talk to industry. You look at comments from Ross Jamieson from the Gas Appliance Manufacturers Association of Australia, who said that any thoughts of consultation were completely baseless, and:

We've had no meaningful discussions with the Government this year at all – this year at all. You can just imagine, can't you, the gas appliance manufacturers trying to knock on the door of the Minister for Energy and Resources. Can you imagine –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

James NEWBURY: It would be a cold day, wouldn't it? It would be cold day. You would be sitting outside that office for a very long time. I am sure that you would not get entry into that office.

For the association to say that the Government has not spoken to them this year is astonishing. Is there any wonder that you have had the Federal Government, the Federal Minister and the Deputy Premier in this place call out the Minister for Energy's behaviour? Is there any wonder that the Deputy Premier has made it very, very clear that he is cooking with gas at home? He said something about gas, and I think he did it because he knows the Government has gone down the wrong path. But what will be interesting later is to see how he votes. That is all very well and good, and I give him some credit for calling out the Minister for Energy. But he will have an opportunity to vote later today, so it will not just be

his words – it will be the character of his conviction on display. I would say that I would hope that he would not only speak to his views but that he actually votes against the ban. If he is allowed to cook with gas, why would he allow the

Government to ban others from doing the same? Words matter, and he has the opportunity to do that later today.

The other thing that is worth speaking to in relation to this Bill is the Minister's second-reading speech. The second-reading speech went to Victoria's Housing Statement, some of which the Government has forgotten about, including the commitment to build 80,000 homes each and every year over the next 10 years. We know that in the last year they built 51,000 and this year that is projected to fall to 45,000. Only Labor could announce that they will increase the number of homes being built and that number go backwards as a result of their statement. Only Labor could manage that one. It is frankly because they do not understand what they are doing and the housing statement was basically a raft of new taxes. 'Industry, why don't you build new homes?'

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Wendouree! Member for Eureka, come to order.

James NEWBURY: And what we will do as a result is we will tax you into doing it. What that was about was the former Premier wanting to announce something on the way out. We know from little birdies in the Department that the former Premier was given a draft housing statement that suggested the Government commit to 60,000 homes every year, but the Premier, because he was on his way out, said, 'I want to commit to 80,000.'

Paul Mercurio: On a Point of Order, Acting Speaker, I believe the Member has strayed from the content of the Bill.

James NEWBURY: On the Point of Order, Acting Speaker, the Member may wish to read the second-reading speech of the Minister. The Minister quite clearly, in detail, speaks to Victoria's Housing Statement at page 4 of the second-reading speech.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The Member was being relevant.

James NEWBURY: Victoria's Housing Statement, some of which has been forgotten, will become a key focus for Victorians over coming months. You are starting to see across this State big groups of the community forming to come together in forums – big, big groups – saying they are concerned about the measures in these Bills. We spoke about it in Question Time yesterday. In the Deputy Premier's seat hundreds of residents will be coming together on Sunday. They have invited me as the Shadow Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to come to the Deputy Premier's seat to talk about their concerns about a major activity centre plan with a minimum four-storey requirement. For effectively a 1-kilometre circumference you will have to build a minimum four storeys.

We know that in the other activity centres there will be a standing right for six storeys in suburban streets – six storeys.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: I hear the Members from the other side talking about the fact that their areas do not have any of these announced plans. I am so glad that the Members think it is something to boast about that Labor has chosen not to pick their seats for development. And we know when it comes to the Minister, the Minister has form, because the Minister who is approving these things is on the record for opposing development in her seat. The Minister is opposed to development in her own seat – and in one instance opposed a 10-storey development and a three-storey development – but is happy to approve 20 storeys in everyone else's. That just tells you the type of character.

When it comes to this Bill, the Coalition support most of the measures, but we will not support this gas ban, and neither will Victorians. The Premier has been caught, the Premier has been seen and so has the Labor Party, and Victorians will not accept it.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

HOUSING POLICY

Thursday, 13 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:16):

The Government has brought a Matter of Public Importance to this House today on perhaps their biggest policy failure as a Government, other than of course their perhaps criminal economic vandalism through the life of their Government. But it is in the lack of capacity in providing homes to the community where they have failed so badly. And they have done it today – today of all days – a day when Victorians have been seen to vote against this Government. We have seen it. We have seen it in polling today. The ‘runner-up Premier’, the polls say today.

The Premier has now become the runner-up leader of this Parliament, and when it comes to policy and when it comes to housing, we know why, because the housing policies the Premier has announced – she has staked her leadership on it in recent weeks – are the great reset. The Premier took a great reset by announcing, ‘Throw it all in on policy.’ And it has been proven to be a scam – a total scam. Do you know why? Because the policy on housing is about one thing: the Premier’s population growth.

The Premier keeps saying, ‘We’re going to double the size of this city to at least the size of London.’ Has anybody ever asked a Victorian whether they want to see Melbourne at least double to the size of London? Nobody has been asked. There is no mandate, so this hollow set of policy announcements is nothing more than a fraud, a scam. The Premier talks about building housing for people’s children, but it is about housing new population growth – that is what this policy is about – and in doing so turning Melbourne into a mega city. Did anyone ask this State whether they want a mega city? Did anyone ask? No, of course they did not. The Premier has swanned around, driven into Melbourne from Bendigo – from 150 kilometres away – to make her announcements, and

those announcements will wreck this city. Melburnians know it; of course they know it. You have got a Premier who lives 150 kilometres away, who swans on into town and says, 'I've got a series of policies that are going to wreck your suburbs.' Is there any wonder that all around the city you are starting to see big groups of people come together and rise up and say, 'We don't want our city wrecked. We don't want to see the liveability of our State destroyed.' We were the most liveable city in the world, and now the Government has a plan to wreck it by turning certain suburbs into mega suburbs.

The Premier likes to play political games and pick the suburbs she does not like. Of course that is what has happened. We all know what has happened. The Premier cannot even see these suburbs with a pair of binoculars from where she lives. She could not even see the city with a pair of binoculars and has picked suburbs she does not like and said, 'You know what, we're going to wreck them.' These are established, long-term suburbs where the community has spent hundreds of years, built these beautiful suburbs around them, and the Premier has said, 'We're going to put big skyscrapers in them, and you know what, community, you have to suck it up.' That is what this policy is: a scam to fit the population growth that the Labor Government has targeted, both State and Federal, into our suburbs.

What has happened as a result? Victorians have turned on the Premier. I am 100 per cent sure that when the Premier said, 'We're going to put everything into this announcement,' it was to do one thing: to turn around the polls. I do not think the Premier has any goal in her mind other than trying to turn the polls around for herself, so that is what these policy announcements were about. Today the Premier woke up with the faint hope that there would be some glimmer that the Premier's reset, her big policy announcements, would pay a dividend, and Victorians have said no. Not only have they said no; they have made the Premier the runner-up. How embarrassing for the Premier. You can feel it in this Chamber, and you can feel it as you move around this building. The other side of the Chamber know it. They are now looking at the boss and saying, 'Oh no, something is wrong here,' and there is something wrong. The Premier does not get Melbourne. That is the problem – the Premier does not get Melbourne, and that is what you can see in these policy announcements.

These policy announcements were an attack on the city. There is no other way to see it. The Premier will say, 'If you stand up against what we are announcing, somehow there is something wrong with you.' I have said it before, and I will say it again: I would rather stand up and protect my community than be the Premier who wrecks it. That is what this Premier is doing. She has already announced that she will allow the wrecking of 25 suburbs through her major activity centre announcement, and the Coalition has said strongly that where the community does not want it of course it should not be forced upon them. There are some communities that do, and they absolutely should be welcome to it. But when you see inappropriate skyscrapers being forced on communities that have none, purely because the Premier does not like the suburb, seriously, is there any wonder that Victorians have turned on the Premier?

We have been called a number of times recently into communities by community led groups who have organised forums about what is being proposed in their area. This is not the Liberal Party organising opposition to the Government's announcements. These are groups in Box Hill, Niddrie and Essendon where the communities have turned out in their hundreds to say, 'What is this Government doing?' What I have said to those communities is that, firstly, your local Member has not stood up for you. In fact, your local Members are gaslighting you, because they are saying in this Chamber, 'You want what the Government is foisting upon you,' which is just not true. The Members are gaslighting their communities and coming into this Chamber and saying it is supported. We know it is not supported, because it is inappropriate. When the Government talks about housing and community support, we know that is not true, and there are a number of other community events in coming weeks.

I know that in my own community on Sunday there will be a community walk. It will be a very big community walk, I suspect. But that community walk is not just people from Bayside. There are people from the Deputy Premier's community who are coming across, there are people from Box Hill, there are people from all over Melbourne who are coming to say, 'You know what? We cannot have a Government who is attacking our communities.' That is what is at the core of the Premier's announcement.

What is going to become more clear to Victorians is that it is not just an attack, it is an attack based on a scam, because this is solely about population growth – nothing more. But the Premier has not asked Victorians if they support that growth; no-one has. Do we want to be the size of London? Has anyone asked? Of course they have not, and the Premier certainly does not have a mandate for it. So, what you will see is Victorians continuing to turn against the Government. Their Members have not worked it out yet. They have not fully worked it out. You could see when the polls came in that something was not quite right, but they are always behind the curve. They have not yet worked out that Victorians have turned on the Government, but even more so they have turned on the Premier. They have turned on the Premier. They do not trust the Premier. That is why the Premier is a runner-up. The Premier is a runner-up. To think – and how embarrassing – the Premier put everything into the housing announcement. It was going to be the great white hope, the saviour, of this Premier's premiership. It was going to be the saving of the Premier's premiership. Yet what happened? It sank like a stone. That is because Victorians have figured out two things: number one, the housing policy is based on a scam – it is all about population growth; and secondly, it is an attack on Melbourne from a Premier who lives 150 kilometres away.

Though we do not talk about it – and the Government certainly has stopped talking about it – this follows the commitment by the former Premier to building 80,000 homes a year. I will tell you how incompetent the Labor Government is. Since announcing the commitment to building 80,000 homes, the number of homes built this year will go down on the previous year. Only a Labor Government could announce an increase in home builds and actually cause it to go down. You have to be a special kind of stupid to get it to go down. The former Premier announced the commitment to building 80,000 homes, and we will see it go down. That is why Victorians have no confidence in the Premier's plan. That is why industry has no confidence in the Premier's plan. What is terribly sad – and the Coalition has and will have policies in this space and knows very well – is we do not want to see this industry fail, we want to see it succeed. What we know is as a result of a former Minister for Planning we saw the highest number of builds in this State's history – the highest. So set aside all

the words; the highest number of builds we have seen in this State's history was because of former Planning Minister Matthew Guy. That is a fact.

Matthew Guy interjected.

James NEWBURY: He is a legend, he says. It is a fact, so we have credibility in terms of supplying housing.

Housing Minister Wynne – I mean, seriously, that guy slept. He was the Joe Biden of this Parliament – good old sleepy Richard.

This Government has monumentally failed on housing. There is no question that this Government has failed on housing in terms of the former Premier's commitment, the commitment he made on the way out to try and show that he stood for something. His commitment – what a failure that has been. Housing has gone down. And now it is the Premier who has thrown everything into her housing commitments. Victorians have worked it out. It is based on a scam – this is about population growth. But nobody has been asked if we want to be a city the size of London, and the Premier certainly does not have a mandate. Secondly, it is an attack on suburbs the Premier does not like from 150 kilometres away. The Premier does not even have to live in the city she is wrecking. By the time it is wrecked, she is going to be out on a pension, one of the very few out on a pension – what a disgrace that is – having wrecked this city. This Premier has failed.



PARLIAMENTARY: MANAGER OF OPPOSITION BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 6 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:27):

The Opposition will not be opposing the Government Business Program. We will not be opposing the Government Business Program.

Wasn't it wonderful to start the year coming back into this place knowing that we had the opportunity to represent our communities, to speak on behalf of the community?

The first thing I did when I came in this morning was I saw a wonderful school group of kids come in and visit the Chamber, and it was terrific to see the school kids back in the Chamber today learning about democracy, learning about our Parliament and talking to me about their lack of funding.

St Brigid's Primary in Mordialloc asked me to raise their case in the Chamber, and I promised to do that straightaway. St Brigid's Primary this morning raised the fact that they do not have the funding they need and asked me to raise that on their behalf.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a Point of Order, Speaker, I might have been tempted to stay in my seat if the Manager of Opposition Business had not called me on a similar Point of Order. I ask that you bring the Member back to the Government Business Program. It is on relevance. It is not an opportunity to make a Members Statement, it is an opportunity to debate a Procedural Motion in this place.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will come back to the Government Business Program.

James NEWBURY: I do note I was referring to something that happened in this very Chamber today, so I am not sure how much closer you could get to the operation of this Chamber.

The SPEAKER: It is not part of Government business.

James NEWBURY: There are a number of important matters and things that are happening this week, and that is why the Coalition will not be opposing the Government Business Program.

Of course, we have seen the new Member sworn into this place, and it is always important to both see new Members sworn into this place and also come in and hear them give their Inaugural Speech, which I understand will take place at the end of tomorrow. I do encourage all Members to come in to hear the new Member welcomed to this place, and we look forward to hearing the Inaugural Speech, as we also look forward to the joint sitting tomorrow evening and the new Member of the Upper House being sworn in. For that one we are all required to be here, but for the Inaugural Speech I would encourage people to come in.

Then on Thursday there is the apology, and the apology is something that I know so many people in our community want to hear. It is a very important moment for this Parliament. It is an important moment for not only Members from both sides of the Chamber but all people to hear that apology. For the victims to have that apology and to hear it I think will be an important moment for this Parliament.

There are of course a number of other Bills. The Minister has spoken to those Bills. The Service Victoria Amendment Bill 2023 – I know that the Leader of the House was talking about her online app wallet, and I think every Victorian is looking forward to seeing their drivers licence in the app wallet when the Government finally gets around to doing it.

Look at what New South Wales has been able to do; to say we are laggards would be an understatement. Our app wallet is collecting a lot of dust. Unfortunately, the Government has been very, very slow in ensuring the services that people

use every single day are provided to them. I am sure we look forward to action taking place to ensure that we have the level of IT serviceability for this State that Victorians deserve.

Also, we will be speaking to an Amendment to building and consumer protection for people. There are so many people who have been hurt by a very small minority of builders, and that Bill will be an opportunity to talk about whether or not enough action has taken place quick enough and also to give a voice to people who deserve to have a voice. They must have a voice, and this Bill will be an opportunity to talk about the victims who deserve that voice and what protections need to be in place to ensure that people are protected into the future.

The Coalition will not be opposing the Government Business Program this week, and I know the Government is happy to hear it. I look forward to both the items that we will have and the debate on those important issues throughout the remainder of the week.

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: GREENS APOLOGY

Thursday, 8 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:19):

I move:

That debate be adjourned.

I move that the debate be adjourned because it is important that this House immediately debate the behaviour of the Greens, the pattern of behaviour of the Greens, and that a number of Members of the Greens party have not apologised for the pattern of behaviour that is occurring.

It is deeply distressing not only to many Members of this place but to staff of Members of Parliament, to staff in this building and to people in the community that a repeated behaviour is occurring and yet, sadly, that behaviour has not been apologised for.

Every Member is elected to this place in their own name, every Member. We represent our communities, but no-one speaks on our behalf in this place. What we saw this morning was the acceptance of an apology from one Member by the Speaker for the behaviour of others, and many Members of this place saw one Member of the Greens laughing after an apology was given. It is totally and utterly unacceptable, and as such the Coalition sought to move dissent from the ruling of the Speaker. I want to place on record how long and hard we thought through that course of action before doing so, how I personally spoke with the Speaker, how I wrote to the Speaker and how I met with multiple Members of the Government because I did not want to go down that path. My strong view was that every Member should apologise for their own behaviour.

We have seen over recent months both Chambers shut down. We must debate the behaviour and the action taken. The action taken this morning was that one Member who has caused and led, frankly, this outrageous behaviour did not apologise. After an apology was given many Members of this place saw one of the Members laughing. This is very, very serious. This is about the behaviour of Members of this place. That is what we need to debate – appropriate behaviour from Members of this place and where they behave inappropriately in a way that does cause distress and does cause issues of safety concern. What we saw last year with the shutdown of the Parliament was a genuine concern for the safety of Members and for the staff of this building, and I put on record the Premier's comments where she concurred with that principle that the behaviour recently not only is wrong but is deeply concerning and is, frankly, inciting issues around safety. We cannot have behaviour of that nature.

We must have a debate about whether or not behaviour is appropriate from Members in that way. When they are behaving inappropriately, we must debate what sanction they receive, and the sanction of not apologising today was totally inappropriate. It was totally inappropriate, and to know that a Member laughed about it – we should all sit here shocked by what we saw. It is not good enough to have a Member knowing that they do not have to apologise and then laughing about it, because what we know is it is going to happen again. The Speaker did note this morning an intent to act further. But I have no faith that poor behaviour will not happen again, and we must debate whether behaviour of this type is acceptable. We must debate, when behaviour of this type occurs, whether or not a Member apologises to the House for that behaviour individually and personally, as they rightly should. As such, because an apology was not required, we sought to move a dissent from the Speaker's ruling, which we certainly did not take lightly.

We must debate those matters. We must debate that ruling. It is only appropriate that these issues be debated, and I do this noting for the House that this is not something that has been moved without fully thinking through the ramifications, fully thinking through what we are here talking about – the seriousness. But we cannot allow this behaviour to continue in this place, and we cannot allow Members to get away with it without even an apology.

MOTION

ATTEMPT TO INTRODUCE BAIL AMENDMENT (INDICTABLE OFFENCES WHILST ON BAIL) BILL

Tuesday, 20 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:18):

I strongly support the Member for Malvern's attempt to introduce the Bail Amendment (Indictable Offences Whilst on Bail) Bill 2024, and I support the urgency that it needs to be introduced with.

I advise the House that last night in my community there were five home invasions. When we speak about the need for this Bill there can be no greater proof of a need than the incidents that occurred last night.

The Member for Malvern spoke about the 34 days until the weakening of bail laws comes into effect. We absolutely need to introduce and consider this Bill immediately, because I have five families in my community that expect it – families with children who go to one of my local primary schools, who this morning woke up to having had their homes invaded. When does it stop? We need to ensure that there are punishments at law that act as a deterrent to stop these crimes.

We need to ensure that the laws are strong, not watered down but strong, and that is what the Member for Malvern's Bill is about. It is about ensuring that we have protections in place and ensuring that when you commit a crime more than once you are punished as you should be, not that it is easier for you to do it again. To know that 68 incidents are occurring a day is a problem, and that is what this Bill seeks to address.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business knows full well that this is a procedural motion. It is not an opportunity to debate the merits of the Bill, and I ask you to bring him back to speaking only about the introduction of the Bill, not what the Bill may contain.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the Point of Order.

James NEWBURY: I say again: there can be no more urgent reason to introduce this Bill than to ensure that families like those in my community who were attacked last night are protected. Could there be any greater reason? I am a father of young children, and to talk to other parents who have woken up in the morning and found they have been victim to a home invasion just absolutely rocks you. It hurts to hear the stories of what they have gone through. And it is not just something that happened last night. As we heard from the Member for Malvern, this is something that is now happening 68 times a day – 68 times every single day – on average.

I have, in my community, heard of so many incidents where this has occurred. Only recently in Bay Street a family woke up, walked out to have their Weeties and were confronted by two armed home invaders with machetes. Can you imagine? That is why I so strongly support the Member for Malvern's attempt to say that we cannot allow the laws to be watered down in 34 days. No-one in good conscience would allow the laws to be watered down in 34 days, and that is what this Bill goes to.

We must consider it immediately. We must consider it urgently. We must ensure that our laws protect our community, and when we know that there are failings, when we know that there have been mistakes, that we stop them from happening. In my community our local police station is now closed for part of the day. It is just one of the 43. Forty-three stations are shut for many, many hours a day. I do not have a station in my community. The nearest one is now shut for a third of the day; the 24-hour station is now shut for a third of the day. Work that one out.

But the Member for Malvern must be supported in his attempt to introduce this Bill. We cannot allow repeat offenders to not have a deterrent to stop them from committing these horrific crimes. How can we as a Parliament look the five families in my community in the eyes and say what they went through last night was okay? It is not okay, and this Government needs to stop sitting idly by while 68 of these invasions are happening every single day.

MOTION

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 20 February 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:53):

The opposition will be opposing the Government Business Program, primarily because again the Coalition went to the Government and asked if we could consider in detail one of the Bills that is being proposed for the House to consider this week, and the Government declined the opportunity to consider that Bill in detail.

Thinking through the last three terms, each term the Government has agreed to one opportunity of consideration in detail in each four-year period, and we saw last year the Government agreed to consideration in detail on the WorkCover Bill after I went to the Minister directly. In this instance of asking for consideration in detail, the Government declined. So, I would say that it is unfortunate that the Ministers do not feel that they have the capacity to debate a Bill in a consideration-in-detail stage, and I understand why they feel they do not have that capacity.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, as was previously raised by the Manager of Opposition Business, again, this is a narrow procedural motion. It is not an opportunity to attack Members of the Government, and I ask you to bring the Member back to speaking on the procedural matter.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Points of Order need to be succinct, as was mentioned earlier. There is no point of order.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. The Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program. The Leader of the House spoke to the Bills that are being considered this week. Picking up the points that were raised, the Leader of the House spoke to the climate change legislation and the importance

of secure energy supply. I can assure you, having seen the biggest blackout in our State's history last week, that is absolutely an important matter for this House to consider. So, we agree entirely with the Leader of the House that there should be a fulsome debate on secure energy supply. The fact that we have just seen the biggest blackout in our State's history means it is an important opportunity to talk about the capacity to deliver energy and the capacity for our system to work into the future, because these matters are serious, and this Bill will be an opportunity to do that.

Secondly, the Leader of the House spoke about the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024 and the early learning centres that will be delivered as part of that package. The Leader of the House spoke about the locations of the centres, and I do note that 10 per cent of those centres are in Liberal electorates and 60 per cent are in Labor electorates. So, when the Leader of the House talks to the way that they pork barrel, it is an important opportunity to talk about the locations, because we need to do so much better. We need to ensure that these services are available to young families. I am sure the entire House agrees that we need to ensure that we have these services available to our families, to our kids, but of course I note, as the Leader of the House did, the locations where, just like school funding, pork barrelling is absolutely rife within this Government.

Finally, in relation to the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024, which the Leader of the House spoke to, the Coalition does note that the Government has taken up the Opposition's call for action in this space, looking at the debate that occurred only some 20 minutes ago. Community safety is something that the Coalition is deeply concerned about. The reduction in police numbers year on year – 3 per cent down in the last year, 5 per cent over the last two years – and 43 stations having their hours cut significantly are concerns. So, in terms of the Bill more specifically, the Coalition did propose Amendments, which the Labor Party has picked up, which we accept, but we will be opposing the Business Program.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 5 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:23):

The Coalition will be wholeheartedly opposing the Government Business Program. How outrageous it was to hear the Leader of the House get up and say that 2 hours into debate on the cognate SEC Bills the Government will be guillotining one of the Bills. How outrageous – 2 hours in. With that in mind I move:

That the Government Business Program resolution proposed by the Leader of the House be Amended by omitting paragraph (1) and after ‘7 March 2024:’ inserting ‘Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023’.

It is outrageous to think that this Government has so mangled the SEC Bills that it now is trying to rush them through the House without any scrutiny. That is what the Government is trying to do today – rush them through the House without any scrutiny. We had a promise last year from the Government that the Bills would be done and dusted that year. They were listed on the Government Business Program and they were sent to the world at large – and then, when they realised their Members could not turn up in this place, they pulled the Bills. So, over a hundred days later, the Parliament is considering these Bills now.

The Leader of the House says that it is so important that these Bills be considered as a cognate package – that they must be considered as a cognate package – except when we all vote. How extraordinary to think that we have to consider these Bills as a package – that there must be a cognate debate.

We heard last year that the Leader of the House explained that Members on her side of the Chamber did not have the capacity to delineate between the two Bills when they were being debated – did not have the capacity, so it must be cognately debated.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a Point of Order, Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business knows that he cannot mislead the House, and he is simply making up things that he is attributing to me.

The SPEAKER: That is not a Point of Order, Leader of the House.

James NEWBURY: The point I will remake is that Government put to this House and passed that the two SEC bills must be considered together. It was an imperative that they be considered together. And the Government Business Program today has made it clear: except when they vote. I mean, it is extraordinary, and we know why the guillotine is being brought on one of these Bills at 5 o'clock today. We know why: because the Government does not want any scrutiny of the detail of this Bill. That is what this is about. They do not want the media, they do not want Victorians, looking at this issue in detail. We know that is why. We know they do not want the Upper House Members thinking about the debate that is occurring in this place, and I look to all Members in this place when I speak about that matter. That is why the Government wants to rush this Bill through. That is why Governments always, when they rush Bills through, want to do it – because they want to hide from the scrutiny.

And I suspect there is also a second reason, and that is: there is no capacity for the Government to hold their own Members here on Thursday. This Bill requires a special, special number in terms of the vote, and every single Thursday the Government is knocking on my door to allow more of its Members to go home and to pair them off – every single Thursday. The reason why this Bill is not being debated until Thursday is because they cannot hold their numbers until Thursday. They know they cannot get their special, required vote on Thursday afternoon, so they are going to ram it through today.

It is outrageous. What is being done today is an outrageous affront to democracy. We are not considering these Bills appropriately; in fact, the Government took over 100 days to provide a Bill briefing and then just sent a political adviser to give one. It would not allow the Department to turn up. It is outrageous, the handling of these Bills. It is so obvious for the world to see. We will be moving our Amendment and dividing on our Amendment. If that unfortunately does not pass – and I live in hope that the Government has heard my speech and reconsidered – we will be opposing the Government Business Program.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 19 March 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:35):

I note before continuing that of the seven items on the Government Business Program proposed for this week four of them are Motions, and this is an issue that we have spoken about in this Chamber a number of times. The Government has listed four Motions for this week for consideration.

The concern the Coalition has is the use of the Parliament's time to deal with Motions, however meritorious. The Government provides no opportunity for non-Government Members in this place – the Liberal Party, the National Party or the Greens – to consider any matter that they put forward, so there are a number of very, very important issues on the Notice Paper that have not been included in the Government Business Program.

Four items – the majority of the Government Business Program for this week – are Motions that the Government has moved. They are Motions that the Government has scheduled time for debate on, but none of the important motions in a very full notice paper have been afforded an opportunity to be debated in this place. It is for that reason and consistent with our previous decisions on Government Business Programs that we will not be supporting the Government in their Business Program this week.

If the Government intends to use the Parliament to deal with Motions, it is not unreasonable to provide the Opposition or non-Government Members with an opportunity to consider other matters. It is not unreasonable for those to be considered. Of course, as has been pointed out, there are instances where Condolences are dealt with, but in terms of Motions more generally there are four Motions on the Government Business Program. It is the majority of the week's work. There are four Motions on the Government Business Program. There has never been a non-Government item on the Government Business

Program – never. Not one time has there ever been a non-Government motion on the Government Business Program. And the overwhelming instances of these Motions being dealt with over the last year in this place have been – we had weeks where the majority of the week, two out of three days, was spent debating Motions which made no meaningful change in law, impacted in no way in terms of finance or providing new funding for projects, programs –

A member interjected.

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

There have been multiple instances throughout the last year where the Coalition has moved very important Motions and sought to adjourn debate on very important Motions. The best part of 10 times, from memory, that the Coalition has sought to have an opportunity in this House to adjourn debate after oftentimes a day of debate on a Bill and allow an important matter to be dealt with, the Government has opposed every single time the right of the Coalition or non-Government Members any time for debate. And so, the Coalition absolutely will be opposing the Government Business Program, opposing a program which by majority includes more Motions than Bills.

As I said earlier, there are four Motions on the program for this week, more than Bills, but more broadly than this week it is very important to note that there are no opportunities for non-Government Members in this Chamber to speak to general Motions on policy matters, and that should be a concern. I think I speak for all non-Government Members when I say that is a concern. It is not something replicated in the other Chamber or in other Parliaments, and so for that reason the Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program that has been put forward by the Leader of the House this week.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 30 April 2024

Mr 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.

MOTION

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: MEMBERS BE HEARD

Tuesday, 30 April 2024

Mr 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.

MOTION

1 DAY ADJOURNMENT: STATE TAX

Tuesday, 14 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:23):

I am absolutely outraged that the Treasurer would walk into this Chamber, introduce a Bill that increases tax – two new taxes, I understand, there could be more; we have only just been handed the Bill – and they have done it immediately.

They have moved these taxes and proposed to guillotine the Bill tomorrow. They have proposed to stop any debate by tomorrow. It is absolutely outrageous. We are outraged of behalf of Victorians. What we know already about this Bill is that it will increase the waste levy by 30 per cent. On top of that, the Government has not consulted with anybody. It has not consulted on new taxes that are being foisted upon Victorians, and these taxes will seriously hurt business.

The second measure, the fire services levy, is a combined take, I understand, of a billion dollars. This Bill will hurt people, this Bill will hurt businesses, and the Treasurer has just stood up and said he wants to ram it through this Chamber. I am not surprised he wants to ram it through this Chamber. Of course he does, because he does not want the community to know about it. He does not want the community to consider it, and he certainly does not want non-Government Members to shine the light that is deserved on this pernicious Bill and what it does.

The other element this Bill goes to I can only just speak briefly about because I have just been handed the Bill. I have only just been handed the Bill, but this is going to go straight to the heart of the non-Government school tax that the Government introduced last year – a tax on children.

It is one of the most shameful things this Government in my view has ever done – to introduce a tax on non-Government schools and tax children. Schools now are effectively paying the State to teach children. We know they are doing an incredible job, and because this Government have run out of money, they have introduced a tax, which hurts schools and which hurts, absolutely, the hip pocket. We know the impact of those taxes not only on non-Government schools but on religious schools. We know many religious schools provide services and education to kids who cannot afford them. I know that there are near my community many Jewish schools that provide services to people who cannot afford them, and this tax goes directly to how many children can be taught. This tax absolutely undermines the good work they do.

The Coalition will not stand for a Bill which partly closes what the Government calls ‘loopholes’ around this new school tax. Who knows how many of the Members on the other side of the place are even aware that that is what this Bill does. This goes straight to the non-Government school tax again. And the Government and the Treasurer walk into this Chamber and say, ‘We’re going to introduce a billion dollars of new taxes. We’re not going to show anyone the Bill. We’re going to give you 24 hours effectively.’ We are going to have 24 hours. We can have a short time of debate tomorrow, because they have already confirmed no debate on it today.

Michael O’Brien interjected.

James NEWBURY: A short debate tomorrow, Member for Malvern, and they will ram this Bill and ram these new taxes through. It is absolutely outrageous. And to think the Bill also closes loopholes in relation to the non-Government schools is absolutely shameful.

There is no wonder in my mind that the Government want to ram this Bill through this place; of course they do. But they need to be called out for it, and every single Member that votes to allow this should be condemned for allowing the Government to guillotine and ram through a Bill so pernicious – but a Bill that also introduces a billion dollars of new taxes. This is an outrageous proposition.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 28 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:20):

The Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program – the Leader of the House will have to wait for another week.

The Leader of the House has gone through a number of Bills that the Government is proposing to consider this week. What is noticeable I think for the Coalition, for the non-Government Members in this place, is the Government is proposing to deal with three Bills, which is not necessarily common in this place. We know their legislative agenda is light on, but what is missing is confirmation from the Leader of the House that the Government will be providing time to debate the Budget.

Does anyone remember the Budget – the Victorian Budget? Because the Government do not remember it. The Government do not want Victorians to remember it. We would have expected the Leader of the House to spring up and say how the Parliament will be provided time, will be provided certainty, to talk about their Budget. I mean, I tell you, that Budget sank like a stone, didn't it?

And what is missing in this Government Business Program and from the Leader of the House has been certainty that Members in this place will have an opportunity to talk about the \$188 billion of debt. We know that is why the Government does not want to talk about it. We know that is why the Government will not provide us an opportunity to talk about funding cuts, promised funding for our schools – two in my Electorate who have had that funding snatched away. Fake promises they were.

The Leader of the House did speak about three Bills that are being considered this week if this Government Business Program passes, and two of them, as the Leader of the House spoke to, are about the Government cutting – cutting the native timber industry entirely. And as the Leader of the House said, the

decisions around that on the Government's part were based around natural disaster and the courts' fault. It was the courts' fault – so the Government had to come in here and shut down an industry. Well, I am absolutely sure that the industry and the communities, the families involved in that industry, know exactly who has destroyed their livelihoods. Every one of those people know who has destroyed their livelihood. And the Coalition will certainly be looking forward to having an opportunity to speak on behalf of those communities – those good, hardworking people, who were promised some degree of certainty and timeline in terms of the decision the Government made. How quickly they rolled over on those promises to look after people. So, the Coalition will absolutely be looking forward to an opportunity to talk about those issues.

The Leader of the House also spoke about the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, an initiative the Member for Malvern certainly had a large part to play in in the former Coalition Government. And the Leader of the House spoke about the fact that the organisation needs to be scrapped because 'It has met its objectives'. So, I presume that everybody in Victoria gambles responsibly. I presume that the Government is suggesting that everybody now in Victoria is gambling responsibly. We know of course that is not true. So, the Coalition will certainly be speaking to the fact that this Labor Government has decided to scrap the responsible gambling foundation, and we will speak strongly on those issues.

The Coalition went to the Government to propose an opportunity for our Shadow Minister to take that Bill into consideration in detail, and I know that the Member would have done a sterling job holding the Government to account. The 10-year Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Member would have done a sterling job at holding the Government to account. So, is it any wonder the Government said no? No Minister could have held up to the scrutiny of that Shadow Minister. The experience and wit he would have brought into that consideration I am sure scared the Government away, and so we were not provided with that opportunity. So of course we will, because of that, be opposing the Government Business Program, and I do hope that at some stage the Government stops hiding their Budget and provides every Member in this place with an opportunity to talk about the damage that it is doing to our great State.

MOTION

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Thursday, 30 May 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (17:15):

It is clear that this Motion is just another one of the Government's sledge Motions, a break-glass attempt by the Government to divert from their own problems, and I Move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'the Allan Labor Government be condemned for failing to provide secure, reliable and affordable energy to Victorians.'

We know why this Motion is being moved, and that is because Labor's primary has hit 28 per cent and because at a Federal level it has hit 29. So, this Government has decided, 'Why don't we help our Prime Minister, who is tanking, and our Premier, who is tanking?' And aren't they tanking?

Victorians and Australians have lost trust in Labor, and why? One of the core reasons goes to the heart of this Motion, because everybody in this State deserves reliable, secure, affordable energy, and they do not have it with this Government that oversaw the worst blackout this State has ever seen – over half a million people without power.

Every Victorian knows they would move a Motion in this place to cover up their 28-point primary. That is what they do. They think, 'Oh, let's throw the dead cat over there; maybe everyone'll look at that.' Well, we all know what this is about. We have Bills that could be debated – the Budget, which the Government is hiding from. I have said it all week – the Government has spent so little time debating the Budget. Of course they have, because they want to try and deflect from their problems.

We have got a Cabinet that is split up. They have got different positions on everything, and the Deputy Premier, the stalking horse – he is a stalking horse that one. We all see that thoroughbred over there, we all see him – he is racing strongly at the moment, isn't he? Hasn't he had a week? He is standing up for a bit of common sense. 'I don't want to get rid of gas,' he says.

Well, you have got a Minister who will not approve any projects. The Minister for Energy and Resources will not approve any gas projects and then comes into this place and says, after 10 years, 'Oh, we don't have any more gas.' Well, you have not approved any projects, Minister. If you do not approve any projects, guess what happens – you run out of gas. That is what has happened in this State. Everybody knows it, and the Minister has been exposed for it to the point that the Deputy Premier has called it out. I mean, how embarrassing that the Deputy Premier has had to call out the Minister. Every time the Minister for Energy is asked about gas the Minister gets up and says, 'Oh, we've run out of gas.' It is because you have not approved any projects, Minister – it is pretty simple. Victorians deserve to have reliable, secure and affordable energy. That is what they deserve, and when you vote Liberal, you will get it. That is the difference.

This Motion is a joke. It is a cover-up for a 28-point primary. Everybody can see it. That is what this Motion is about, but we can see, and Victorians now can see how badly the Government is failing at delivering for them. They do not have trust in this Premier, and this Motion goes to one of the core reasons why Victorians have lost trust, because people do not have reliable, secure and affordable energy. Every Member, if they were honest – which I will leave up to them – would stand up in this place and say that their constituencies are worried about power supply. They are worried about the cost of energy provision. These are things that every single person will talk to you about, and they have got every right to feel that way. After 10 years we know this Government has not delivered it for them.

To not approve any gas projects and then say, 'Oh my gosh, we're out of gas': can you believe the hypocrisy of it? We know why it was not approved: ideology, that is why. And the Deputy Premier has called it out. We know what

the Deputy Premier is doing on this side of the Chamber. We know the Deputy Premier is standing for common sense on gas. If only the Premier would hear his words, that great thoroughbred, the stalking horse that he is. That is why we have amended the Motion to deal with the real substance of these issues. This should not be a debate about sledging. This should be a motion about the substance of ensuring that we have secure, reliable and affordable energy.

At the start of the year, we saw one of the most embarrassing displays of an energy policy collapse this nation has ever seen. We saw the offshore wind policy of this Government collapse in front of our very eyes. We had the Premier standing up to talk about offshore wind and not understanding basic details. We had the Minister for Energy standing up and not knowing basic details. We had the Minister for Environment, who took a little break out of his holiday, talking about this issue and not understanding the basic details. He said the details of the project were not available to the public when they were on a public website. You would think with all of his staff they would have the capacity to understand the basic details. The Premier said that the project had been approved by the State Government despite the Minister for Planning doing something entirely different reviewing it. It was a mess. No wonder Victorians know they cannot have secure energy. Of course they cannot, because the Premier does not even understand the policy.

The Minister for Energy is ideologically strangling gas. That is what the Minister is doing, and everyone can see it. The Minister has finally been exposed, because after saying that they are not going to approve any project, guess what happens, they run out. And now the Minister comes into Question Time and says, 'Oh, if someone came and saw me, maybe I'd consider their approach.' Do you know what businesses are saying? 'Why would we bother with this Minister?' That is what every single person in industry is telling us, and now they are starting to say it publicly. They are saying, 'Why would we go to this Minister?' because this Minister is not making value-based decisions; this Minister is entirely ideological. We know it is true. This is a minister who started a process of locking up the entire parkland of much of Victoria. This Minister is entirely ideological and has been exposed for it. That is what the substance of this Motion is about.

What makes things worse is not just that the Government has lost control of this policy area, the Government has also cut the community out entirely from the process. They have created a new pathway for energy projects that entirely cuts the community from the process. It is so fundamentally wrong. Yesterday one of the Members of this place came into the Chamber and spent a number of contributions talking about the fact that I was recently at a rally at Lethbridge Airport, upset with me because I had met with her community. Well, of course I met with her community, because – guess what – the Member has not. The Member is absent. We have hundreds of people in that community asking a very, very simple and fair question: if you put windfarms 1 kilometre from the landing flight path of an airport where the emergency services vehicles land for the entire Geelong region, will it affect the capacity of those emergency services vehicles to land? That is a fair question. That is why hundreds of people are asking it, and they are getting no answer. So, they have come to me and said, 'Why are we not getting an opportunity through the Government's new processes to have a right to speak and to have our questions answered?'

What I find so offensive about the way that the communities are being cut out of not only energy but also planning more generally is that people move into communities – well, let us go even a step further: people create communities, people create towns, people create suburbs. They move into those areas. They look after those areas, and they form community groups. They care for these areas for years and for decades. Then the Government comes along and says, 'I'm going to put something here and you don't get a say.' How is that right? How is that okay? What will happen later this year is the Government will introduce draft laws which will entirely cut out communities for much of the planning process. That is what the Government will do, and the community will turn on them. The community is going to turn in a way we have not seen before. You think a 28 per cent primary is bad – you wait and see.

If you cut the community out of all planning decisions and out of all energy decisions, what will happen is that the community will reject them. Because the Government is not some bunch of overlords. The Minister cannot make a single decision, let alone doubling, tripling or quadrupling her workload every day. I mean, the Minister cannot make any decisions. So, if you give her more

decisions, what is going to happen? The briefs are going to get taller. The dust on the briefs is going to get bigger. It is outrageous what the Government is doing with energy, and the point of cutting the community out of that process will bite them hard – and so it should. That is what is going to happen when these proposed laws come to Parliament later this year. You will see a groundswell from across the entire community, who say, 'No more. We don't accept you building whatever you want wherever you want.' Because our community has character, and community should be protected. Community say should be a core part of that.

We have moved an Amendment to this Motion, and the core of this Motion is about the failure of this Government to provide secure, reliable and affordable energy. That is what we want to talk about, because that is the core of this issue. What the Government has tried to do is bring up a break-glass political tactic in the form of a sledge motion. Well, the fact that the Premier has been criticised for her speech last night at a pro-Israel function, the fact that the Government has no capacity over policy day-to-day, the fact that the Deputy Premier is contradicting – the litany of errors is banking up. So, what do we do? We are going to use a word over here to try and scare people. Do you know that the only way that works is if you have a Premier that people listen to. And guess what – you do not. If you have a Premier that people actually trust and listen to, that tactic will work. But the tactic of the government now will not work, because the problems the community have are deep and they are real. They are deep and they are real, and the cost-of-living impact on people is hurting them. People are worried about the fact that inflation rose this week, and we may see another rate rise. That is the kind of stuff people are worried about.

For the Government to, after 10 years, come along and throw some silly political sledge across the Chamber to try and detract – it will not work, and neither should it. It is juvenile. It is university juvenile, what the Government is doing at the moment, and the community can see it. That is why their primary is 28 per cent. People can see it. Unless the Government actually get on to the priorities that people in this community care about, it will get worse for them. And so, it should – they should be condemned for their behaviour.

So, for the Minister to come in here and move some motion after crippling an industry – after destroying policy in this space – the Minister should stand condemned. And the Premier, for trying to throw her dead-cat politics over in the corner to try and trick Victorians away from the things they actually care about, should be condemned. The Premier should be condemned for her behaviour.

Victorians see it – that is why it is not working. Throw all the stupid university politics tactics you want, Premier, but you have been seen. Victorians see what you are doing, and they will call you out for it, and you will never, never get the standing that a Premier deserves while you behave in that way. Fix the problems that are there. Fix the things that people care about. Make sure people have energy. Make sure that cost-of-living issues are at the forefront of your agenda, not stupid university politics. That is what is happening, and that is why the Amendment we have moved condemns the Government for it and, in my view, condemns the Premier for it.

It is time that this behaviour gets called out – enough. It is time for the Government to start talking about policies that matter and fixing problems that matter and not move things in this place that hurt people. Yesterday we debated a Bill that is going to hurt 15,000 people. I did not see very many people on that side of the Chamber get up and give a 10-minute defence of 15,000 people, did I? No – silence of course. Where is the party of the people? That was gone a long, long, long time ago, and it is sad. This Motion is a disappointing reflection of what this Government has become.

We will be debating the substance of what we should be debating, which is the core of my amendment, and we have a very long list of speakers that want to speak till the end of the day about it. Though I would love to spend the entire 30 minutes – I can assure you I would love to speak for the entire 30 minutes – we have a long list of people who want to get up and talk about the substance of this Motion, about ensuring we have secure, reliable and affordable energy.

So, I will finish where I started and say: this is the Premier's dead cat sledge Motion. That is what this is, and that is why we have amended it. This is about

the fact that the Premier has hit a 28 per cent primary – and all the Members on that side of the Chamber are very quiet. We know what they are thinking. We know they have lost confidence, like Victorians. How can you have trust and confidence in this Premier? Because the Premier has no standing. That is the issue, because the Premier is not focused on things that actually matter to people. The Premier is not focused on fixing problems that exist for people, and the Liberal–National parties are. That is the difference.

We are not going to be moved by some silly little Motion. Every single sitting week the Government can move a silly, little Motion, and every week I will get up and I will point it out and every one of my Members on this side of the Chamber will do it too, because we are sick of the way the Government uses this place – we are sick of it. The Government needs to start doing things for people and fixing problems that they have.

Yesterday 15,000 people were hurt because of a Bill, and every Member who voted for that without standing up for those communities and who speaks for those communities without working to protect those communities should be condemned. That is what we are doing. That is what the Shadow Minister for Agriculture the member for Lowan is doing – working hard to try and do everything that we can to help 15,000 people. I know how hard the Shadow Minister is working to try and get a deal for these people. The Government should be condemned for their failure on this policy and for the misuse of this place, and from now on, every time they do it, they are going to be called out for it.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 18 June

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:52):

I will start on a positive note by just letting Members know that this is an important week. Around the building there has been an important show of bipartisanship in relation to Footy for Climate being in the building. The Minister for Environment and I, as Shadow have brought in Footy for Climate, an important organisation which is part of the AFL, to talk about climate. It is a bipartisan event. I want to give a shout-out to Tom Campbell from Footy for Climate and Stephanie McKew from Environmental Leadership Australia, and also the CEO of the AFL Andrew Dillon will be here tomorrow evening for an event, which will be fantastic. Members will be able to hold both the women's and men's premiership cups and have photos with a number of significant footy players if they are interested.

I thought I would start on that positive note before saying the Coalition will not be supporting the Government on the Government Business Program, and I can hear the shock from their side.

The Government and I had a discussion about providing an opportunity for the Shadow Attorney-General to debate one of the Bills in consideration in detail, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024. It did not surprise me to hear that the Government did not feel that the Ministers were capable of debating him and giving him that opportunity, so no time has been provided. He is an outstanding Shadow Attorney who will make a fantastic Attorney, so I can understand why the Government was fearful of allowing him that opportunity. On that basis, and on the basis that we have not had the opportunity to properly scrutinise in that way many Bills – once this term with one particular Bill, and one of the Nats often says to me in their time they have only seen it happen twice in this place – it would be good if the

Government felt that their Ministers were able to take Bills into consideration, which unfortunately they cannot. In the last sitting week, the Government on Thursday thought they would pull a little stunt and bring on a Motion, which did end up quite lame in terms of their attempt to play politics and waste the Parliament's time, and I hope that this week we do not see any stunts from the Government on Motions.

I would note the Leader of the House spoke about the Budget Bills and the take-note Motion on the Budget. I can assure the Leader of the House that our Members want to speak on these issues, and I would say that when the take-note Motion was moved the Government took the unprecedented step of stopping anyone who had spoken on the original Bills from speaking on the take-note Motion. So, I would say to the Government: you would have our support entirely in allowing every Member who spoke on the original Bills to speak again, because we all have so much to say. I put that ball in the Government's court and ask them to consider revising that order so that anyone who did speak on the Budget Bills can speak a second time on the take-note Motion, because historically that is what has always happened. We all assumed that would be the case, and unfortunately that has not been the case.

So, I just reiterate for the Leader of the House and the Premier that if the Government was serious about providing every Member the opportunity, they would amend that Motion, which prohibits us – people like me – from speaking a second time. I would love to speak about the Budget a second time, but unfortunately, I am gagged from doing so, and I know that many Members –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: That is right – gagged Government Members. The Government Members agree with me. It is a gag, I know, and I know I have been speaking up on the Government Members' behalf to find all of you more time to speak on the Budget, because the Leader of the House was not going to provide it. So, I am very glad that Government Members have thanked me for providing them more time this week to speak on the Budget. I put that ball in their court to provide all of us an opportunity – some of us a second time – to speak on it, but because of those reasons, we will not be supporting the Government Business Program. They should have allowed the Shadow Attorney-General an opportunity to take it into consideration.

MOTION

ATTEMPT TO INTRODUCE PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT (SCHOOLS) BILL 2024

Wednesday, 19 June 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:47):

I rise in strong support of the Member for Kew's move to introduce the Payroll Tax Amendment (Schools) Bill 2024.

This Bill must be debated urgently. This is an issue that is a moral line in the sand. The State Labor Government has decided to make money off children. It is absolutely outrageous.

The reason that this Bill must be debated today is because not only are there 58 schools which are currently caught up in the Treasurer's attack on those children but there are 18 schools which are about to be caught up in the Government's attack – schools that are doing good work in educating our next generation.

I refer to Alice Miller School in the Member for Macedon's electorate, Alphington Grammar School in the Member for Northcote's Electorate, Ballarat Clarendon College in the Member for Wendouree's Electorate, Ballarat Grammar, again in the Member for Wendouree's Electorate, Girton Grammar School in the Speaker's electorate, Kardinia International College in the Member for Lara's electorate and North-Eastern Montessori School in the Member for Eltham's Electorate as just some examples of schools that are about to be caught by this outrageous attack. And what will we see then? We will see those Members quietly write little letters to the Treasurer – and hide them. They may come out under FOI. We will not see them stand up for the kids in their communities in this place, but that is what this Bill does. That is what this Bill is about. This Bill is standing up for the 58 schools that the Government is making money out of.

Natalie Hutchins interjected.

James NEWBURY: The former Minister for Education is interjecting across the Chamber.

If only the Minister had actually used her voice on behalf of kids when the policy was introduced.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: I remember, Shadow Minister for Education, the Minister consulting at one dinner about the impact. That was the level of consultation with schools. It was embarrassing for the Minister to stand up and say the consultation that was done was at a dinner –

Natalie Hutchins: On a Point of Order, Speaker, I am not sure if there are any regulations in Parliament about the tone that is being used and the decibels that are being reached by those opposite, but I would like to put a complaint in that my ears are hurting.

The SPEAKER: Order! It is not a Point of Order.

James NEWBURY: I am more than happy if the Minister wants to leave the Chamber. I can understand why the Minister is embarrassed by this policy. I can understand why. I understand after the strong public response the Minister was forced into a partial backflip, but it was not good enough.

And what we have seen today is 44 schools are paying the Government to teach kids – \$19 million. It is outrageous to think that this is a so-called Labor Government that uses catchcry words around fairness but is charging schools to teach our kids. This is a moral question, and you can see how quiet the Members on the other side of the Chamber are because they are embarrassed. They know the 18 schools that are about to be hit. Then in this Budget the Government went further.

I recall in the briefing the Government gave to Members how it described possible risks and the need to close loopholes. What kind of Government would

see children being educated as a possible risk and a loophole that needs to be changed?

We know that after the new 18 schools are caught in the Treasurer's vicious net Members will write secret letters to their schools with their crocodile tears about how they have advocated to the Treasurer on their behalf. This Bill must be debated today. This is a moral question. This is about children being treated fairly no matter where they go to school – and that is the side that the Coalition is on – so we must debate this Bill today.

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: CRIME CRISIS

Thursday, 20 June 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:59):

Speaker, we must urgently debate the crime crisis in Victoria, and that is why the Member has moved to adjourn debate – because we must do it now; we must do it urgently. The time for action is now.

The Government has spoken today, trying to explain away why this Parliament should not be debating this urgent issue, and they have said, ‘Well, the Premier and the Minister have talked to the people this week.’ So what? The Premier and the Minister have done talking – well, frankly, have done nothing – for far too long. And what has happened as a result? We have seen a massive spike in crime over recent years. But in this last year, in the data released today, we have seen a 10 per cent increase across the board and a 20 per cent increase in youth crime.

What is the Government proposing to do? Nothing. They have brought a Bill into this place which does nothing except soften the law further. It is absolutely outrageous. We have seen bail laws softened at a time when we need tougher laws. We need tougher laws on punishments, and we need tougher laws on bail.

In my community in Bayside over the weekend we saw that young teens working in local grocers were attacked by a gang of thugs, one of whom has so far been arrested – only one. These thugs have come in with knives. The profound impact that has had on those workers has been extraordinary, and they should not have to put up with this in their workplace. Why should they? But this is what is happening in the community because the Premier is ignoring these crimes. Do you hear the Premier ever talk about this crime crisis that is happening in Victoria? Absolutely not. All you hear the Premier do is try and talk

down the importance of them. Talk about gaslighting victims – how outrageous.

Every time you see a crime, a knife crime especially, you hear a Minister or the Premier walk out and talk down the crime that has occurred. And it has happened now for years. But we have got to the point where the data that is being released is showing what the community already knows, so the Government cannot keep hiding from it. You see it with aggravated burglaries, up 18 per cent this year – up 18 per cent in one year. I know about these crimes because they have happened proportionately more in the Bayside community. They are almost 150 cent up over the life of this Government.

Ten years ago, home invasion was a concept you did not even know about. Now it is regular in Bayside in many of our streets. In some streets in my community there have been multiple cases over time of home invasion. But it is not just those crimes; there has been a nearly 23 per cent increase in motor vehicle theft and an almost 35 per cent increase in theft from retail. And you hear that from traders. Traders talk about this. That is one in three. I mean, these numbers are huge, and you hear that from traders. You would think the Government would actually care about business at a time that business is doing it tough, but of course the Government is just ignoring these crimes. We have seen 43 police station closures. Over the last year there has been a 3 per cent reduction in police and over the last two years a 5 per cent reduction in police. How can you allow this, if you are a Government, at a time that these crimes are getting more vicious and more violent?

When you talk to the Police privately, they are calling it out. On Saturday after these crimes occurring, the Police were contacting me and saying, 'Please, please tell this left-wing Government to do something about the law, to do something about bail.' And you feel for these hardworking Police men and women, because they are trying to look after their community. They are putting themselves at risk for all of us, and they are saying they want action from this Government, not a Premier who is ignoring these crimes. That is what this Government does – ignore these crimes. It is absolutely outrageous.

We must urgently stop debate. We must debate these issues, the issues of this crime crisis in Victoria, because we need action now. We need tougher laws. We need to toughen bail. We need action now.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 30 July 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:55):

I will start on a positive note and thank the Leader of the House in relation to facilitating the State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 being debated today. The fact that the Coalition is opposed to the Government Business Program is in no way linked to that facilitation, so I appreciate very much the scheduling.

However, in relation to the Business Program the Coalition has again, considering the nature of the Youth Justice Bill 2024, which is a thousand pages – it is a substantial Bill – sought from the Government an opportunity to take the Bill into consideration in detail.

As we have spoken about in this House before, the Government has very rarely over the last 10 years provided opportunities for Bills to be considered in detail in that process in this place – once in this term when I approached the Minister directly, and I do not think even his own Cabinet could have stopped him from accepting the opportunity, and there has been one other instance that I am aware of over the last 10 years.

The Government declined our request to take that huge Bill into Consideration in Detail, and it is just not good enough. I appreciate that the Minister is not able to deal with the questions that would be asked. I accept that that is the reason why the offer was declined. But just because a Minister is not good enough is not an opportunity, I think, to shirk the House being provided the chance that it should have to deal with the Bill in detail.

So, the Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program. We do hope that Ministers are good enough, tough enough and smart enough to one day take a Bill into Consideration in Detail, as Minister Pearson did; he was happy to do so. At least there is one Minister who is not afraid to answer difficult questions. So, we will be opposing the Government Business Program.

I do want to note that – I am keeping track for Government MPs just as much as Coalition MPs – there are still 22 Labor Members who have not been given an opportunity to speak on the Budget. We have spoken about this in the Chamber many times. The Government does not want to provide an opportunity to talk about the Budget, because, wow, that was a bad Budget. But to not let their own Members speak really shows quite clearly how afraid they are to add any oxygen to the debate around the Budget – the Budget that I do not think anyone remembers, because it was so bad. But there are 22 Labor Members and 11 Coalition Members – of course I want to make sure that our Members have an opportunity to speak, but there are 22 on that side – who have not had an opportunity. In fact, not only have 22 not had an opportunity, I know one was overruled in the middle of a debate by a factional opponent when the Minister walked in and took the call over that Member in, quite frankly, an embarrassing display. So not just have 22 not had a go, but we saw a factional go play out between the left and the right.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

James NEWBURY: I was here; I saw it.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a Point of Order, Acting Speaker, I have to confess that I was not really listening, but when I did, what I heard had absolutely nothing to do with the Government Business Program, and I ask that you call the Member back to speaking on the narrow procedural debate, which is of course the Government Business Program.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): The Member for Brighton has the call.

James NEWBURY: I have given a reason as to why the Coalition will not be supporting the Government Business Program. When it comes to the Youth Justice Bill, it is clear that the Government's priorities are not in line with fixing the youth crime crisis in Victoria.

To water down the law at a time when there is a crime crisis is, frankly, shameful, and the community will see that for what it is. There are a number of issues that we could be debating. The Coalition moved to clean up Government projects today and the Government opposed that, not surprisingly. But we should be debating issues like that in this Chamber. The Coalition will be opposing the program.

MOTION

ATTEMPT TO INTRODUCE: BAIL AMENDMENT (STRENGTHENING CONDUCT CONDITIONS) BILL 2024

Thursday, 1 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (9:44):

I strongly support the Member for Malvern's introduction of the Bail Amendment (Strengthening Conduct Conditions) Bill 2024.

Victorians want bail laws strengthened. The victims of crime want bail laws strengthened. The police want bail laws strengthened. The only people who do not want to strengthen the bail laws they weakened are the Labor Party. That is a fact.

We have heard today from the Government that they want to think more and talk more. We know what they are doing. The Premier is doing Carpool Karaoke instead of dealing with the real issues facing this State.

Just this week in my community on Monday we had an incident where a disabled woman was driving her son to school and was hit by an offender in another car. It flipped over her car. Guess what, the next day the offender was out on bail. It is an absolute disgrace. On the same day at yet another place in my community three cars were torched. That is two days this week, and I could go through for hours the examples and incidents that have happened in my community alone.

There is a youth crime crisis in Victoria – we know it. The Government may want to deny it, and they may want to talk and think more, but this Bill will do something significant. This Bill will do something meaningful, and it will make sure that the open-door bail policy of this Government is actually starting to close. That is what is happening in this State. There is an open-door policy.

When you talk to Victoria Police they call it out. I feel so much for Victoria Police because what they are now saying to me is that they are under pressure from their families, because they go out and do the hardest work. They go into the most dangerous places for us to keep us safe, and then the next day the people they are arresting are being let out again. So, their families are saying to them, 'We are worried about you not just because of your job – because you're working hard to make sure criminals are not on the street, but the next day they're out again.' So those same violent offenders have to be chased again and again and again – and we hear from the Government they want more time to think and talk. It is an absolute disgrace.

We in the Coalition have tried to make things better in terms of making sure the laws actually do what they should. We have tried to move Bills on move-on laws, machete laws and today on bail laws, because we are seeing what is happening in the community. We know of the 10 per cent increase in crime and the 20 per cent increase in youth crime just in the last year – an almost 20 per cent increase in residential aggravated burglaries. Some of the worst types of offences that people can suffer are to have someone come into your home, and this has been happening for two years in Bayside, as many will know. The Government, when this was raised, victim-blamed people in my community for calling it out – victim-blamed them. It is an absolute disgrace, and to think that the Labor Government are going to vote against this Bill being introduced is an absolute disgrace.

Look at the examples that occurred in my community this week. How can you have a woman driving her child to school – she has a special car to help her drive, and she was hit by an offender. She does not even have capacity to drive that car anymore; it was written off. How is it okay for the Government to sit there and say, 'Let's think and talk a bit more'? The sad thing is it is not just the incidents that I have raised. People have died because of these crimes; people have died in their homes. What does it take when people have died – Victorians have died? You would think you would get up. Stop thinking and talking. Get up. What is the Ministry doing in this place? How can you vote against this Bill?

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 13 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:57):

I rise to speak on the Government Business Program, deeply concerned and alarmed at the design of the program this week.

For those watching, what the Government is trying to do this week is to split the program into two parts and deal with three Bills that you could probably fairly say are not substantive statewide reforms. I am not in any way talking down those reforms, but you would not describe them as key priority reforms that have statewide impact, though I do know that the Leader of the Nationals is very, very much looking forward to leading on the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Repeal Bill 2024. He has been talking a very big game about how good his speech will be on this Bill, so I would hope that the entire Chamber is here, because he is very, very keen to impress us with his speech on this Bill.

But the Government is going to also try to ram a Bill through this Chamber. We saw today a Bill introduced which the Chamber has not seen – the Chamber has not seen that proposed reform yet – and they seek to guillotine it tomorrow at 4 o'clock. So, the process of the House will be that at some stage late morning tomorrow that Bill will be tabled in this place and by 4 o'clock that afternoon it will be rammed through this Chamber. It is deeply, deeply concerning to see that the Government will do that. That is why I move:

That paragraph (1) on the Government Business Program be omitted.

It is just fundamentally not right that you introduce a Bill into this place and only a few hours later take it to a guillotine. And we know that tomorrow in between when the Bill is tabled and the guillotine being brought in at 4 o'clock, there will be Question Time and other procedures of the House; there will be a

lunch break. So, most of the time between –

Tim Richardson: interjected.

James NEWBURY: We would be more than happy, Member for Mordialloc, to stay in here for the entire time and debate you. But it is concerning that for the very few hours between when the Bill is tabled and the Government is guillotining it in this place, we will not have an opportunity to debate it.

So, we might have at best perhaps an hour to consider the Bill. Normally the standard adjournment period for a Bill that has been laid on the table is two weeks, and federally the rule of thumb is, unless it is an issue of national security or national emergency, Bills do not get rammed through quicker. It is standard that a Bill is for national security or a national emergency before it is rushed through. This clearly is not the case in this circumstance. We see we are in the middle of a youth crime crisis and the Government has not put its shoulder to the wheel on any matters to rush through any changes that would actually protect the community, but when it comes to this one Bill, after perhaps an hour of debate it will be ramming it through. So, the Coalition has moved an Amendment to the Government Business Program because of this outrageous guillotine, and of course that being the case, we will not accept a program of this nature and will be opposing it. So, the Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program.

I do also want to note the Coalition has proposed Amendments to the Sessional Orders which would require the Government to actually answer some of the questions that they are being asked. Last sitting week, we saw a shameful display of 22 questions being asked and none being answered, and I think that reflects on the Premier and the Ministry. So, we will seek an opportunity to have those Sessional Orders considered and passed.

Lastly, I will briefly step away this week for a very short amount of time for my grandfather's funeral and would hope that no-one even notices I am not here. I think that would be the best part. I very sadly lost my grandfather, a beautiful man who lived 100 years. We were very fortunate, and I will miss him very much and love him very much.

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: WRONG PRIORITIES

Thursday, 15 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:22):

I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

What the Government is doing in this Chamber this week is an abuse of this Parliament. We saw only 10 minutes ago the Minister for Transport Infrastructure come in and spend 10 minutes joking around about whether he likes Times New Roman font. What a fool he is. But he is playing Victorians like fools because he is misusing this place. This place should be dealing with the important issues and challenges of the day, and it is appalling that we have seen day on day of abuse of this place. We have seen the Minister come in and talk about his favourite font and we have seen how he looked talking about that, laughing away and giggling away with his backbench about whether he liked Times New Roman.

Yesterday we saw the Government try and smash through the Lawyer X Bill, only to vote against dealing with it in the other place. What an absolute disgrace. We had it rushed through this place with one hour to debate it and then rushed across to the other place. We know what that Bill is about – that is purely a whitewash – but there are serious issues this place should be debating.

We have a crime crisis – there is absolutely a youth crime crisis. There have been appalling instances day on day. But there are also other important issues, for example, the lack of Government spending in electorates.

We saw the Member for Kororoit – not someone you would describe as my friend, but nevertheless – raise an important petition signed by almost 5000 people in her electorate. Almost 5000 people, well over 10 per cent of her electorate, said that Government expenditure in her electorate was not enough. Item 38 on the Notice Paper is a Labor Member supporting a petition saying

that the Government is not spending enough in her electorate.

It is unusual to hear that from a Labor Member, I must say. It is usually the Liberal and National seats that the Government purposefully ignores in terms of Government expenditure, but we saw with this petition a Labor Member talk about the fact that 5000 people have signed a petition to say that they are not getting enough Government funding.

We need to move on from the Bill we are currently debating, which is why I have moved the Motion to move on from the current debate, because there are important issues. An example of that important issue is the Member for Kororoit's Motion. I note the Member is not here, but perhaps the Government will provide the opportunity for a debate on the Member for Kororoit's petition. Five thousand people have signed a petition to call for more Government investment in her electorate. That would be an issue that would be deserving of debate in this House, not the Minister talking about what font he is interested in and giggling about it like the fool he is.

Sonya Kilkenny: On a Point of Order, Acting Speaker, I think we have listened long enough here to some of the unparliamentary language that is being used by the Member.

James NEWBURY: What is your Point of Order?

Sonya Kilkenny: Unparliamentary language that is being used.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): If I could just bring the Manager of Opposition Business back to the procedural debate.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, Acting Speaker, and I do appreciate the fact that you have not overruled my definition of the Minister.

I also refer to Motion 108 on the Notice Paper in relation to the Sessional Orders and the need for the Government to actually provide answers in Question Time. We have seen day after day after day the Premier get up and refuse to answer any question.

We need to debate the issues that matter to Victorians. We must debate the issues that matter to Victorians, and that is why the Coalition has moved to move on from the current debate and on to an issue that matters to Victorians.

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: GREENS ON MIDDLE EAST

Thursday, 15 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:01):

The Greens have attempted to move today from the business of the House to debating the conflict in the Middle East, and it is a matter that they have sought to debate repeatedly in this place, not in a constructive way but in a destructive way.

No-one in this Chamber wants to see people hurt. Nobody wants to see young people – any age of person – hurt. We want to see our community band together; we want to see our rich multicultural community band together at this difficult time as this difficult, in fact heartbreaking, event is happening on the other side of the world, a place where the Member for Caulfield and I recently went. It is heartbreaking, and I am sure every Member in this place wants to see an end to that conflict, wants to see peace and wants to see all of the good people of that region flourish and have wonderful lives.

To know that the Greens have again attempted to rip the social divide in this State is simply shameful. We will not support the Greens' attempt to do so. In fact, earlier on the Motion the Member spoke about the fact that charity should no longer flow to parts of the Middle East. Think that through: we have an argument that is being put that is pulling the social fabric of our community apart and asking people to choose sides in a conflict where both sides are full of innocent people. There is only one group of people that we can all unite in being opposed to, and that is terrorists.

We need to be careful with attempts like this, which hopefully will not see too much light other than the Greens' media pack that are standing outside the Chamber with their cameras ready. We know why this is being pulled – so that the social media can be filmed on the way out of the Chamber. This type of

Motion will only hurt the fabric of the Victorian community, and we cannot stand for it.

Every time there is an attempt by the Greens to do that, we have to stand united in this place and say, 'No, we will not allow that. We are a rich multicultural community.'

There are elements around the world of extremism, and that clearly is ripping apart some of the edges of the fabric of Western countries, and there do need to be conversations around whether extremism fits within the value set of Western countries. My view is that it does not, because you need to ensure when you have a people and a country and a community living together, that for the people within that community – of course they can be rich and vibrant and from all across the world – there has to be just a basic set of fundamental values that binds that community together, not in any way to take away from the richness of that social fabric but to make sure that the people around us live well and prosper. So, there is a conversation around extremism. What is not a conversation that should be had in this place, or any other place is whether or not an innocent person who has been hurt or died is more important than another innocent person who has been hurt or died.

This place I am sure is almost united in saying the events in the Middle East are deeply heartbreaking. Many of us feel so incredibly moved by them, but what we have to do as community leaders is stand together and say, 'Let's not allow anybody to rip apart the social fabric,' which is not easy to make in a community, but it is easy to pull apart. We have to stand up against any attempt by anybody, let alone a Member of this place – shame, a Member of this place – to pull apart that social fabric. So, the Coalition will be siding with the Government in ensuring that this Motion is voted down, and I hope the Greens consider stopping moving this type of Motion in this House.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 27 August 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:16):

The Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program.

I will tell you why. The Government Business Program has become a joke. It has become an absolute joke. Whatever is written on the Program will bear no resemblance to what the Government actually deals with in a week.

We saw only last week the Government rush through an urgent Bill that came into the Chamber – ‘We have to get this Bill through today. We have to introduce this Bill, get it through the Lower House and through the Council on Thursday’ – until the Government voted against bringing their own Bill on Thursday in the Council. They voted against bringing their own Bill on despite saying it was a matter of extreme urgency. What an outrage. It just shows how fake the Government are and how their Government Business Program is a complete waste of paper.

What we also know is that the Government this morning gave notice that the House would be dealing with the Youth Justice Bill 2024 Amendments – the Council Amendments – first up today. Well, we skipped over that, didn’t we? What happened to that? What happened to the Government’s own Notice Paper for today?

Roma Britnell interjected.

James NEWBURY: Again, chaos. We have skipped over it. I am not sure whether The Leader of the House forgot or whether the Government was embarrassed by the youth crime crisis that is actually occurring on our streets. I tell you what, it is happening on Church Street in Brighton.

We saw that on Friday. There was a knife fight on Church Street in Brighton – a full Church Street, kids going up and down the street – and chairs were being thrown and bottles were being thrown at 3:45 in the afternoon. It is no wonder, is it, that the Government has skipped over dealing with the Council Amendments on that Bill, because they are embarrassed. We might see that item come back to the Chamber today. How would we know? All we have to rely on is the daily program where it is listed, and it was skipped, just like the Government Business Program last week. We had a Business Program written down in black and white, but it bore no resemblance to what was actually dealt with in the week.

When it comes to the Parliament the Government is in chaos. In both Chambers the Government is in chaos, because the Government tries to push the items it wants through the Parliament, and then they sit in the Upper House until it can trade away and do a deal with the crossbench and get enough votes to get them through that place.

They bring these items through the Lower House and call for urgency, call for immediacy, in terms of getting these Bills through. Then they sit there in the Upper House waiting for the horse trading to occur, waiting for Members' votes to be bought off until there are enough votes for the Government to get their bad legislation through the Council. It is obvious for the world to see. That is why the Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program.

I do note the Government has given notice again – and here I am standing up for the Labor Members again – of dealing with the Budget Motion. Last week we saw the Government allow 1 hour of debate on the Budget Motion – the embarrassing Budget that the Government wants to hide. No wonder they want to hide it. Every single week the Government lists and will allow debate on the Budget Motion, and yet there are some 20 Members on the Government benches who have not had a chance to speak on it and about a third on our side have not had a chance to speak on it. We know what we want to say. We want to say that we have been neglected. We want to talk about the fact that we have been neglected and our communities have been forgotten year on year on year. But for the Government to ignore their own backbench – no wonder the

Premier is wandering around the room shoring up her numbers. It is because the Members are being neglected by their own Government in the Parliament.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a Point of Order, Speaker, on relevance, a contribution on the Government Business Program is not an opportunity to sledge the Government.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Member for Brighton will come back to the Business Program.

James NEWBURY: The truth hurts.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 10 September 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:29):

I will start on the Government Business Program by letting the House know that we will be opposing the Government Business Program this week.

On the Short Stay Levy Bill 2024, the Coalition again went to the Government and said we would like to take a Bill into consideration in detail – it has only happened once in this term – and the Government again said that they did not have a Minister who was able to stand up and argue the case, so the offer was declined.

It is disappointing to know that no-one has the capacity to stand up to the scrutiny. That is something the Parliament should expect; the Parliament should expect Bills at times to go into consideration in detail so that the detail of those Bills is not just rushed over, and the Bills are not simply rushed through.

I will say for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, although we agree on nothing, that in one case he was the only Minister who agreed to take a Bill into consideration, so he deserves one point for that. He is the only Minister thus far who has had the skill level required to take a Bill into consideration. So, the Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program.

The Leader of the House spoke about the ‘excellent initiative’, the short-stay levy. In her words it is an excellent initiative, or as Victorians I am sure will come to say of it, the 55th new tax this Government has introduced – 55 of them. Though the Bill has disingenuously been titled a levy, it was somewhat bizarre to hear the Treasurer stand up in the last sitting week and read out a statement in which he confirmed that the levy was in fact a tax. The levy was a tax, but the Bill was not called a tax. No, of course the Government would not have called it

a tax, because why would they be honest? The Treasurer in the last sitting week stood up in his speech and admitted that the levy was in fact a tax – the 55th new tax – and we will have a lot to say about that 55th new tax that is being imposed on the community and that the Leader of the House describes as an excellent initiative. The Shadow Treasurer has made the point a number of times that this new tax has not got a single friend. I will let the Shadow Treasurer know that there is one – the Leader of the House. The tax has one friend, the Leader of the House – the excellent initiative.

The other things that are worth noting: each week the Government notes in the Business Program notification that the Leader of the House will be providing an opportunity to speak on the Budget Bill. I know I get up every week and I plead on behalf of the Labor Members – the third of the Labor Caucus who have not had a chance to speak on the Budget – that this week maybe the Government will give them their shot. Both on our side and on the Government side a third of the Members have not had a chance to speak on the Budget – the Budget the Government is clearly trying to hide. Every single week it is on the Government Business Program: 'We might deal with the Budget Bills'. Last week – no. The Members did not have a chance to talk about it, but why would they? Why would the Government want to provide an opportunity to debate that Budget? They want to hide it. So again, I am going to get up on behalf of the Government Members and the Coalition to say: Leader of the House, you are letting your own side down. There are so many Members of this place who have not had an opportunity to talk about what the Government has not delivered and \$190 billion in debt. Hopefully we will see an opportunity for all Members to have the right to speak up on behalf of their community.

This week there are a number of other Bills, but there are also 200 motions on the Notice Paper, roughly – 200 motions – and the Government has not provided any opportunity to talk about those motions other than previously allowing time for sledge motions. The 200 motions that are sitting on the Notice Paper are being ignored, and there are important ones, including Standing Order reform in relation to questions not being answered in Question Time. So, we will be opposing the Government Business Program for the reasons that have been outlined.

MOTION

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: PROTESTS AND GREENS BEHAVIOUR

Thursday, 12 September 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:56):

We must urgently debate the motion and also the matters raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

For months and months and months we have seen in this place, out on the steps of this place and in the streets outside this place increasingly dangerous behaviour, and it has culminated this week in shocking, outrageous behaviour. To see 27 police officers hurt whilst doing their jobs –

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: Disgraceful. Acid was thrown on police. This morning the Coalition attempted to move a motion in support of those police, and what did the Government do? The Government blocked it. How disgusting, to block a motion recognising the hard work of police and the shameful things that they have seen over recent days.

But further, the reason why this debate must be urgently adjourned so the House can move on to other important matters is because for months the Coalition has gone to the Government and said, 'We need to change the law, we need to improve the law. The law must be tougher to protect Victorians.' We have tried again and again and again.

In terms of behaviours in this place, we have gone to the Leader of the House and the Premier repeatedly and called for better behaviour from Members of this place, specifically the Member for Richmond, and protections around that in terms of either the Standing or Sessional Orders, because we can no longer stand by while behaviour by Members of this place incites the violence we see on the streets.

Sam Hibbins: On a Point of Order, Acting Speaker, this is a procedural debate. It is not an opportunity for Members to reflect on other Members, namely, the Member for Richmond. I ask you to bring the Member for Brighton back to this narrow procedural debate and not reflect on other Members of Parliament.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Brighton, I ask you to come back to the debate.

James NEWBURY: I can understand why the Greens Member does not want the issue debated, but it is urgent that the issue be debated, and I again call on the Premier. Premier, words matter – of course they do – but so does action, and coming into a Chamber that is empty at 7 o'clock at night and doing nothing changes nothing. It changes nothing. No-one watched it, no-one was here. The Premier needs to act. We have put out our hand to offer to work with the Government on that, and in this Chamber the Premier leaned across to me and said they would. It is on the record. Where are they? How many times will it take before we see worse? Because what we are seeing is escalating. I call on the Premier and I call on the Labor Party to act.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:58):

It is urgent that we adjourn the matter that was before the House and debate these important issues. I note the reports of the protest group today, who have said reportedly:

... we must keep going ...

We are the most radical part of the resistance on this continent ...

These are not the words of people who are anything other than dangerous, so it is essential that this House moves on from the debate and debates the matters put by the Leader of the Opposition. We must do it now. Words are not enough in this place. We must take action, and this is an opportunity for the Government to vote in unity, as the Premier alluded to in Question Time. This will be the Government's chance to prove it.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 15 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:18):

The Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program.

We are deeply concerned. A number of times over this term the Coalition has sought to take Bills into Consideration in Detail. We made a request to the Government on its pill testing Bill and the Government provided 15 minutes when it would take questions on that Bill – 15 minutes. Can you believe it? It is little wonder that the Coalition sought to take this Bill into Consideration in Detail. What is even more concerning is that not only did we have only 15 minutes to put a raft of questions but the Government took those questions on notice, and despite that Bill being debated today, in fact shortly, guess what, how many of those questions have been answered? Zero. The Government has failed to deliver the promised answers on any of those questions before the Bill is debated. Shame on the Government. Those are genuine questions from the community, and it is not unreasonable.

In fact, it is a longstanding tradition not only of this place but of Parliaments that a Bill briefing is provided. I raise my concerns with you, Speaker, about the tradition, the strong tradition of this place, that a Bill briefing is provided and that post that briefing outstanding questions – genuine questions – that have been put by the community are answered in a timely and reasonable way. Yet this Bill is about to be debated, and we have seen nothing. That is very, very concerning. I am sure, Speaker, you would share my concerns that that is still left outstanding. And 15 minutes – you can imagine how little opportunity there is to put genuine questions. I mean, the Government just got up and spoke about this Bill and a health-led response and the fact that they are further legalising drugs effectively, but there are genuine questions that were raised in that process and I know a number of Members on our side of the Chamber have questions that are still left outstanding.

The Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program, because you cannot run a Parliament this way. It is shameful, just as shameful as it was for the Government to deny leave on the anniversary of 7 October. How shameful. Even the Federal Government managed to provide leave.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a Point of Order, Speaker, the Government Business Program is a narrow debate. I ask that you bring the Manager of Opposition Business back to the Government Business Program.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I will allow in passing other matters that have happened before the Government Business Program, but I do ask you to speak to the Government Business Program.

James NEWBURY: I would have thought that the Government Business Program would have afforded time to deal with important matters, as did the Federal Parliament. That was not provided here.

This week I will note for the first time the Government Business Program notification did not include an opportunity for any Members to speak on the Budget. That was not noted, as has been the case in recent weeks. It should be recorded that the Council has now provided every Member an opportunity to speak on the Budget. As of this week there are no Members in the Council that have not been provided that opportunity. In our place the Government Business Program has not provided an opportunity for roughly a third of this Chamber to speak on this Budget, and we understand why of course. The fact that a third of the Members of this place have not been afforded an opportunity to speak on the Budget Bills speaks to what the Government actually think of their own Budget, because the Government Members are not being provided an opportunity and the Coalition Members are not being provided an opportunity, and again I note that Council Members have all been provided an opportunity to do so.

The Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program for their shameful behaviour when it comes to Bill briefings, trying to ram through a Bill without providing proper detail and scrutiny, and we would call for much better management of the process.

MOTION

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: 7 OCTOBER MOTION

Tuesday, 15 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:20):

I rise in support of allowing an opportunity for this Parliament to debate this important commemoration of the atrocities of 7 October. That is what the vote that will shortly take place is – allowing this Parliament an opportunity to not only debate the important Motion but also vote in commemoration of the atrocious events that happened on that day. It is a similar Motion in many ways to the one that was put through the Federal Parliament. This morning the Coalition sought to move a Motion, and the Government denied leave. I think the record stands clearly in relation to the Government denying the opportunity to debate this, and at no point in this week is there any time set aside by the Government to put through a Motion in this place to acknowledge the darkest day not only for Israel, not only for the Jewish people and not only for the friends of the Jewish people but more broadly for all good people in the Western world. All we have asked for is an opportunity to put through a Motion in this place and for this Parliament to recognise the atrocities.

One year ago, a number of us stood to speak in a bipartisan way on the atrocities of 7 October. It was almost one year ago today; it might have even been 15 October, one year ago. A number of speakers on that day said, 'true friendship will not be measured by the speeches of today, but it will be measured by the friendship over time.' It is easy at the time to deliver words that you think are appropriate, but for many since, they have talked out of both sides of their mouth. That is a fact, and the community knows it. People are talking out of both sides of their mouth, because this Parliament could have been provided an opportunity to commemorate not just the atrocities of those affected. The Member for Caulfield spoke eloquently about him, me and a number of others being in Israel and visiting the sites of the most tragic and horrific events, which

are absolutely burnt into my memory for the rest of my life. Today, and this Parliament this week, should have been an opportunity to commemorate those horrific events. It is not something that you simply do once afterwards and say, 'Well, tick that one off, and we don't need to do it again.' One year later there are still hostages being held, and they deserve to have people around the world speak on their behalf. We could have done that, and we could have done that in a bipartisan way. That is what the Coalition is seeking to do: to say to this Chamber, please, let us have an opportunity to not only debate but put through a Motion in recognition of those who have passed, of those who have been held hostage and also of the fight for the free Western world, which this fight is in the Middle East.

I know a number of Members have spoken about the recent commemoration event and the Jewish community's feeling. The feeling in the community is so incredibly strong because we have seen a rise in antisemitism that is ripping at the fabric of the welcome that people in the Jewish community feel in our State. We should find every opportunity to stand up with them and say, 'What you are feeling is wrong and we will never allow that.' And that is what this, today, could have been an opportunity to stand up in friendship and walk in partnership with the Jewish community through a Motion of that kind. There is little wonder that the Foreign Minister, having accepted attendance at that event, was forced and shamed into not attending by the community. So strong is the community, both Jewish and broader, on the outrageous and disturbing acts of the Minister for Foreign Affairs over the last year – the lack of empathy and friendship shown by the Minister for Foreign Affairs – that the Foreign Minister was forced to not attend that event.

This would have been an important bipartisan opportunity, and it is disappointing the Government has not provided it.

MOTION

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: MOVE TO BUILDING BILL

Thursday, 17 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:42):

On the procedural motion, I stand to speak very strongly in support of the Leader of the Nationals' procedural motion to move away from this current Bill.

For the background of the House and those watching, each week there is a setout plan for the Government that they move by way of the Government Business Program, and this week they set out three Bills. The normal process would be that each day one Bill is dealt with. There are occasions where a Bill is dealt with a little bit on a different day, sometimes. But the only reason for the delay in moving to the next Bill is because it implements the Government's gas ban.

We have just heard from the Labor Party, from the Government, that they have packed out a speaking list on the Pill-Testing Bill – a packed speaking list – to block out the entire morning of debate on the Pill-Testing Bill so that there will be almost no time at all for any Members to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024 or on what many call the gas ban Bill, because we know how little time there is for debate today. There is so little time for debate today. We know how much the Government wants to cover it up and not move from the current Bill to the Building Legislation. How shameful that the Government would misuse time in this House to stop debate on the third Bill on their own program. I think it is important to note, by the way – it is entirely relevant.

Juliana Addison: On a Point of Order, Deputy Speaker, he is misleading the House, because every Member deserves to speak on this legislation who wants to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a Point of Order.

James NEWBURY: Continuing on the Procedural Motion, the House will remember that the Coalition sought to take the Pill-Testing Bill into Consideration in Detail and the Government said no. So, we have Government Members standing up – and they will, one after another – to say, ‘We want to speak on the Pill-Testing Bill, we want to speak on the Pill-Testing Bill,’ but will they take it to Consideration in Detail? Scared, scared – of course they will not.

This is a stunt by the Government to block the Parliament dealing with the Building Legislation – that is what this is about – and it has been called out. It has been called out because the Building Legislation deserves proper scrutiny. You cannot ban gas in everybody’s home and not allow this Parliament time to consider it. A ban on gas in everybody’s home – this is draconian. No wonder the Government is packing out a speakers list on anything it can think of to stop an opportunity to debate the Bill. And the Government has confirmed it. They have confirmed they have got a packed list that is going to take hours – hours of debate on the Pill-Testing Bill. For those watching, this is the third day the Government has debated the Pill-Testing Bill – the third day.

Of course, they are packing the time of the Parliament on this Bill, because the Building Legislation Bill is very, very concerning. It allows unfettered power. I will not go too much into the detail of that Bill now. Perhaps at some stage today we will have an opportunity to at least consider it briefly, in passing – who would know? The Government has already started to pack out their speaking list for today to cover for the fact that they do not want the Building Legislation debated. That is what this debate is about.

So, the Government, one after another, will stand up and say, ‘We want to talk about something else.’ Of course they want to talk about something else, and when they vote against this Motion, that is what it will prove: they want to hide from the gas ban. That is what a vote against this Motion proves: the Labor Party want to hide the gas ban Bill. How outrageous. How outrageous that Victorians cannot have their concerns about the Government’s gas ban ventilated in this Chamber. What an absolute outrage. So, we will shortly see the Government again try and hide their gas ban by voting against this Motion, but we will support it.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 29 October 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:17):

Deputy Speaker, in relation to the Government Business Program, when we got version 1 of the Government Business Program – because we are now on the second Motion; that has not yet been reflected in the Parliament’s printing because of the changes today – it listed three Bills, one of which the Leader of the House just spoke about: the Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I think it is actually called the railroading communities Bill. The Coalition sought from the Government an opportunity to consider that Bill in detail, because effectively what that does do is railroad communities and take away all community rights.

The Coalition went to the Government seeking an opportunity to consider that Bill. The Government, as they are prone to do, felt that their Minister was not able to deal with a consideration-in-detail process and declined the opportunity. On that basis we will be opposing the Government Business Program, because there must be opportunities in this place for Ministers to have the character and capacity to debate what they are putting to this place. When it comes to that Bill and Bills in other weeks when we have sought to take those Bills into consideration in detail, the Government has said no, and that is just fundamentally wrong. Only one time in this term has a Minister taken a Bill into consideration in detail.

This Bill specifically will railroad many, many communities, and we know that Victorians and Melburnians will see this; they will see it over time, and they are starting to see it. They are starting to stand up and say what the Government is doing is wrong, and that is what Melburnians and Victorians will do.

They will understand that the Government is railroading them, and that is what Victorians will do over time. Again, we sought an opportunity to take this Bill into consideration in detail and that was declined. We also earlier sought to

move to introduce a Bill in relation to the tobacco firebombings and a fix for that, and we would have hoped that the Government would have not only allowed it to be introduced but afforded it an opportunity on the Government Business Program. Unfortunately, it was not provided an opportunity. We do know 108 bombings have occurred over the last 18 months – that is two a week. It is shameful to know that the Government has not allowed the Bill to be introduced or included in the Government Business Program.

We heard a debate earlier about the Government pushing forward with a Bill immediately, and I did note at the time that the Government had indicated that debate on that Bill would occur after there had been a briefing on the Bill and there had been some discussion. The Leader of the House spoke about our understanding of the Bill. I was handed a copy of the Bill and the second-reading speech when the Treasurer stood up. Having an opportunity to open it is not unreasonable, as it is not unreasonable for the Opposition to be briefed on it so that they understand it. As I said in an earlier debate, the Coalition will always stand for lower taxes and always deliver lower taxes than the Labor Party will in their wildest dreams. On principle we are very strongly for lower taxes. It is just in relation to that Bill that it was not unreasonable that some process be followed rather than just the straight, raw, opportunistic politics of the Premier, but I think that was for all to see over the last week.

I know that each week I try and lobby the Leader of the House to allow a third of the Parliament – just under a third – to speak on the Budget Bill, because the Leader of the House does not want her own Members to speak on the Budget Motion. There are a number of Members who have not had that opportunity. I know it was a dud Budget. We know it was a dud Budget because the Leader of the House will not even let their own Members speak on it, but every Member should have the opportunity on principle to speak on it – every Member.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: There are Members who are saying they spoke on it. Stand up for your colleagues, my friends. Stand up for your colleagues who have not spoken on it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair, Member for Brighton.

James NEWBURY: It is not unreasonable. The Coalition will be opposing the Government Business Program.

MOTION

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Tuesday, 12 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:54):

As I look at the Government Business Program that the Leader of the House has just moved and the one listed on the daily program produced by the Parliament, they are different. What a mess. This Government has proven time and time again that they are losing control of the Parliament and that they do not, frankly, know what they are doing. We saw it at the end of last year with Bill after Bill shelved in the Council, not dealt with, because the Government did not know what to do. They had introduced things and sought to move things through this place and the other place without consulting with the Parliament. Now we are seeing a mess in their organisation of this place.

As I said, we have a Government Business Program listed on the Parliament's daily program which is different to the Motion that has been just moved in this place, so we cannot support a Government Business Program that is a mess. It is a mess, and Victorians would expect more. They would expect more both in terms of the management and operation of this place but also in terms of the fair and reasonable management of proposed Bills through this place.

Governments should not be introducing Bills and trying to push them through in a haphazard way because they have been caught out by the Opposition, who have been trying to make meaningful changes on important issues as occurred last sitting week, two weeks ago. We saw it today. We saw a Government find a Bill and try to treat it as urgent this week, on an issue that the Coalition has been pushing for action on for some time. This urgent Bill has a 19-month delay where it will sit gathering dust. The Coalition cannot support a Government Business Program – which one is it? Is it the Government Business Program –

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

James NEWBURY: The Leader of the House says it is the one that the Leader of the House read out, but the daily program which is available at the end of the table has three Bills listed for this week. There is a fourth one that I understand the Leader of the House has read out – the Tobacco Bill – and we have said we want that Bill debated, because it is an important issue. The fact that the Government has so poorly managed this issue is a reflection on them, and as I said earlier, two firebombings have occurred in the last two weeks in Pascoe Vale.

I note that the Government Business Program – I do not know if it was right or if it is still right anymore – that was sent out to non-Government Members suggested that there would be debate around the Budget Bills. I know for many weeks I have been trying to find an opportunity for the Government to allow Members of all sides to speak about the dud Budget, which a third of the Members of this Chamber, roughly speaking, have not even spoken on. The notification that went out to Members suggested that there would be time for that debate. There are so many Members of this place who have not been able to talk about the fact that on our side of the Chamber our communities are being ripped off again. But I suspect now that with four Bills to debate this week – not that it is on the program that has been sent out by the Parliament – proposed for the Government Business Program, that Budget Debate opportunity may not occur or would not occur in any meaningful way. And how can you be so ashamed of your own Budget that a third of the Members of this place are not given an opportunity to speak about it? That just shows you are trying to hide it, doesn't it? You do not stop a third of your backbench being able to speak on something unless you are really, really embarrassed about the Budget. I do note that that proposal was put out publicly that there would be meaningful debate on that, but I suspect now with four Bills for debate this week that will not occur.

The Coalition cannot support the mess of the Government Business Program. I do not think the Government knows what it is doing from day to day. Clearly that is not the case in that what we are seeing on the program provided by the Parliament and what the Leader just said are completely different, so the Coalition will not be supporting the program.

MOTION

ATTEMPT TO INTRODUCE: CORRECTION AMENDMENT (ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TREATMENT) BILL 2024

Thursday, 28 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:18):

I rise in support of the Member for Berwick's move on the Corrections Amendment (Assisted Reproductive Treatment) Bill 2024 and its introduction.

The debate now and the debate earlier are about the moral compass of this Chamber. The divisions on both of these items have been about the moral compass of this room and the Members in it, because both of these Bills seek to correct things that are wrong and need to be corrected.

The Government speakers have spoken about the need for experts only to draft Bills, and I will leave out for a moment that the Government drafters have drafted these Bills. But if the Government was moving an alternate Bill that did the same thing or fixed these problems, I would look at it and say perhaps they had an argument that we on this side of the Chamber should listen to.

But what has happened today is our side of the Chamber has sought to move two Bills, to fix things that are wrong. They are not just wrong in practice but also morally wrong, and for the Government to be voting against them is at the very least disappointing. I would hope that the Government could stand up and say that they will look into these issues and seek to solve those same problems, and if they did, they would have some standing.

The first Bill would have empowered women and their loved ones with knowledge – how could you possibly vote against that? – and what this Bill seeks to do is say that the rights of the victim should always be put ahead of the rights of the criminal, and what this Government is saying is that the criminal, who in this certain circumstance committed one of the most egregious crimes by murdering a mother of three, has more rights than the victim and the victim's family and is fit, as a murderer, to bring a child into jail. So, we on this side of the House have said the system as it stands is wrong.

I would say to the Government: if you are going to vote against this Bill – and speakers have suggested they will – why not at least commit, both on this and the former matter, to making a similar reform? The community would expect the rights of a victim to be put ahead of the rights of a criminal, which should always be the case, and that has been lost sadly in the State. But also, the earlier matter would have empowered women with knowledge. That is something that other States do, empower women and their loved ones with knowledge, because to solve the broader issue you need the broader community, and you need people's loved ones to be part of the knowledge base to help solve these broader issues.

I would say to the Government, as they stand and say they have a busy legislative agenda: do not simply just vote this down, but do so committing to similar reforms, because otherwise a vote against these Bills is not just a political vote, it is also a vote that is morally wrong, and that goes to the heart of the character of every single Member who votes against these Bills, and frankly, Members of this place should do better.

MOTION

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PROGRAM

Thursday, 12 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:22):

I rise to speak on the Government Business Program, and in doing so if I may just take a moment to acknowledge that it is the last sitting week before Christmas, and this Parliament operates because of wonderful people around the building who do incredible hard work to keep this place going. The Clerks provide us with advice all the time and do an incredible job to make sure the House and the traditions of the House hopefully continue over time. Also, the staff around the building do an incredible job: the cleaners, the cooks and the staff out the back who look after us and make us coffees. I know Jacquie and her team, and Alex, who makes a mean coffee, do an incredible job out there and look after us.

In the spirit of Christmas, I think it is important to acknowledge them, but also our broader staff on all sides of the Chamber. We are only what we are because of the support in the teams around us, and our staff work tirelessly for us and for the community – they work incredibly hard for the local communities. I know in my team Elouise Ager, Victoria Morgan and Edward Bourke are working in my office, and we miss Allie Amey, my Office Manager who has had twin boys Jack and Luke. We miss her, and we know that she has got two wonderful boys to keep her very, very busy.

In terms of the Government Business Program, the Coalition will be opposing it. As the Leader of the House said, this Business Program includes three Bills and three motions. Most noteworthy – and I have spoken about this in previous sitting weeks – is one of the motions is the Budget Motion, and roughly speaking this Motion on the Budget will be acquitted at the end of this week, which means that the chance for Members in this place to speak about the Budget will conclude. The opportunity provided by the Government for Members to speak on their own Budget will no longer be the case after that Motion is dealt with at the end of the week.

And what is so notable about that is that about a third of this Chamber has not been given an opportunity to speak. There are lots and lots of Members in this place who have not been given an opportunity to speak. To have the Government's Budget Motion being effectively moved on by the Government at the end of this week while a third of the Members of this place have not had an opportunity to speak on it is something that I do not think anyone in this Chamber has ever seen – a Government killing its own Budget debate. It just goes to show, frankly, how bad the Budget was – that a third of the Members in this place are being denied that opportunity. I know that there are many Members on this side who have not had the chance to yet speak about the Budget, and so ending their opportunity to speak about the Budget is really, really wrong.

There are a number of other motions on the Government Business Program to be dealt with, one of which of course we support and another which is, frankly, nothing more than a sledge motion. The Government is using the Government Business Program to play politics, not deal with legislative changes to this great State. It is using it as an opportunity to try and wedge, in some hollow attempt to dredge up a political issue to try and seek political advantage, and you can see that it does not work. You can see that Victorians have seen through this Government's games, which is why we obviously are opposed to the manner with which the Government Business Program has been designed.

A Member interjected.

James NEWBURY: I hear the Leader of the House sighing across the table. That is why I started with some Christmas cheer, Leader of the House, before getting onto our position on the Government Business Program.

But I do note that there is one Motion on the program which will stop Members speaking about The Budget, and that in principle is wrong; all Members should at least have an opportunity to speak about The Budget no matter how much of a dud Budget it was, and to stop a third of the House is wrong. So, the Coalition will wholeheartedly be opposing the Government Business Program and the political gamesmanship from the Government in using the Motion for that purpose.

MOTION

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: BERWICK SLEDGE MOTION – ONE

Thursday, 28 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:11):

The Government is about to misuse this Parliament again. What an outrageous abuse from those Labor Members to use the Parliament's time again to sledge. That is what this Government wants to do again, to spend another 2 hours of time in this place to sledge and sledge and sledge. The Members on that side of the Chamber should be absolutely ashamed of themselves. We are currently debating a Paramedics Bill, and the Government wants to move to a sledge motion instead of debating that Bill. I look forward to hearing all of the Members on that side of the Chamber stand up and explain why a sledge motion is more important than debating the Bill that the House currently is.

What an absolute disgrace this Government is. After yesterday the Government – I mean, did they not embarrass themselves multiple times? Multiple times I went to the Government and said, 'Please stop. Please stop using this place in this way. Please stop it.' I went to the Premier and said, 'Please stop it. Please stop demeaning this place.' During part of the debate yesterday there were school students in the gallery, so we will now have Members on that side of the place stand up and explain why we should move to a sledge motion over debating a Paramedics Bill. Shame on this Government, shame on this Government, shame on this Government. To think that the Government wants to park the Bill so that it can play its little games – the Government should be ashamed.

What is now clear, what we now know, is that these decisions could only be made if they were approved by the Premier herself. This much Parliamentary time would not be misused had the Premier not personally approved it, so we know that the Government from the Premier down is saying they want to have an outrageous, vicious, dirty use of this Parliament's time, so much so that the Speaker yesterday made a number of comments about the debate that was then underway. The Speaker herself made a number of comments about the debate that was underway. I think I felt and hoped that the mistakes the Government made yesterday would be left there, but no. The Government again, from the Premier down, clearly want to get into the mud. We know going into another day of this snarky, nasty dirtiness that only the Premier could approve this. We oppose entirely moving away from this Paramedics Bill to move to a sledge motion. Can you imagine it?

What are the Members on the other side of the place going to justify that decision on? On what grounds could they possibly justify the need to debate that motion over the legislation that was being debated by both sides of the Chamber? In fact, there were Members on both sides of the Chamber who had not yet spoken; the speakers list was not even exhausted. The Government is now saying, 'Let's move away from a Bill that essentially is around paramedics to just waste the Parliament's time with dirty, nasty sledges.' Well, the Premier needs to come in and explain it. Why doesn't the Premier actually stand up and explain why this procedural motion should occur? The Coalition will be opposing this. We will absolutely be opposing this gutter behaviour from the Labor Party. That is what they do when they are losing – always straight into the gutter. That is what is going to happen, so we will be opposing this motion, and we will do everything we can to call out their behaviour.

MOTION

DEBATE BE ADJOURNED: BERWICK SLEDGE MOTION – TWO

Thursday, 28 November 2024

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:42):

This is an outrageous abuse of the Parliament's time. While the Premier is sitting in this Chamber, I can say the Premier is taking this Parliament into the gutter and knowingly misusing this Parliament's time to take it into a sledge motion.

The SPEAKER: Order!

James NEWBURY: This is my voice, Speaker.

Colin Brooks: On a Point of Order, Speaker, the Member knows that reflecting on another Member is disorderly.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Brighton, be mindful of not reflecting on Members.

James NEWBURY: The Labor Government is seeking to again waste this Parliament's time by sledging. How ashamed they should be. We will fight it at every single step. We will cause a division at every single step, because the Premier needs to own this. The Premier needs to be called out for allowing this most outrageous abuse of our Parliament's time. Victorians should be watching on, with an hour or so left, in theory, of the last day of the week for Parliament before Christmas, to see the type of gutter behaviour of this Labor Government.

To think that this Government is going to finish the year moving on to a sledge motion again after using the Parliament's time so shamefully yesterday. I put on record again how many times I went to the Government yesterday to say, 'Please stop using the Parliament's time in this way.' Today I again said to the Government, 'Leave yesterday's mistakes in yesterday. Do not move the mistakes of yesterday into today.'

We now see a Procedural Motion that takes away debate on a Bill on paramedics to sledge a Member of the Opposition.

It is absolutely shameful. The Government would only agree to using two days of its time in this way if the Premier personally approved of it. And that says everything about the Premier's character, doesn't it? We know that is what it does. This is an outrageous abuse.

Iwan Walters: On a Point of Order, Speaker, this Procedural Motion is not an excuse for the Member for Brighton to reflect upon those opposite and to impugn the character of the Premier or any other Member.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Brighton, be mindful of not reflecting on Members in the Chamber.

James NEWBURY: I was reflecting on the collective, the collective Labor Government, who have now for two days wasted time. The Leader of the House talks about sledging. I tell you what, the Leader of the House is the king sledger of this place.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair.

James NEWBURY: The absolute sledger of this place, to allow the Parliament to be used in this way. What I can also let the Parliament know is that during the division the Greens and the National Party advised me that they do not want to speak on the sledge motion. I advise the Speaker that the National Party and Greens advised me during the division that they do not wish to speak on the sledge motion.

Pauline Richards: On a Point of Order, Speaker, this is a tight procedural debate, and I would ask you to bring the Member back to the procedural debate.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Brighton, do not interrupt people when they are on their feet. Come back to the Procedural Motion.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, and I was speaking to the procedure. During the division the National Party and the Greens advised me that they do not wish to speak on the sledge motion. We will oppose it at every single step of the way. This is disgusting, and it shows quite clearly for everyone the Premier's character.



JAMES NEWBURY MP

Member for Brighton



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