



DEBATES  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY  
FIFTH ASSEMBLY  
WEEKLY HANSARD

29 JUNE

2004

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**Tuesday, 29 June 2004**

**The Assembly met at 10.30 am.**

*(Quorum formed.)*

**MR SPEAKER** (Mr Berry) took the chair and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

### **Leave of absence**

Motion (by **Mr Stanhope**) agreed to:

That leave of absence from 29 June to 22 August 2004 be given to Mr Corbell (Minister for Health and Planning).

### **Ministerial arrangements**

**MR STANHOPE** (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Environment and Minister for Community Affairs): Mr Speaker, during the period of Mr Corbell's absence, Mr Quinlan will act as Minister for Planning and Mr Wood will act as Minister for Health.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a short statement concerning Mr Corbell's absence.

Leave granted.

**MR SMYTH:** Mr Speaker, on behalf of the opposition, I offer Mr Corbell our best wishes in regard to his personal dilemmas at this stage. We hope that he will have a speedy recovery. I do not think people outside the members of this place understand how, if you are ill, it is often impossible to get better, given the pressures of office. I want to say that he is in our thoughts and our prayers and we wish him a speedy recovery.

I say to the acting planning minister and the acting health minister that that does not mean that we will be neglecting our duties to keep them under scrutiny and we will certainly be asking the questions that need to be asked about the government's performance in those areas.

### **Petition**

#### **Ministerial response**

**The Clerk:** The following response to a petition has been lodged by a minister:

By **Mr Corbell**, Minister for Planning, in response to a petition lodged by Mrs Cross requesting that the Assembly call on the Minister for Planning to conduct an inquiry into a circumstance in which the ACT Planning and Land Authority misled prospective buyers at a public land auction in Belconnen, or that the Assembly refer the matter to a committee for inquiry.

The terms of the response will be recorded in *Hansard*.

## **Lake Ginninderra**

*The response read as follows:*

Mr Tom Duncan  
Clerk  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
London Circuit  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 13 May 2004 regarding the petition lodged by Mrs Cross MLA and received by the Assembly.

I wish to bring to your attention that the petition contains factual errors and would like an opportunity to appropriately respond to the claims made in the petition. The petition states that the Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) had admitted that it had misled prospective buyers at a public land auction in December 2002 for the sale of Block 80 Section 65 Belconnen.

The petition infers that such an admission was made in ACTPLA's correspondence of 22 April 2004. The correspondence referred to is the "Findings on Material Questions of Facts" that formed part of ACTPLA's decision on the recent Development Application (DA) for this block.

The "Findings" include a statement explaining how an administrative error in the drafting of the Crown Lease was corrected. There is no statement about prospective buyers being misled at a public auction in December 2002.

The issue relates to the Lease and Development Conditions for the site that were issued with the auction documents. In this instance the Lease and Development conditions for this site, among other things, specified that the lease purpose required the land be used for one or more of the following purposes: club, restaurant, shop, tourist facility and cultural facility. This information was available to potential buyers.

However, when the actual Crown Lease was drafted, the purpose clause read: "To use the land for only one of the following purposes...". This administrative error was rectified prior to the making of the decision on the DA lodged on 24 October 2003. An instrument of Correction was registered at the Land Titles Office on 17 December 2003. The lease purpose clause is now in accordance with the original intent encapsulated in the Lease and Development conditions.

During the last few months I have written to a number of residents in response to their concerns relating to the proposed uses for the site. I have conveyed the above message to them that explains the circumstances in which the error was made and the process that was undertaken to correct it. I assure you that the matter was dealt with legally and transparently.

I thank you for bringing this matter to my attention and trust that the Assembly will not be misled by the claims in the petition.

Yours sincerely

Simon Corbell MLA  
Minister for Planning  
22.6.04

## **Standing Committee on Legal Affairs Scrutiny report 52**

**MR STEFANIAK (10.34):** I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (performing the duties of a Scrutiny of Bills and Subordinate Legislation Committee)—Scrutiny Report 52, dated 29 June 2004, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to move a motion authorising the report for publication.

Leave granted.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I move:

That the report be authorised for publication.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

**MR STEFANIAK:** The report contains the committee's comments on 20 bills, 33 pieces of subordinate legislation and five government responses. I commend the report to the Assembly.

## **Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation Amendment Bill 2004**

**Mr Wood**, by leave, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR WOOD** (Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Arts and Heritage, and Acting Minister for Health) (10.35): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I would hope that we could debate the bill on Thursday. The Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation Amendment Bill is intended to facilitate the construction of the Gungahlin

Drive extension through land identified in the territory plan as public land reserved for nature reserve. It is, in fact, exactly on Caswell Drive. Despite the government's efforts to construct this road, it has been frustrated by a series of legal challenges. This amendment bill includes further provisions to minimise such disruptions.

The most recent legal challenge seeks to prevent the construction of some 900 metres of the GDE south of Wangara Street in Aranda that passes through what on the territory plan is identified as a nature reserve on the basis that building a road is inconsistent with the objectives of a nature reserve, notwithstanding the road there now.

On closer examination, the area under challenge is the road reservation for Caswell Drive and the GDE is to be built within that reservation. The road reservation for Caswell Drive was gazetted in 1969 and the existing road was constructed well in advance of the adjacent areas being declared a nature reserve in the territory plan in 1993. Caswell Drive is identified as an existing arterial road on the national capital plan.

On the face of it, there should be no need to make these amendments, but the current legal challenge to block the construction of part of the GDE because the territory plan identifies the area it passes through as a nature reserve justifies this action. The nature reserve also includes parts of the road reservations for Belconnen Way and Bindubi Street, and you may well ask whether there will be legal challenges about any improvements of these roads in the future or even the existence of those roads.

Sensibly, the management plan for Canberra Nature Reserve released in 1999 identified the road reservations for Caswell Drive, Bindubi Street and Belconnen Way as separate from the nature reserve. The amendment bill provides for me, as the minister, to consider land that is necessary for the construction of the GDE and to declare that this land is not reserved or not reserved for a stated period—in short, that Caswell Drive is actually a road and we can build on it.

These amendments are essential and provide more certainty to progressing the construction of the GDE and limits further challenges. The bill complements the other initiatives announced by the government to allow work on the project to continue, including the Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation Bill, amendments to the land act regulations and amendments to the Nature Conservation Act. I comment this bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mrs Dunne**) adjourned to the next sitting.

### **Estimates 2004-2005—Select Committee Report—government response**

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (10.39): I present the following paper:

Estimates 2004-2005—Select Committee—Report—Appropriation Bill 2004-2005  
(presented 22 June 2004— Government response.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Mr Speaker, this budget delivers an aggregate surplus over the life of the budget and forward estimates and sets a prudent approach to expenditure while making provision for investment in our infrastructure. The Estimates Committee made 57 recommendations and the government has responded to all the recommendations of the committee with the exception of a recommendation that is a matter for future estimates committees and the Assembly, that is, recommendation 2.

The government is extremely proud of the budget. I note with great satisfaction that the government has delivered a budget that has received the committee's endorsement of its passage through the Legislative Assembly. The government thanks the committee for its support of the budget. The government also thanks the committee for its deliberations and its time.

Whilst it is the committee's prerogative as to what issues it wishes to pursue, one has to wonder whether it was time well spent. It is disappointing that the committee has seen fit to utilise valuable time to investigate and make recommendations on such trivial matters as typographical errors in the editing of the budget papers and the calculation of percentage movements in performance measures. Might I add that I think there are a few typographical errors in the committee's report. The latter is an issue directly relevant to the annual reports, not to the budget papers. Further, I note that the committee made a number of recommendations about the existing performance measures framework, with little consideration of the supplementary discussion paper on this very issue.

Mr Speaker, the most significant concern relates to an apparent lack of understanding of the legislative provisions, processes and bases of some agencies' budgets. For example, the committee has recommended that the Chief Minister direct the Commissioner for Public Administration on certain matters. In making this recommendation, the committee does not appear to have taken into account the extent of the powers that the Chief Minister has under the Public Sector Management Act to direct the commissioner and on what matters he could do so.

In recommendation 9, the committee has recommended an increase in the appropriation for the Auditor-General's Office for the review of performance statements. The committee has failed to recognise that there is an established process under the legislation for setting the Auditor-General's budget. The office's budget was increased in line with a proposal received from the public accounts committee. The Estimates Committee also does not appear to have understood that the performance statements form part of the annual financial statements under the Financial Management Act and the associated costs are directly charged to agencies rather than appropriated.

In a number of cases the committee's approach has been, effectively, to micromanage government activity. The government, of course, welcomes the committee's views and the Assembly's input in this regard. Notwithstanding these disappointments, Mr Speaker, I once again thank the committee for its work and support of the budget. I commend the government's response to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mrs Dunne**) adjourned to a later hour this day.

## **Appropriation Bill 2004-2005**

[Cognate paper:

Estimates 2004-2005—Select Committee

Report—government response]

Debate resumed from 14 May 2004.

### **Detail stage**

**MR SPEAKER:** Is it the wish of the Assembly to debate this order of the day concurrently with the government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Estimates 2004-2005 on the Appropriation Bill 2004-2005? There being no objection, that course will be followed. I remind members that in debating order of the day No 1 executive business they may also address their remarks to the relevant parts of the government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Estimates 2004-2005 on the Appropriation Bill 2004-2005.

Standing order 180 sets down the order in which this bill will be considered, that is, in the detail stage any schedule expressing the services for which the appropriation is to be made must be considered before the clauses and, unless the Assembly otherwise orders, the schedule shall be considered by proposed expenditures in the order in which they are shown.

With the concurrence of the Assembly, I am proposing that the Assembly consider schedule 1 by each part, consisting of the net cost of outputs, capital injection, and payments on behalf of the territory. Is that the wish of the Assembly? There being no objection, schedule 1 will be considered by each part, consisting of the net cost of outputs, capital injection, and payments on behalf of the territory, then the clauses prior to schedule 2 and the title.

Schedule 1—Appropriations.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.1—Legislative Assembly Secretariat, \$5,076,000 (net cost of outputs), \$668,000 (capital injection) and \$4,229,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$9,973,000.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (10.45): I note that the Estimates Committee, on page 17 of its report, raised two specific issues as to the funding of the Legislative Assembly Secretariat and the way we do our work here but did not make a specific recommendation. I could not see at a quick glance a reference to that in the government's response to the Assembly.

The first issue raised by the Estimates Committee following the time it spent with you, Mr Speaker, was about the obligations of the Speaker to comply with things like the Territory Records Act and the implications of that for corporate and strategic issues in the development of the Assembly and the way we do our work. The second issue was the

need to undertake some necessary building work identified in the whole-of-life costing study for this building.

I cannot see anything in the government's response to indicate that the government has taken on board the question of extra funding for the Assembly. We all know that the resources that we have to spread around are finite, but we have in this place certain obligations that we need to carry out and to set an example by carrying them out well. Ms Dundas raised the issue of having this building as a truly energy efficient building as an example to all other public buildings and the people of the ACT of what we need to do to become an environmentally sustainable society. Obviously, you need the resources to do that.

The \$9.9 million that has been appropriated is a lot of money, but if it is not an appropriate amount or if it is not an amount that allows us to do our job here properly and be an example to the community, perhaps there should be some reprioritisation to ensure that that funding is available. There is never a good time to provide money to do what appears to be something for politicians but, that being said, we should not shy away from doing so.

The second area of concern that I would raise is support for the committees. The committees are working harder. I suspect that the reports they are doing are becoming more and more involved. I believe that there have been a number of instances in the last year or two where there just have not been sufficient resources to carry out the work adequately.

Perhaps in future budgets we need to consider the provision of some support for the committee system—some permanent researchers; indeed, just straight out additional staff—to help with some of the more heavy times, particularly the preparation of an Estimates Committee report, because that work is very important. It needs to be done professionally and is done professionally, but I think that any assistance to the committee staff to support us in our roles as members of those committees and, indeed, as chairs of those committees would be welcomed.

The third point I would like to make on part 1.1 is about the support directly to MLAs. I still suspect that we are underresourced. I note that there have been pay increases for the staff—for some they have been significant and for others there has not been a great deal of change—but there is still the fundamental question of whether we have adequate resourcing for the members to carry out their jobs properly. I suspect that we still do not. I think that we are probably underresourced in comparison with other jurisdictions.

Perhaps we should try to come to some sort of bipartisan agreement on how we can make that happen. Again, I suspect that this is not a good time to suggest that we are underresourced, but the reality is that the jobs are becoming bigger and bigger and the workloads are getting heavier and more complex. It is awkward, I suspect, for us to do the job properly and to do justice to this place and to the people without the appropriate resources

In terms of pressure on staff, I do not think there would be anyone here who does not stand in awe of the amount of work our staff get through. I think that it is important that we also look after them. I think that it is important that the pay that they receive is

commensurate with what they do. That applies also in terms of allowances such as the mobile phone rebates or payment for mobile phone use by them and things like that that are now coming out of electorate office payments.

Perhaps we need to get on to a footing that is more commensurate with that of some other jurisdictions. That is not to say that we should go overboard, but I think it is fair that the staff be paid well and are given the tools to do their job so that we can keep the good staff we have and get more good staff to come and join us here. That being said, the opposition will support part 1.1.

**MRS DUNNE (10.50):** The opposition will be supporting part 1.1, but there are some things that we should be paying attention to. Mr Smyth touched upon some of those. I would like to deal with the fabric of the building in the first instance. Some important works need to be done to bring this building up to standard, both immediate works and things that we should be looking at in the long term.

This building is a marvellous example of adaptive reuse. I think that it is a fine building and that the chamber is a pleasant chamber. It is not too grand, it is not too ostentatious and I think that it meets the needs of the people of the ACT. But there are a few problems with the building itself, which was built in the 1960s, that will need to be addressed over time.

The vast expanses of glass mean that the building has very poor thermal qualities. In particular, we really need to address the issue of the leakage of heat out of the lobbies on either side of the chamber. The fact that we run three-bar radiators in there in winter time is not an example to the people of the ACT of what we would like them to take up. We should have a building which is more energy efficient and is an example of how we should provide for energy efficiency in the sort of the climate that we have in the ACT. Unfortunately, I do not think that that was quite the flavour of the month when the building was built. We went for style over substance, but the substance is coming home to roost.

The Chief Minister made a bit of a gaff the other day about the fact that we do not have water efficient loos, whereas we do, but when I last had a shower in this building I did look at it and wonder whether it was a 9-litre a minute shower. I know that the showers in this building are not used a lot and do not consume a huge amount of water, but the thing is that the showers are used and an awful lot more water is being consumed if, as I suspect, the shower heads are the 1994 standard. We probably need to upgrade those.

**Ms Dundas:** They are not, Vicki.

**MRS DUNNE:** Have they been fixed up?

**Ms Dundas:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** I withdraw all that. Ms Dundas informs me that the shower heads are 9-litre; I am relieved about that. But there are many issues here about energy consumption. One of them is the fact that we do not have an airlock on the front door, which means that every time somebody walks past, let alone comes in, vast amounts of heat go hurtling out of this building. These are issues that we should be addressing.

I concur with the statement made by Mr Smyth about the resourcing of committees and members in general, but I raise a cautionary note. At this part of the electoral cycle rather than the economic cycle, people are not very keen to talk about the number of members of this place, but the fact that today one of our number has taken extended sick leave does draw attention to the inordinate workload of members of this place, particularly ministers.

I think that as a reference for future assemblies we should be looking seriously at the number of members we have in this place, because if we are down one person it is a very noticeable thing and the place does not run as well. So, not so much for this debate today but for future reference, the next Assembly should look at whether there should be more members. I commend the item to the Assembly.

**MR CORNWELL (10.55):** I join my colleagues in commenting on this line item. I would like to follow up on what Mrs Dunne said in relation to the number of members. I appreciate that this line item does not canvas the desperate need, as far as I am concerned, for additional members for this house, but I do believe that that is something that the new Assembly should address and should take up with the Commonwealth parliament to see whether matters can be improved here.

I know that this is an unpopular subject, but I am not exactly remiss in addressing unpopular subjects in this house. It is often forgotten in relation to this 17-member Assembly that we do have the same responsibilities as state parliaments with many more members. What happens here—may I say that I am surprised that there has not been a similar occurrence to the one today—is that the absence of one or two people puts enormous strains upon those left, to a much greater extent than would be found in a state parliament.

I believe that that needs to be looked at. It also should be looked at from the point of view of the need for additional staff. Mr Smyth spoke of the need for additional staff in the secretariat and the availability of additional resources in members' offices. The fact is that no matter how many staff you have the result of their work would be still being channelled into 17 members. I do not believe that that would necessarily solve the problem.

As I have said on a number of occasions, this Assembly has been remarkably timid in the last 15 years of its existence in its approach to having the proper resources to govern this territory. We have the absurd situation that 330,000 people are now living in the ACT and we still have only 17 members, which was the benchmark for membership 15 years ago, based on a ratio of something like one:10,000 people.

That really does need to be addressed, but it cannot be addressed just by providing additional resources and additional staff. We need to address the fundamental problem, which is that if we are going to govern this territory in an efficient and proper manner we need the resources to do so. I know that there is still some resentment out there about self-government. My response to that is that I regret that those views are still held, but nothing is going to change. Therefore, we must make the best of it. We cannot do that without the resources.

May I say in conclusion, Mr Speaker, that I am very pleased—I am delighted, in fact—that our standing orders are being reviewed. I think that that is important. I have already put in one submission and I am seriously considering putting in a second submission on that matter, which I understand is ongoing. I think that it is high time that it was done and I hope that the results will be beneficial to this house.

**MR STEFANIAK (10.59):** Mr Speaker, I am pleased to see that, as usual, the expenditure for the Legislative Assembly Secretariat is modest. I think that that is what people want to see with the Assembly and what we have always tried to do. However, there are a number of things that we need to look at regarding the Legislative Assembly. If there are capital works that need to be done to make this place more efficient, I think that it would be eminently sensible for that to occur. If it takes a little bit of money to do so, so be it. I think that that is something that this government and future governments need to take into consideration.

Other members have talked about the role of committees. The committees of this place have been particularly effective since the First Assembly. That is because we have always had minority governments, except for the Alliance government, which was a bit of a shemozzle as there were three separate groupings actually forming the government. In reality, it was probably not much different from a minority government. I think that the fact that we have always had minority governments has enabled us to have a very strong committee structure. Indeed, the fact that we have low numbers also ensures that that occurs. So I think that it is important to look at ways in which, if the committees need more resourcing, they can get it.

A number of my colleagues have mentioned the need for the Assembly to have more members. We almost got there on that in this Assembly. We had various recommendations, ranging from having 21 members across three electorates to some ideas about having 23 members and some ideas about having 25 members in five separate electorates. In my view, having been in this place for some time, we will probably end up with having about 25 members, but I think that in the interim there is a demonstrated need for having at least 21 members. In fact, if you compare the population of the ACT in 1989 with what it is now, you have a very strong justification for having at least 21 members. In fact, we are probably closer to having 22 members, but that probably would not be a sensible step to take. I would certainly recommend that action be taken on that in the next Assembly.

Yes, that would increase the costs of the Legislative Assembly Secretariat a bit, but that that would be far outweighed by the fact that we would end up with much better governance. We have seen what happens, as Mr Cornwell rightly says, when someone gets sick. Unfortunately, Mr Corbell is not going to be with us for two months. I wish him well. There are often occasions when people have to go about other urgent business or ministers have to go to meetings and we are down to having, effectively, about 13 people in this house. That, quite clearly, is not a desirable situation, given the fact that we combine local government with state-type government.

It is often difficult to get people to run for a body like this one, although quite a few candidates seem to be putting their hands up for the next election. We are unlike other state parliaments in that we do not have a pension scheme; we have a very basic

superannuation scheme. Membership of this place is a lot of work for everyone. I do not know whether the people of the ACT realise the amount of work members do.

It is not surprising that members get sick but they have to carry on, which probably makes it far worse for them. Those are things that people just do not realise when they look at what we do. The appropriation is modest, as usual, but there probably will be some real and not unreasonable pressures in this area in the years to come that will justify a sensible increase.

**MRS BURKE** (11.03): I wish to make a couple of brief comments. I take on board and note the comments of my colleagues. For my part, the announcement that was made this morning about Mr Corbell puts a whole new perspective on what we are debating this morning, particularly the first item. I think that, with the advent of better communications, such as email and the internet, people are putting greater and greater demands upon us as a body of people. We are not machines; neither are our staff, nor is the secretariat.

As Mr Cornwell said, quite rightly, we have to be bold and be able to stand up in the face of people knocking self-government and knocking politicians. I believe that we can do a lot about improving our image in this place by facing up to the community in regard to the expectations that are placed upon us and explain our case. We do not have to defend our case; we have to explain our case. People are putting greater demands upon us. If we averaged it out we would find that most of us in this place work extra hours. We put an inordinate amount of personal time into the job because we are dedicated and we are committed.

Staff issues are something that we need to look at, certainly the resources for staff. The need for extra members has been talked about. The debate needs to continue on that. I think that more of us are being asked to do more, as I alluded to earlier, which brings with it greater workloads and greater pressures and stresses within the job.

The committee system is of interest to me. The absence of one or two members from this place, who may perhaps be unwell or on leave, brings great pressure to bear upon a system that we depend upon for good governance, that is, the committee system. People in the community demand high standards of us, yet they balk at having more people in this place to do the work demanded of this place. I would strongly urge members to seek unity on this matter of having more members and making improvements to our committee system. I think that we should be looking at that.

**MR WOOD** (Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Arts and Heritage, and Acting Minister for Health) (11.06): Mr Speaker, I am a bit intrigued by this debate. I agree that everybody in this place works hard. If you did not want to, you would have no choice because you are so close to the community anyway. But it is my view that willingly everybody in this place works hard. That probably increases somewhat if you are in the ministry.

I went away recently and I worked hard while I was away, yet I understand that in the media here, including on the radio, there was some comment about coasting and things like that. I listened to what Mr Stefaniak said today and I accept it. I believed it when he

said that the people here work hard. But I think that some people need to edit what they say when a media person rings up. There is no problem in saying "That bloke works hard and that is fine." Edit what you say, for heaven's sake, and do not think that you have to make a disparaging comment just to get a line in a newspaper.

**MR PRATT** (11.07): I wish also to talk about the paucity of resources in this place. Despite the angle that Mr Wood has on this issue, let me add my voice to the need for more resources for MLAs to be able to better represent their constituents. I am talking about somehow increasing the staff of backbenchers from 1.3 persons each to give them a bit more depth and the capability to better represent their constituents as well as get across the issues in a much more in-depth way. All MLAs are trying to do that, but we have a duty to our constituency to do better than that. I think that one of the areas we must look at fairly urgently is the staff back-up available to MLAs.

**MRS CROSS** (11.08): Mr Speaker, I honestly believe that the greatest restriction on our capacity to do this job to the best of our ability is the underresourcing of staff in this building. This is particularly the case for crossbench members, where the equivalent of three full time staff members must deal with policy work, legislation, constituents, administration, speech writing, committee work and diary organisation, among a plethora of other duties.

The sheer volume of work required of crossbench members is immense, as we must analyse and work on all pieces of legislation. We do not have the benefit of distributing work via portfolio. This increases the workload of crossbench members and staff many times. Whilst I appreciate the need for a modest Legislative Assembly budget, I think that funding for members' staff needs to be looked at on an ongoing basis and continually improved. Our staff do a wonderful job, but we need more of them if we are to represent Canberrans to the best of our ability.

I heard one of the opposition members talk about increasing the number of members of this Assembly. I think that that is something that needs to be reviewed. It is a pity, however, that there was a discrepancy in the numbers proposed previously. I think that most of us would have liked to have seen the number of members go to at least 21. The government insisted on 25. The political ramifications of their solution would have been extremely interesting for the Canberra electorate. I believe that that is something that we need to revisit in a more democratic fashion, hopefully after the election and hopefully with a minority government in place.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (11.10): I wish to make a couple of brief comments, Mr Speaker. I do not want to speak too long because it looks like it is going to be a long day. I sound a note of warning to members in relation to making assumptions about Mr Corbell's illness and attributing it directly to the job. Let's not make assumptions, please. Members may well find that they are making the wrong assumptions.

I note the comments about resources. I do hope that, if ever the resources are increased, we will see a greater depth to debate. I have to say that we have seen in this Assembly a very large layer of repetition on the budget, with an anxiety for all members to speak.

I respect their right to do so, but some of the debates have been, let me say, very repetitive.

**Mr Pratt:** That is your opinion.

**MR QUINLAN:** It certainly is, and I am on my feet giving it, mate. It has been stated that committees are working harder than ever. I do not know about that. I do not think any measure has been made. I will not deny for a moment that most members of this place work hard and that committee work is hard work. The claims about working harder than ever might be just selling short some of the work that has been done by past committees over the years of the Assembly. Certainly, there is a workload there, but I can recall in the course of the last Assembly being involved in a couple of committees which worked very hard and I cannot imagine the committees of today could claim that they have worked harder just because it is closer to today.

Mr Stefaniak mentioned the committee structure and its contribution to this place. I think that it does contribute to this place. People have asked me outside the ACT about our system of government and the quickest way I could explain it was to say that we have an upper house and no lower house. We seem to focus a lot on process within the place.

I note that Mrs Dunne used the term “economic cycle” in her address. I remember from the Estimates Committee process that one should not use the term “economic cycle” unless one explains it, so I would like to table a full explanation of the economic cycle for the edification of members. I table the following paper:

The Economic Cycle—chart.

Members will find that there are ups and downs and a time line of indeterminate length. I hope that that clears it up for every member and that all members will feel free to use the term “economic cycle” at will.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.2—ACT executive, \$4,685,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$4,685,000.

**MS DUNDAS (11.13):** I will be brief in speaking to this line item. I note that the ACT executive has received a 14 per cent increase in funding. It appears that over the last number of years the ACT executive has been receiving increases in funding based on staff numbers. That is the explanation we have from the budget papers.

I note with disappointment that, even though I put a question on notice to the Chief Minister on 19 May and repeated the question last week, no answer has been forthcoming in relation to what these staff are doing and why the ACT executive has been subject to such increases over the last number of years while other areas, such as the Health Complaints Commissioner, are actually suffering a decrease in funding. I put again on the record that I would like a fuller explanation of the use of money by the ACT executive in this budget statement.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.3—Auditor-General, \$1,279,000 (net cost of outputs), totalling \$1,279,000.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (11.15): I was pleased to see the rise in the Auditor-General's budget for this year. The public accounts committee has had for some time some concerns about the level of funding and the ability of the Auditor-General's Office to undertake the audits that it needs to undertake—in particular, the performance audits.

In regard to some amendments made by Ms Tucker in 1996 as to environmental and social questions and how to combine them into a performance audit, I think that it is fair to say that not a great deal has happened. People have been grappling with how to undertake that activity. That is a question being tackled around the world, not just around the country.

The actual budget for the Auditor-General goes to the public accounts committee for its approval. We spoke with the new auditor and suggested that we would be open to an increase in the budget. The auditor actually went away and reworked the document and came back with an expanded budget that allows for extra staff and additional training so that the office can carry out its functions as it should. With that in mind, we will be supporting the line.

I noted the discussion in paragraph 4.2 of the Estimates Committee's report about staff turnover. Like all organisations in the ACT, if we lag behind the Commonwealth or private enterprise, it is often hard to keep good staff. Some interesting figures have been provided there. The staff turnover in the Auditor-General's Office is about 25 per cent to 30 per cent and currently 50 per cent of the staff have less than two years experience. For an organisation of such importance to the confidence of people that things are being carried out appropriately in the ACT and inside the government, the lack of experience in the Auditor-General's Office is of concern. The increase in the budget, hopefully, will address some of that.

In recommendation 9 the committee recommended that the government ensure that next year's budget provide additional funding to meet the need to do more performance audits. The government, in its response, drew the attention of the committee to the basis upon which the Auditor-General's budget has been established and adjusted annually. I still think that there is room to move there and if we are serious about giving people the tools to do their jobs one of the tools, of course, is the budget to carry it out.

The job is getting more and more complex. I know that a number of members have referred issues to the Auditor-General's Office. Recently, I referred an issue concerning the workers compensation supplementation fund, for instance. As we, as members, do that, which is our right and our responsibility, we put more pressure on the Auditor-General's Office. In the case of the workers compensation supplementation fund, the auditor has written back to me to say that she will do a full performance audit of its operation. Obviously, some of the concerns that have been raised have piqued the interest of the auditor and she will now conduct that audit.

Again I say that the work we do in this place puts additional pressure on the work they have to do in their office. So we would be very supportive of seeing over time an increase in the Auditor-General's budget that is commensurate with the needs. There has been an increase this year. It is a significant increase over previous years. We will be supporting part 1.3 of the bill.

**MR STEFANIAK (11.18):** I was also pleased to see the government indicate in its response to the report of the Estimates Committee that it has increased the office's base funding by \$300,000 in appropriation and additional revenue of \$215,000 in audit fees for 2004-05 and onwards and that the government has committed to providing the appropriate level of resources for the Auditor-General's Office in the context of its budgetary priorities and fiscal capacity.

The auditor's reports are absolutely essential to the good governance of the territory. Sometimes the government of the day does not particularly like the findings in these reports, but in my experience the reports have always been very thorough, they have always looked at a wide range of detail and they have usually made some very sensible recommendations about how to fix up things ranging from the management of swimming pools through to, dare I say it, the redevelopment of Bruce Stadium.

Recently, I referred to the Auditor-General some serious concerns that a staff member had with an organisation. The auditor has taken up that matter and seems to be doing a most thorough job of it. All of those things lead to better governance, be they systemic problems within departments through to problems which come under the purview of the auditor that individuals have and draw to the attention of people in the Assembly.

As chair of the committee, I was concerned to hear the Auditor-General tell us about problems within her office and the fact that there was significant staff turnover and that at present 50 per cent of the staff have less than two years experience. It is a problem when you see that in any area of government. That was impacting on their ability to do performance audits. I think that only about two people out of nine were really able to do that, which was of great concern to the auditor.

It is pleasing to see the government recognise that in its response. It seems to be taking appropriate action and seems to be making a commitment to continue to provide an appropriate level of resources for this most important arm of administration in the territory.

**MS DUNDAS (11.21):** Other members have made some pertinent points in relation to the Auditor-General, but I would like to note that the government, in its response to recommendation 10 of the Estimates Committee, said:

The need for improving performance reporting has been highlighted in the Supplementary Budget Paper, and would be addressed as part of the work outlined in that discussion paper.

The government then repeated its commitment to consultation in relation to budget paper No 5. It was a recommendation of the Estimates Committee that the government let us

know its consultation timeframe in relation to that. In the brief time I have had the government's response I have yet to find that.

I am glad to see that the Auditor-General will be an important part of the development of new performance reporting in relation to environmental auditing and looking at triple bottom line reporting. I think that this is a very important step for the government to make. I am, as always, disappointed that it has taken this long, but I am glad to see that Auditor-General is moving forward as part of that and that we are expecting some very important changes to come out of the discussion put forward in the supplementary budget paper.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (11.22): Just a very brief comment, seeing as Ms Dundas touched on budget paper No 5. So far the government is extremely disappointed with the response to that within the assembly, just turning it back into a question and saying the government has started a consultation process. The government has started the consultation process. We have put the paper together. It is before the members of the assembly, and we hope and expect that there will be positive input from members.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.4—Chief Minister, \$76,209,000 (net cost of outputs), \$27,856,000 (capital injection) and \$590,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$104,655,000.

**MR STEFANIAK** (11.23): In looking at the Chief Minister's Department there is possibly a potential note of caution in relation to how some of the administrative structures seem to be developing. The Chief Minister's office has a number of areas where various other ministers are responsible. A new area for child protection—which Ms Gallagher is responsible for—has gone in now under the umbrella of this department too. There is probably something there for virtually every minister except possibly Mr Wood and certainly Mr Corbell. Mr Wood might have some responsibilities in there as well, but certainly Mr Quinlan has in economic development, and sport and recreation, and Ms Gallagher has, as well as the Chief Minister.

Some significant problems can arise from that. I think back to the time when in one of the previous governments we had a department called BASAT. I thought we should have added regional development to that to make it something quite different. It had business, art, sport and tourism. Basically there were four ministers and the cabinet, and the poor Chief Executive of that department had to see each minister and was responsible for each one. There was a subsequent change, which I think rationalised that a lot more sensibly. I note that as a word of caution because it does seem that now we have at least three ministers responsible for various areas under this particular department. I will watch with interest to see if any problems develop from that. There can be, and previous experience does urge caution there.

In relation to sport and recreation I make a number of points. During the course of estimates I was somewhat concerned about the Academy of Sport. I was concerned to see the potential for a number of programs there being cut. The academy does an

excellent job in identifying, training and assisting talented young Canberrans in a wide range of sporting and recreational pursuits. It has assisted on an annual basis anything up to a maximum of about 275, and in more recent times it has been 265. I think that figure has been fairly static for probably three or four years.

However, I was somewhat concerned to see in this budget the funding for the academy. I wonder how long it will be before programs are going to be cut or indeed the number of athletes' serviced dropped. I think some \$1.43 million is spent on the academy, according to figures provided to us in estimates, and about \$190,000 of that comes from outside revenue that the academy itself generates through sponsorship. That is fairly normal and has been the case in the past.

When I checked the 2001-2002 budget I saw there was an appropriation for the academy of about \$1.9 million of which \$1.7 million was government money—half a million dollars extra. Time has marched on. I know the academy is under some pressure. There is some concern that during the course of this government there have not been any increases in funding. I do not think the CPI has been applied to the academy. There would seem, when one looks at that 2001-02 budget, that there has been a cut in academy spending. I know there is real concern that some programs—the cost of delivering which increasing—will have to be cut simply because the strain the academy is under cannot go on for too much longer. That is something that this government really does have to address as a matter of urgency.

The academy produces some excellent results. When we go back over past Olympics, three of the Olympic gold medal winners in Atlanta were from our local academy. It has produced a huge number of athletes who have done exceptionally well in the Olympic Games and other competitions, as well as in national teams competing on the international stage. The academy punches above its weight and has delivered some excellent results to Canberra.

In sport and recreation it is crucially important never to do anything that does not give proper support to the grassroots, the people who are out there playing sport for enjoyment. They are not stars, they are never going to be stars, they get enjoyment out of it, and we want to encourage more and more people to be active. That is an absolute priority. At the same time, to neglect those more elite athletes, and athletes who aspire to be elite, is a wrong move. I put those concerns on record. That concerns me somewhat, and I am very concerned to see what will happen to the programs and the number of athletes that are sustained there.

Talking about grassroots and encouraging the grassroots, I have some other concerns too. We still get about \$150,000 worth of special programming money from the Commonwealth. About half of that goes towards assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in specific sporting programs and the other \$75,000 goes elsewhere. Several years ago, about \$400,000 was spent on those programs, and some of those programs were quite effective. I note in the past few years that money seems not to be there. Whilst there are a couple of commendable programs in this budget, I am very concerned that there seems to be not as much money available for as wide a range of grassroots programs as there has been in the past.

Whilst I am pleased to see the CPI continue for the grants program, I am disappointed that, in very strong economic times, there are not additional programs or additional money in the grants program that will benefit mass-participation sport—especially as we are seeing huge concerns about childhood obesity and the resultant health problems and health costs that will result. I have seen figures that show that if ACT people were fitter our health budget would drop some 10 per cent. One of the more recent reviews of sport indicated that with just a little more effort we would be saving about \$18.5 million or \$20 million a year on health costs just by people being more physically active. So it is crucially important to do all we can to get people active.

Whilst I note significant advances of money the government has put in the grants program in the outyears, the sports budget sadly seems to have missed out. I think they are both equally important. Compared with other states, Canberra is a very active community—we should be more active but we are an active community—but whilst maintaining our premier position, the number of persons engaged in good healthy physical activity is increasing in the other states, which are catching up with us. It is crucially important that that be addressed. Sadly, I do not think it has been addressed in this budget as much as it should have been—especially given the solid economic base this government has to operate under as a result of the excellent work done by the previous government and the generally very good economic times the country finds itself in, also as a result of some excellent work done by the Howard government. So I make those points in relation to sport and recreation.

I also note the very good program started by the first Carnell government providing money for teams in national competitions. Initially, \$600,000 was allocated to that. Although several teams, like the Cannons and the Comets, have dropped out, money is available and that has been distributed fairly well. About \$30,000 should still be there. The allocation is now down to \$570,000 and probably one or two Canberra teams should benefit from that. I would think one will probably be Belconnen Blue Devils, who represent Canberra in the summer competition, which is the next best thing to the National Soccer League. As a result of changes being made by Soccer Australia, that will probably become the premier soccer competition at that time of year. That team has represented Canberra with distinction. This year it won the club championship, the minor premiership—or championship as I think they call it in soccer—unfortunately going down in the grand final.

A couple of other teams might qualify for that particularly good program, which has helped a number of Canberra teams in national or semi-national competitions very effectively. So, I make those points in relation to the sport and recreation portfolio and indicate that I would have liked to have seen some additional moneys in the budget for the Academy of Sport and the general grants program.

**MS DUNDAS (11.34):** A number of issues under the Chief Minister's Department portfolio should be touched on. I note the significant money for the implementation of the Canberra social plan. Whilst some initiatives under that social plan may be implemented, the money allocated to the social plan is far less than the money being allocated to the economic white paper. Maybe that is because of the cost of each of those different groups of papers, but there needs to be greater examination of the priorities we are setting for our community.

During the estimates hearings there was an interesting conversation about the establishment of the child and family centres in Gungahlin and how they would be linked to work that was already funded in previous budgets to provide family support in Gungahlin and Tuggeranong. It is disappointing that the head of the department whose role it is to see the overall implementation of the Canberra social plan was not able to provide us with an answer in relation to how those different initiatives will be co-ordinated. More work is needed to ensure that the different departments are able to work together to provide greater co-ordination so we do not have ongoing double-ups.

Mr Stefaniak has already talked extensively on the sports portfolio but it was interesting to note that sport and recreation will be focussing on children's health and addressing children's obesity. Also, health is looking at this through HealthPACT, as is the Department of Education and Training. A number of different initiatives in this budget are targeted at children's health and specifically at obesity. As well, the federal government's initiative is being announced today. There needs to be greater co-ordination to ensure that we are not doubling up and that we are getting the best from our resources. We all would like a healthy outcome for children and young people in the ACT.

I also have significant concerns in relation to the work done in preparing the women's budget statement, which comes under the Office of Women. Those concerns were explored through the estimates process as well. It was quite disappointing that the first women's budget statement for this government was done on a very subjective basis, as the Office of Women indicated. There were a lot of recommendations, and a lot of people who participated in the Status Of Women Committee inquiry would have been more than willing to provide advice and support in relation to gender analysis and hard gender auditing that we were looking for in the ACT budget.

In its submission to the Estimates Committee, Toora said that the women's budget statement needed to be underpinned by hard data and gender auditing to ensure that it is meaningful in its analysis of the progress of effectively addressing women's issues in the ACT. Toora went on to say that the women's budget statement in its current form is almost insulting to women when it refers to things such as waste recycling and collection and urban tree safety as issues that directly benefit women. It was incredibly disappointing that 87.7 per cent of all initiatives in this budget were seen to be benefiting women, when the other 13.3 per cent that were not considered to benefit women clearly included initiatives that fitted the process for inclusion in that 87.7 per cent.

The process and the discussion about the women's budget statement have shown that more work needs to be done if we are seriously going to provide support, and analyse that support, for women in the ACT. That being said, I welcome the new initiatives under the Office of Women, especially the women's grant program. It is great to see that that recommendation of the status of women inquiry is being implemented now and that we will be able to support women's organisations to take on projects and work specifically to help the status of women in the territory.

Some concerns are being raised about what is happening to the digital divide program. It was initially a three-year program. Although \$225,000 remains unspent from last year, it does not appear that any of this money is being rolled over to support tutors and allow

the centres to continue. Considering the work that the digital divide program has been successful in completing over the past number of years, it is disappointing that this does not appear to be a priority for the government. It is being cut back and there is some uncertainty about its future.

I would also like to touch briefly on the Office of Multicultural Affairs, which I hope from this budget will be able to support the ACT Multicultural Women's Advocacy Service which is at threat of having its doors closed by a reduction in funding from the federal government. Whilst it is incredibly disappointing that the federal government has backed away from that important service, I hope that the ACT government, through the Office of Multicultural Affairs or the Office of Women is able to support the work that the centre does. It is a very important advocacy service, helping women from a diverse range of backgrounds and a diverse range of life experiences here in the ACT.

A number of issues are being worked on through the Chief Minister's Department—the multicultural centre, the veterans' memorial, the children and family centres, work on Manuka Oval, the dragway or the convention exhibition facilities—that need to be approached with more of a whole-of-government analysis. The committee made some recommendations in relation to that in its report. It is interesting to see the government's response. It is an opportunity for the Chief Minister's Department to focus more on that whole-of-government work it is employed to do.

**MR PRATT (11.41):** I wish to talk briefly about the multicultural component of the Chief Minister's Department. It is hard to find in this appropriation bill funding increases for the services the people of Canberra are receiving—or not receiving. I note, however, that it is a positive result for the multicultural community that \$2.591 million in capital works has been funded to build a multicultural centre by June 2005. My understanding is that that is merely an upgrade of the second floor of an existing government building, and I am extremely disappointed that that is the case. The multicultural community too will be very disappointed that the opportunity is not being taken here to allocate funding for the building of a stand-alone centre.

The multicultural community needs a multicultural centre that is discrete, that has the capacity for people to park and enter, and with multifunctional rooms and services available within. I do not know whether those sorts of services can be catered for in the government's current plan. I hope the government will look at that issue and come back with a much more positive plan. It is like the funding for the Woden police station. We will not hold our breath for the centre to be built.

A couple of other things in the multicultural area are sadly lacking. I do not see sufficient funding allocated for multicultural liaison officers. There is a paucity of these people in the community to help, particularly, with aged care issues. I see little funding available for the development of aged care centres. This is an area that the community does not understand enough about and the government is neglecting the need. As members of the multicultural community age, they face a whole raft of challenges that we of the mainstream Anglo-Celtic part of society do not necessarily face. The communities themselves are very keenly aware of this. They know that as their aged become much older they suddenly have all sorts of communication problems and they find it much more difficult accessing community services.

So it is necessary to have better centres and liaison officers to assist them in that process and to look after them. I am disappointed the government has not found the resources to reinforce some of these communities. I speak for example of the Mandir Society, the Indian Hindu society that would very much like to build an aged care centre. It has a lot of funding and does not need too much more in the way of funding backup, but it needs government assistance. It needs a leg up in the identification of land and other services. So far there has been a thundering silence in reply to the approaches that it has made. I exhort the government to have a look at that society and some other communities as well which have some resources. I am reminded of the Chinese retirement village in Kaleen, another example of a project a community would like to take on board. It has some funding, but a little leg up from the government would go a long way to realising its visions.

If I could also talk about a major concern in the multicultural arena, very poorly managed by the Chief Minister. We do not see the Chief Minister, or any other minister, regularly attending multicultural activities and functions. We do not see the leadership being exercised in multicultural activities that we think the government has a responsibility to exercise. Instead, the Chief Minister is utilising the multicultural component of CMD as an excuse to run silly, divisive political speeches. So, rather than positive speeches being made by the Chief Minister to the multicultural community to better explain how this funding is going to be spent to realise visions in the multicultural arena, or speaking more positively to encourage harmony in the multicultural community, we see divisive speeches which often degrade our own nation and—I do not know whether the Chief Minister realises this—cause divisions within the multicultural community. Again, we encourage the Chief Minister to step back from that practice and pay a lot more attention to that sub portfolio. Let us see some leadership being exercised and the encouragement of harmony across the multicultural community instead of the divisive behaviour being demonstrated by the Chief Minister.

**MR CORNWELL (11.47):** I want to touch on three areas of the Chief Minister's portfolio. Obviously the first is aged care. My colleague Mr Pratt has highlighted the concerns and the requirements of the ethnic groups in the community seeking aged care. It is necessary that we remember that this is a changing society. For many years people of various ethnicities would look after their parents at home. That was the accepted thing to do. This is changing. It is part of the integration in the Australian community to some extent. It is certainly changing societal needs and expectations and it must be addressed.

As Mr Pratt has said, a number of ethnic organisations are looking for assistance. Of course they are not alone, because the entire aged network here in Canberra is looking for assistance. It is looking for assistance in a very practical sense of nursing home beds and aged care facilities. This side of the house has debated this ad nauseam in this chamber. All I can say is if the words that have been expressed about the need for aged care facilities were individual bricks, we would have something about the size of the Empire State Building, or perhaps even the Pentagon. Unfortunately, we still have only promises.

With four months to go before an election, we may see some activity in the interim, but it is far too late. The crisis, and I use that word advisedly, is upon us. It will only get worse as time goes by and it is being caused in large part by this government's failure to

recognise and to act upon the need to streamline the provision of aged care facilities in this territory. It is interesting that the government's response to the Estimates Committee states that:

... a Case Manager commenced work in January 2004. The Case Manager continues to work with agencies and an interdepartmental committee of senior executives to provide a coordinated interagency approach to aged persons' accommodation projects and strategy development. This will continue to include a focus on streamlining planning approval and land grant processes in a way that meets the accommodation needs of older Canberrans whilst maintaining the character of residential neighbourhoods.

What a lovely string of words. What does it mean? Business as usual, nothing practical going on: no holes being dug, no bricks being laid, no mortar being mixed. We are still continuing to include a focus on streamlining planning approval and land grant processes. I repeat, these are words strung together. We have seen no evidence whatsoever of any tangible practical progress in this matter.

However, some \$335,000 is allocated for something called an ageing initiative. I had a breakdown of that \$335,000. I am not opposed to the concept, but it seems to me that we are losing sight of what is really important in the ageing area. The establishment of an ACT seniors expo, or seniors award enhancements, enhancing seniors week, worthy as that funding may be, does not seem to me to be as necessary as providing the bricks and mortar facilities that we need to accommodate our elderly residents, and which we have needed for the 2½ years of this government. I will not hold my breath for this provision.

I turn briefly now to children, youth and family support, particularly the child protection area. This is another sad failure of this government. I have repeatedly raised in the Assembly the failure to mandatory report bringing no penalties. Today I have received from the Chief Minister yet another cop-out in relation to Munchausen's syndrome by proxy. Every time we attempt to address these problems, we run into privacy concerns. Now, this is interesting. We run into privacy concerns, as you well know, Minister.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes, for good reason.

**MR CORNWELL:** Well, thank you, I acknowledge your comment—good reason. The point I make is that you have to be very careful when you introduce these things that they do not become excuses for inaction. Privacy has its place but action on child abuse and action against people who do not report has its place as well. I do not believe you can hide behind a smokescreen of privacy legislation. This is the equivalent to the excuses often used about commercial in confidence. It is the same type of theme. It is used to prevent action being taken and properly being taken in a whole raft of areas.

I remain extremely concerned about this problem of dealing with people who fail to mandatorily report. I am equally concerned about matters that concern this Munchausen's syndrome. I am sick to death of this government continually covering up people who have failed to follow through in the law or who have failed to address the issues concerning mandatory reporting. It is simply not acceptable that we should be using this excuse all the time. I notice this falls within the Chief Minister's purview, and I hope that greater consideration will be given to this in future. Otherwise I fear that you

will give no confidence out there in the community that this government is addressing these issues as it should.

I have said before if you are not going to enforce mandatory reporting of child abuse, why not repeal the legislation calling for it? What is the point of having legislation if you do not enforce it? It appears to me that it is simply a tokenistic approach by this government to say this is a terrible thing, we will put legislation in place to make sure people are aware they could be in trouble, but we will not bother to enforce it. The minister knows that in the recent cases of mandatory reporting of child abuse, as the Territory as Parent report states, eight people failed to mandatorily report. No mandated people in the ACT have been penalised for not reporting suspected child abuse. That is an appalling indictment of the law and of this government. It simply is not satisfactory.

We have had two deaths here. Again, that has been canvassed here. No-one has been charged with the death of child A. Eight mandated persons failed to report their suspicions of her abuse. It is not acceptable, and I urge the government to do something about it. If the government does not want to enforce mandatory reporting, please repeal the legislation. Let the people of the ACT know that we are not really serious about child abuse in this territory and that it is open slather. I do not think anybody in this chamber, or indeed anybody out there in the community, would want us to do such a thing. But by failing to act upon it, the government is endorsing that attitude. I strongly urge the government to address this matter in future. It will certainly come up again when the Territory as Parent report is debated in more detail.

In closing, I comment on the Office of Women. I do not have any great problem about that. However, I notice that the Estimates Committee suggested that something should be done for men as well, and this was apparently not taken up. That is a pity. Only now are we beginning to see the result of the extra attention paid over the years to the needs of women. We are now beginning to see problems being created with men, particularly young men. My colleague Mr Pratt is aware of that in education. Other figures coming out appear to indicate that many young men are more prone to suicide and such like than females. This is something that calls for a balance. I hope that society—and that has to be led by legislatures and by governments—will address this issue and try to bring the pendulum back at least to something I can best call centred, and be even-handed in affirmative action for both sexes.

**MRS CROSS** (12.02): I will just speak briefly to the \$2.5 million the government injected for the multicultural centre. I thought that was a major plus to come out of the budget. I would have liked it to go to a stand-alone building, which would have been far more effective for the multicultural community, but at least the \$2.5 million to refurbish offices in the south building dedicated to the multicultural centre is a start. It will provide a benefit to many in the community but I do not think it is going to be as advantageous as it would have been if the government had put that money and perhaps more into a stand-alone centre, however it is a start. It is an indication that the government is somewhat committed to helping Canberra's vast multicultural community.

I am partly encouraged by that, but I am concerned that the resources of the Office of Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs have been considerably reduced over these past six months. That begs the question that if the government is genuinely committed to multiculturalism and the welfare of the multicultural community why would it have the

resources in that department depleted considerably? It not only puts great pressure on those that remain; it creates an occupational health and safety issue which I know is very important to everybody in this place.

So it does present to us a contradiction. Moneys have been put in the budget because we want to show we are committed to multiculturalism, yet we are reducing the resources in the Office of Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. One has to question why that decision is being made and why the Chief Minister has condoned it. Has the direction come from him? Where is the direction coming from? Why is that resource being reduced?

I seem to recall that line item two years ago when we were questioning the Chief Minister and his then head of the public service as to why, when there was an obvious verbal commitment by the government—not only in multicultural affairs but also in women's affairs—a separate area was not set up for women's affairs with a separate budget rather than using existing resources from the Office of Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs to do an additional job. I got a very testy answer from the then public servant and an even testier one from the Chief Minister.

If the government is genuinely committed to things multicultural, and we certainly have a very robust multicultural community here in the ACT, why are many segments of the multicultural community extremely irritated by the government's lack of presence at many of their events? It seems to be a pattern with some members of this government to start going to things in a very intense fashion weeks out from an election. However, in the months leading up to an election usually nobody is there except members of the opposition and the crossbench. This has certainly irritated the multicultural community, who seems to think that the government's commitment to them is greater than the rest of ours. I think they are coming to the conclusion that that is not the case because our presence there is an indication that our commitment to them is far greater than the government's.

I need to mention to government members that their absence from these events is noted. Given the many other instances of concern that have been raised in the community this year, it is not going to be forgotten when October comes around. I believe it reflects an element of arrogance, particularly from the Chief Minister. He is so confident that he is going to do so well in this election he does not need to put the work into the people that he says he is genuinely committed to.

There is an aspect of the budget that I was pleased with, and that was the women's budget statement. It is a significant step. I am encouraged by the fact that 87.7 per cent of all budget initiatives, either directly or indirectly, benefit women. Particularly pleasing to me were some initiatives that directly benefited women. The increase in the number of breast cancer nurses is much needed and welcomed. In Australia, breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer-related deaths amongst women, with one in 11 women being diagnosed with breast cancer before they turn 75. Seemingly more frightening is the fact that breast cancer incidents are on the rise in Australia—up from 94.6 cases per 100,000 people in 1990 to 115.3 cases per 100,000 in 2000.

However, this coincides with the increase in screenings that have occurred since the introduction of the national breast cancer screening program in 1993. These statistics,

combined with the fact that the breast cancer death rate has declined an average of 2 per cent per annum since 1990, certainly highlight how important breast cancer screening is in finding cancer early enough to prevent death. This program will co-ordinate clinical and psychosocial care, an advocacy for women undergoing treatment for breast cancer, as well as look at ways to decrease post-treatment psychological conditions. This budget initiative will improve breast cancer screening in the ACT, and the government should be applauded for providing additional funding for such an important area in women's health.

I am also extremely pleased to see the government funding three scholarships a year for women to attend the Australian Institute of Company Directors. I have also completed that company directors course. It is extremely beneficial to people in business or who are attempting to go into business. Having been in business for many years, I have seen and experienced the difficulties women encounter when they attempt to climb the corporate ladder. The glass ceiling does exist. As recently as 1998 only 7.6 per cent of directors in Australia were women. More disconcerting is the fact that only 1.3 per cent of executive directors in Australia are women. I am extremely pleased to see money being used to promote women in business, and I applaud the government for undertaking such measures.

Overall, I think the ACT government has poured quite a lot of money into the initiatives that benefit women, and it should be applauded for that. But once again I stress that if the government is genuinely committed to issues affecting women and the multicultural community, then at times what could appear piecemeal amounts in budgets should be a little bit more genuine. Given that half the community is made up of women and more than half of the business community is made up of women, it would be more beneficial for the government to consider in future budgets—whoever is in government—that a separate department be set up for women and not as part of another one sharing resources such as it is at the moment in the Office of Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

Regarding the multicultural centre, as I have stated earlier, I am encouraged that the government has put in \$2.5 million for the refurbishment of a building to include a multicultural centre, but a stand-alone multicultural centre in a central location would have been more ideal for members of the multicultural community, who have already expressed concern that accessing the multicultural centre where the government is proposing to put it is not as attractive to them as a stand-alone centre would have been in a central part of the city.

**MS TUCKER (12.10):** I will raise a few issues in the Chief Minister's portfolio that I think are important. The first issue I want to comment on is the Office of Sustainability. Obviously, that is related to the previous discussion about the Auditor-General's capacity to report in performance audits on environmental and social impact. The review of the Commissioner for the Environment is also relevant to this debate. It is important that not only resources are looked at in that review of the Commissioner for the Environment, and I notice the government refers to that in its response to the Estimates Committee's recommendations. To be fair, that is probably because the recommendation just dealt with resources. The government responded:

The review recommendations considered the hours of work of the Commissioner and the resourcing of the Commissioner's office. The Government will be affording the new Commissioner ... an opportunity to review the Government's preliminary findings and provide input before all aspects of the review are finalised.

The input would probably be broader than just on the resources. The points the Greens think are very important are that the independence of the Commissioner for the Environment is maintained and that the independence of reporting is defined. I understand this year there will be some kind of reporting from the Office of Sustainability as well. A report on sustainability is an adjunct to the general report on the state of the environment. We need to see that that reporting is recognised as absolutely fundamental if we want to have an independent voice to represent the state of the environment. I stress again the importance of the independence of reporting.

I believe the Office of Sustainability could have a much greater function in integrating services across government agencies. That has been raised in discussion this morning by a number of members. That is where the Office of Sustainability could play a key role. The difficulties of integration of services come up in every document, whether it is an estimates report, an annual report or a committee inquiry report. This is a problem. It also is recognised as a problem for governments by independent commentators and academics. So, if we have an Office of Sustainability in the Chief Minister's Office, which is an overarching unit, even though it is within government, arguably there is a really good opportunity for that office to deal with the interrelationship between the various agencies.

An interesting example of that was given in the estimates hearings. We had a discussion regarding the provision of new curtains for tenants at Currong Flats. We were told that the tenants had chosen their curtains and that they had chosen vertical blinds with pelmets. I asked was there any input from Environment ACT. That was taken as a question on notice and the answer was:

Environment ACT was not consulted by ACT Housing about the provision of these curtains. Individual tenants were able to seek advice from the government's home energy advisory service on ways of improving the energy efficiency of their dwelling.

If the government is committed to sustainability, that is not good enough. You would want to see that the work in housing was fully informed by the understanding of energy efficiency that exists in Environment ACT. This would be useful not only for the environment but also for the tenants who were going to have to pay the energy bills. That is just one small example, but there are many more.

Another important issue—and once again this is a general comment I would make about the government's understanding of sustainability—last night I was driving from here to the Asian women parliamentarians and ministers conference on population development and reproductive health. It was ironic because in the car I heard an interview with Jon Stanhope by Rod Quinn on ABC about the fact that ABS had shown that the population of the ACT had increased by 34 people. The government was challenging the methodology because it was rather odd that there was a growth of only 34 people—

I think that was the quoted number or something like that—when new residential buildings are being provided and are being filled. So that was the discussion.

It then moved to population, and the journalist was asking the Chief Minister: what are we going to do; we do not have enough people and we need to see greater population growth. There was some rather light-hearted conversation about that being a problem. The irony of it was that I was going to the opening of this conference where extremely strong and well-informed presentations were going to occur about exactly these questions of population and the carrying capacity of regions. We are not different from the countries that were represented. We are dealing with the same resource constraints—obviously water in this environment—and we have to be prepared to take a careful look at questions of population and relate that to resource use. I note the comments from David Lindenmeyer on this question, which I would like to read for the record. He said:

We get pointless hand-wringing from our political leaders and in the ACT we hear this absurd set of discussions about Canberra's growth without any thoughts as to what's a sensible population size for the city.

We have all these silly plans that talk about people growing olives and developing other settlements miles out of town—it's mindless! Olives, for Christ's sake! They're going to be one of the biggest horticulture time bombs—you only have to drive around the Adelaide Hills to see how they've taken over the place.

It is difficult for governments and parliaments to talk about population, but if we are serious about sustainability, it has to be one of the central aspects of our consideration. As I said before, that has to be linked to carrying capacity and questions such as water—looking at the demand management side of supply and how we recycle water and so on, and getting really serious about reducing the resource implications of our population.

Another issue for the Office of Sustainability is bushfire recovery. I have raised this a number of times. I note in estimates there was a recommendation about catchment management. The response from the government was that it was doing it. I point out—and I will quote David Lindenmeyer on this again too—that the Greens have serious concerns about the arguments that have been put up by the government to justify the planting of pines in catchment areas. I asked a question on notice on that as well. The answer to that is quite long, and I will not take up members' time by reading it all because they can read it for themselves. I just want to point out that it is talking about providing a cost-effective land management strategy. I think all people will respect Mr Lindenmeyer's comments as he is a very well respected scientist in the area. He goes on to say:

I remain unconvinced that pine plantation should be replanted in Canberra's water catchments.

One of the big problems with pine plantations is that unlike native forests, the trees don't regenerate ... they are killed outright by fire and their removal has a huge impact on our water catchments and the quality of our water supply.

He talks about how to deal post-fire and says:

One of those policies ought to be about what you put in the ground after a fire. If you have a pine plantation that gets fried every time you have a fire and you have to salvage it every time with big machines roaring around and creating erosion as well as all sorts of water-quality problems, then maybe we ought to rethink what we're doing.

The government planned a process involving various stakeholders, and that occurred. From the Greens' perspective, that scientific analysis should be the priority because that is about water quality, and it is not a negotiable issue in the ACT, as everyone here continually says.

**MR SPEAKER:** The member's time has expired.

**MS TUCKER:** May I take my extra 10 minutes? A number of people have spoken on the women's policy, and I spoke on it at reasonable length in the initial response to the budget. I will just repeat that the Greens have always said, rather than focusing on women's statements, we are interested in a gender perspective and a gender audit and analysis of all government policy. It is insulting to be told that 87 per cent of government initiatives go to women. That is totally ignoring the reality of the importance of a gender audit and analysis. Maybe the government or whoever makes these decisions needs to listen to the women's advisory group that is supposed to be assisting in this. I know that it was pretty surprised to see that kind of comment in the budget.

I have not had time to properly read the response provided to the report on the status of women; I will do that later. It is good to see that at least there is some interest in continuing to look at the issues. As I said, it would serve the whole community much better if we made the focus gender analysis and auditing, because apart from the fact that that produces a real picture of where the money is going and what policies are doing, it is also less likely to alienate men in the community who see statements about women's budgets and so on as somehow excluding them.

Members talked about multiculturalism a fair bit. No-one has talked about JPET so I will raise that quickly. It is a Commonwealth program for multicultural youth. It is very important in Canberra. It has lost \$30,000. I have spoken to Katy Gallagher about that and I understand she is speaking with those service providers. I am really pleased about that, because \$30,000 is not a huge amount in the government budget, but it is very significant to a number of young people, particularly refugees from Sudan. There is a large group from Sudan. The assistance that they can get through this program is critical, given how vulnerable and at risk they potentially are. So it is a very important service that we would like to see supported. I sincerely hope this government will pick up the slack from the federal government on that issue.

When talking about the Office of Sustainability I forgot to mention the rural villages. I have to say again the Greens are absolutely opposed to the current proposal from the government for Uriarra and Pearce's Creek. Even though there are three fat books of sustainability studies it has not looked at the impact on the national parks of urban development west of the Murrumbidgee, seeing that development in a broader context as well as in the obvious context of the potential for that to become a precedent for further development west of the Murrumbidgee.

The argument put by the government is that it is okay to do this because there were forestry settlements, but it is going to increase it significantly. We have already had some discussion of that in this place and I will not go further except to say that I think the government has failed to do that, and the Office of Sustainability needs to be brought into that to make sure that there is some kind of real impact assessment of this, taking into account the precautionary principle and the obvious fact that there is no way this government can commit to there never being greater expansion of development west of the Murrumbidgee which could follow from this.

If this government can use the excuse of the forestry settlements to have these larger villages, then future governments will be able to use these larger settlements as an excuse to have more or even greater, larger settlements. There was a social argument for replacing the houses of the forestry workers who lost their homes, and I acknowledge that, but I think the process is really flawed.

One other comment I would make is on tourism. The Greens certainly did amend the act that guides how tourism is managed and it encourages sustainability, but I do not think we have ever seen that really picked up. I recommend that the government—and the Office of Sustainability could do this as well, possibly—look at projects or programs such as Green Globe and try to bring in some kind of ESD framework to the conduct of tourism and become much more proactive in that regard.

People also talked about obesity and the relationship between health, education and sport, and so on. I add planning to that. Walkability is one of the key factors for the health of people in any community. If you have a planning system that supports walkability—and the government has acknowledged that—it needs to be brought out in debate if we are talking about the various aspects of how we administer our city, the health of our children and, in particular, obesity.

**MRS DUNNE (12.26):** Many aspects of the Chief Minister's Department budget burrow into much of our lives in many ways. There is a sort of general co-ordinating approach in Chief Minister's which is modelled on the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet model in the federal government. There is an argument for a strong co-ordinating role across departments. One of the things that I am starting to see members in the Estimates Committee express some concern about is a move away from that co-ordinating role into more program-type work. Ms Dundas talked about children and the family centres, and there seems to be a blurring of the role there as to whether this is a co-ordinating role or a program being run out of CMD. We need to have a clear vision of what CMD is doing. At the moment that vision is lacking. It will take the leadership of a chief minister to establish the policy advising co-ordinating role and ensure that we do not spend our time administering programs because there is enough to do in the policy advising and co-ordinating role.

I am concerned, for instance, and I will touch on this first, about the implementation of the non-urban study. It is a fairly unprecedented move for the Chief Minister to say, "I will take this role on myself and I will run it out of my department." This is essentially an economic development and planning issue, and it should fall neatly into the role of the planning department. If the Chief Minister has concerns about the way the planning

department does things, he should address those. If they need to be funded they need to be funded and the money should go there.

I have a concern about running a parallel system. This is not to criticise the work that is done. The work is good and thorough. We may disagree with some of the recommendations and, like Ms Tucker, I have some concerns about where we are going with the rural villages. I would not say that the Liberal opposition opposes them and we are not as implacable as the Greens appear to be, but issues need to be addressed and we need to have some conversation here. The issue is not so much whether we do it or not, but rather who does it. I have concerns that we are distracting and taking resources out of the planning department, out of the Planning and Land Authority, which is stretched for resources. It is very hard to find professional planners these days, and there will be a certain amount of second-guessing. I am concerned about the approach of taking on the implementation of the non-urban study in what is not normally a line program administration department but rather a policy department. By all means have the policy thinking there, but when it comes to the implementation it should go somewhere else.

There are issues equally in relation to, for instance, the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support that we will be debating later in the day. That office has been established in the Chief Minister's Department. Unlike the other functions in the Chief Minister's Department it will have its own line of appropriation. But it raises the question, how long will that remain in the Chief Minister's Department? Is it appropriate that it should be in the Chief Minister's Department? The Chief Minister is not the minister responsible so we have to ask the question is it an appropriate place for it to be? We have to start to bore down and see what is Chief Minister's all about? Under this government and with this Chief Minister there has been a great blurring of the issues.

Members have touched on the issue of the women's budget. It is condescending. I am sure the Minister for Women feels that we are getting her coming and going. Last year we criticised her for not having a women's budget statement and not having anything in it. We did it this time and we criticised her again. Perhaps by iterations we will get to a process where we will have an acceptable women's budget and then it will cease to be relevant. If it becomes so acceptable that no one comments on it, it probably is not relevant. The view expressed at the estimates hearings was that we did an analysis and we came up with 87 per cent of all the programs were good for women, like the tree safety program. I think they worked on the basis that if a tree falls down it would have a 50 per cent chance of it falling on a woman. So, if we stopped trees falling down, that must be good for women. That seems to be the analysis.

I found it condescendingly middle class that somewhere along the line someone in the Office of Women decided that money for a dragway was not in any way beneficial to women. Mr Speaker is a bit of a motor sports enthusiast. I go to motor sports events from time to time. I would not call myself an enthusiast. But an awful lot of women go to motor sports events and enjoy them. It might be a benefit to women because it gets the men out of the house.

*Debate interrupted in accordance with standing order 74 and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for a later hour.*

**Sitting suspended from 12.33 pm to 2.30 pm.**

## Questions without notice

### Hospital waiting lists

**MR SMYTH:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Acting Minister for Health, Mr Wood—surprise, surprise! Minister, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare published the *Australian Hospital Statistics 2002-03* on 28 June. These statistics showed that during that year the median waiting time for elective surgery was 48 days; the national average was 28 days; and the ACT had the worst median waiting time of any state or territory. Worse, the median waiting time had blown out from 40 days from the previous year, meaning that in the first full year of the Labor government, the median waiting time increased by over a week. This shows that Labor's hospital management has been a total and utter failure.

Why did the ACT have the worst performance of any state or territory for elective surgery through the year 2002-03?

**MR WOOD:** Mr Speaker, there were quite a number of positives in that AIHW report, and I might come back to those later in question time. I think the health response to surgery has been remarkable. The fact is that there have been more operations carried out in the period than before. In the 2003-04 budget the government put additional money into surgery. Off the top of my head, I would think—

**Mr Smyth:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I didn't ask about the 2003-04 budget; I asked about the results of the 2002-03 budget. I would ask you to get the minister to confine his answer to the point of the question.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Minister, come to the point of the question.

**MR WOOD:** Mr Speaker, the fact is that, in all the years of the life of this government, this government, with the assistance of the Commonwealth on one occasion, has put extra money into surgery. That extra money in all years has seen an increase in the level of surgery being carried out. It is also the case that, at various times, for a number of reasons, including the ageing of the ACT's population, the demand increases considerably. I think that this government and Mr Corbell have performed exceptionally well in managing that demand; in putting more and more people through the operating theatres; in adjusting the systems—more money, better processes—and I think the system is working well.

It is the case that it is difficult in this system, as in any other system, to keep up with the very heavy demands of people for surgery.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, why did the waiting time for elective surgery blow out by 20 per cent during the financial year 2002-03?

**MR WOOD:** Mr Speaker, I think I have explained that. Despite the fact that there was a considerable increase in the amount of surgery being done, the demands were also very heavy.

## Hospital statistics

**MS MacDONALD:** My question is directed to the Acting Minister for Health and also relates to Australian hospital statistics. Can the minister advise the Assembly of the Stanhope government's response to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report on Australian hospital statistics?

**MR WOOD:** In the first instance we study these reports, we value them, we pick up what they tell us, and we learn from them. They are a good incentive for us. There are many positives out of that. You would not expect Mr Smyth to want to focus on those. For example, the ACT has the highest proportion—that is, 74 per cent—of people seen on time in emergency departments. That is an area where there is most stress in any hospital, and this hospital does extremely well.

The total estimated proportion of patients admitted into hospitals from the emergency department—17 per cent—was lower than it was in other states and territories as well as lower than the national total.

In another respects, patients in the ACT spent an average of 3.4 days in public hospitals compared with four days nationally. The ACT figure decreased from 3.6 days the previous year. You can see that the systems are improving, as I have indicated. The 2002-03 figure also represents the second shortest average hospital stay, with the Northern Territory reporting the shortest. The total number of presentations in ED increased by 1.08 per cent from 95,126 patients in 2001-02 to 96,151 in 2002-03. One can see that the demand is there, but it is being handled very well indeed.

As I indicated earlier, the ACT government has put an additional \$2.85 million in the 2003-04 financial year for elective surgery in response to those 2002-03 figures. This will increase the number of admissions for elective surgery in 2003-04 by more than 600 compared with the earlier year. The government responds very effectively. In addition, the government will provide another \$1 million for 2004-05 to provide for 50 joint and 150 eye surgeries. This funding will target those people with the longest waits.

ACT public hospitals provide a very broad service, and our hospitals treated 635 diagnosis groups out of a possible 661 in 2002-03—something that might have slipped the mind of Mr Smyth, who I think was health minister for a time. It is an extremely heavy demand on our hospital system. We are supporting a small health system, but we get very comprehensive care. This has reduced the need to transfer interstate, though the average cost per patient is still increasing as a result of that very wide range of services.

Drawing comparisons between state and ACT hospitals and a national average can be misleading. Both ACT public hospitals are teaching hospitals and should be compared with similar sites providing similar services and, indeed, a similar range of services. The national average combines costs from many types of hospitals, ranging from small sites with lower costs to large teaching hospitals providing expensive specialist services.

The new Australian hospitals statistics report that the average patient stay in the ACT costs \$4,128—approximately 30 per cent above the national average. It is something we have to work on. It is because of what I indicated before about the comprehensive range of services. But it also says that we have a lot more talking to do as we come up to new agreements with New South Wales.

In a small system such as the ACT's, our hospitals have limited ability to transfer patients to other sites. That tends to drive up reported costs per admission. We look at the statistics from the AIHW each year and it is clear, from the material I have spoken about, that we respond. We know there is heavy pressure on our health system. The government's response is indeed very effective.

### **Police numbers**

**MR STEFANIAK:** My question is also to Mr Wood but in his capacity as minister for police. Statistics published in the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2004* showed that the ACT continues to have the lowest number of police per 100,000 people in Australia.

In an editorial in the latest issue of the Australian Federal Police Association's journal, the association claims that this government has not fulfilled its 2001 election promise to "implement a program to restore the number of police officers"—in Canberra—"to go to at least the national average". The editorial went on, "Sadly, the recent ACT Budget showed the contempt the Stanhope Government has for its own promises and the brave men and women of the ACT police function."

Minister, why has the ACT government failed to meet its election commitment on police numbers as highlighted by the AFPA?

**MR WOOD:** I will tell you one thing about police numbers and it is a pretty stark figure: there are a lot more police now than there were when those opposite were running the police force.

**Mr Smyth:** How many more?

**MR WOOD:** There are up to 21 as from a couple of days ago. In fact, we will go up to 786 and I will check that figure. Your figures were very low and, in particular, disastrously low when, without any question at all, you thought that you could send people off to East Timor and it would have no impact on police in the ACT.

I am surprised that those people over there ask questions about police numbers because, all the time they were in office, they never added to the police budget. There were the CPI increases, mind you—

**Mr Smyth:** Do you stand by that—that we never added to the police budget?

**MR WOOD:** Okay, you did not add—

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members of the opposition!

**MR WOOD:** I will check that.

**Mr Smyth:** Oh, now you will check.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order!

**MR WOOD:** I am talking about police numbers here.

**Mr Smyth:** No, no, you said “budget”.

**MR WOOD:** Oh, okay, well budgets go up with CPIs; that is inevitable, but we provided significant additional real resources. That is what we did. There is no question about that. When you stand up and say that there is a problem with police numbers, that we should have provided more police, I think you have a hide because you simply do not want to take note of the fact that you did not do anything at all about police numbers. To repeat—because it bears repeating—when police went off to East Timor, our numbers dropped to a very low level, the lowest ever.

I remember Mrs Dunne at one Estimates Committee last year saying, “My, that is high”, when she was given the number of police at that time. The number was high and it will not always stay at that level, although that is the level at which it remains at the moment.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Minister, why should the community believe that you are meeting your election promises when the AFPA believes that you hold it in contempt?

**MR WOOD:** They can believe us because they can see what we are doing. They can see that we have added numbers to policing when you did not do that. There were two clear components of that assurance back in 2001, and we are holding to them. We are moving towards that national average and specifying how we would do that, which was by moving roughly three lots of seven—I think there was a six in there somewhere—as we headed in that direction.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Mr Wood has the floor.

**MR WOOD:** We carried through that very specific approach. What we have done further, as a result of an agreement between me and the Australian Federal Police, is develop a study to look at the management of police resources and the management of the agreement—it is called an arrangement—between the Australian Federal Police and the ACT government for the provision of services. That arrangement was signed last time by Mr Humphries when he was police minister.

We are having a careful look at that and that includes looking at how our circumstances in the ACT compare with circumstances in other jurisdictions to clearly identify the need here. We are taking very positive steps in respect of police management, something that you people did not do.

### **Gungahlin Drive extension**

**MS TUCKER:** Mr Speaker, my question is also to Mr Wood, in relation to the offer from the RSPCA to put wildlife carers at the site of the building of the Gungahlin Drive extension, and the fact that qualified volunteer carers have offered to do that. They would work with the contractor to ensure that they were not in any way offending the safety requirements of the site. Given that, for example, in New South Wales with the Parramatta rail link it was a requirement of the contract to allow wildlife carers onto the site and given that it seems, from credible sources, that government officers are not able to be there all the time, why is it that you will not accept this generous offer of the RSPCA?

**MR WOOD:** There are certainly safety issues on the site. It is an industrial site; there is activity; and quite clearly there are occupational health and safety issues that we need to take into account. That is an issue I just cannot walk away from. I think the measures we have set in place are very strong. I might say that the degree of care for the little animals is much in excess of anything that has happened before. My office has been in extensive communication with the RSPCA, although I have not spoken directly to them.

Further to that—I will deviate for a minute, at the risk of incurring someone’s wrath—they have asked if we could see that the measures we put in place could be incorporated into future construction contracts of a similar nature, where there is timber and other growth. That indicates to me some measure of acceptance of what we are proposing and specifically the way we are doing that work.

I will talk further with officers about the ramifications of people actually being on site. We are very nervous about it. You tell me it applies elsewhere and I accept that. I would like to check out provisions elsewhere to see what happens. I will have further talks about it for Ms Tucker to see if something might be done. I have to say that, thus far, there have been a number of animals—gliders and the like—that have been noticed there. It is an area we want to take care with but it is not an area teeming with wildlife. There is bird life aplenty and, on the ground, an amount of wildlife but it is not abundant. I suppose I will have to start to define what I mean by “abundant”. To come back to the point, Ms Tucker, let me talk some more about it.

**MS TUCKER:** Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Minister, can you tell the Assembly what hours the government officers who are doing this work are there? Are they there whenever there are trees being cut down?

**MR WOOD:** To my knowledge they go ahead of things and indicate where there might be things, and they keep a very close watch on it. I do not believe they are there all the working day, but I will check out the precise times they are on site.

### **Water—Canberra supply**

**MR HARGREAVES:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Can the Chief Minister tell the Assembly what steps the government has taken to determine the most appropriate way to meet the territory’s future water storage need and how important the assessment of engineering and scientific advice is in this process?

**MR STANHOPE:** Thank you, Mr Hargreaves, for a very important question. Water issues are uppermost in the minds of Canberrans at the moment and have been for some little time as the result of a combination of circumstances: damage to the catchment and issues that arose from turbidity; long-term drought; the environment of a regime of restrictions; a water supply that continues to decline; climate predictions that are not all that hopeful; and rainfall that will be only a third of our average rainfall expectations after this year, following a year in which we had only two-thirds of our average annual rainfall.

There is within the Canberra community a level of genuine, and quite understandable, concern about, and enormous interest in, water use and the future needs of the city. So it was timely that the ACT government concluded, after detailed consultation and investigation, a detailed water strategy for the ACT, “Think water, act water”, which I was pleased to release earlier this year.

The strategy sets out a determined and detailed strategic direction for ensuring that we have a secure water supply, that we now use water responsibly, that water is a sustainable resource and that we recognise just how rare and precious it is. I will not go into the details of the water strategy “Think water, act water”, but it was well resourced in the third appropriation and in the budget that is being debated today. This term, millions of dollars are going to a range of initiatives that have started us on the road to a much more efficient and sustainable use of water in the ACT. The strategy has certainly raised the level of understanding in the community of what each of us can do to deal with water issues.

The long-term security of our water supply, for a city that is expected to increase in size to almost 400,000 in the next 30 to 40 years, requires us to look to the longer term. In that context, I have directed Actew to initiate a detailed assessment of the options that we should consider for the long-term water supply needs of the ACT. Members of the Assembly will be aware of the detailed report released by the chief executive of Actew, Michael Costello, entitled *Options for the next ACT water source*, which he released at the time of making a major presentation in April of this year.

In the report, Actew indicated that of 11 short-listed options for securing a long-term water supply for the ACT, it would commence work on a detailed investigation of three—namely, a dam in the Naas valley, a new dam on the Cotter river and the potential for extending a pipeline from Tantangara into the ACT, entering into a water-trading arrangement with New South Wales.

Each of these options presents a range of issues that need detailed assessment. To that end Actew has put together a team of experts and engaged consultants. Advice I have received from Actew is that they are seeking, as a priority, to answer the following five questions on each option: the net yield—how much water can be delivered; the environmental impact; the economics—that is, the costs and benefits to the ACT; risk assessments; and social aspects and issues such as water quality, family requirements and infrastructure solutions. These are important questions; this is a major undertaking.

Were we to take the option of building a new dam in Naas or in Cotter, we would be talking about a cash investment of about \$150,000. We should not risk that level of

investment without the necessary environmental and social studies and without addressing the simple question of whether the dam will work. This is the approach the ACT government has taken to this important issue.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Minister, do those options mentioned have any scientific bases? Would immediately taking the option of a dam be irresponsible and precipitous?

**MR STANHOPE:** It would be reckless in the extreme to take a punt and pick an option, as if to stick a pin in a list of racehorses, and think that would do. To design a list of options for a water source and then pick one out of a hat, as the Liberal Party has done would be reckless in the extreme. In the context of climate change, the change in rainfall patterns and the experience we have had in the last couple of years with water sources, to simply stump up—particularly making a cheap political point of being perceived to be decisive and actually have a policy on something—and say, “Let’s build a dam at Naas, and let’s not worry about whether it will ever fill,” would be reckless in the extreme.

“Let’s not worry about whether climate change is relevant to where one places a dam. Let’s not worry about the fact that a range of environmental can be overcome by looking at another option. Let’s not worry about bequeathing to a generation a dam that won’t fulfil the water supply needs of the future community. Let’s not worry about whether it will work. Let’s repeat history. Let’s not take the time to consider whether, if we promise to spend, say, \$12 million on a football stadium upgrade, we can deliver it for \$12 million. Let’s adopt the same attitude we adopted then. Let’s just make the commitment on a wing and a prayer.” Do members opposite remember when they said, “We promise to rebuild the football stadium; it will only cost you \$12 million”—and five years later the community pays \$84 million and runs the facility at a deficit forever and a day. Let’s continue to repeat the mistakes of the past!

That is gung-ho and reckless with absolutely no commitment to process or the issues that need to be looked at in making a serious decision about major infrastructure development—namely, the expenditure of at least \$150 million of taxpayers’ funds on a facility that is designed to secure the needs of the community in the future. “Let’s just take a punt. Let’s just hope. Let’s just make decisions on the basis of a wing and a prayer. Let’s just assume that it will continue to rain, that we won’t have climate change and that rain will fall in the Naas valley to the extent of filling the dam.”

It is relevant, in terms of what we see, that the Bendora dam is currently at 85 per cent capacity on the basis that rain is falling within the Bendora catchment. Bendora received 40 millimetres of rain two weeks ago; Googong received two. It is because of the nature of those rainfall patterns within the region that we are undertaking detailed, and quite complex and scientific, analyses.

Actew will have the first cut of a draft report on all those scientific, environmental and other aspects of the three options by December this year and will have a final report early in the New Year. It is an appropriate response to this difficult and serious issue. Let’s do it seriously; let’s apply some process; let’s not reduce decision-making on a major piece of infrastructure to a political stunt.

**Bushfires—warnings**

**MR PRATT:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Urban Services, Mr Wood. On Tuesday of last week you advised the Assembly that you were provided with information from a variety of sources about the fight against the fires in January 2003. These sources included Mr Keady, Mr Castle and Mr Lucas-Smith from the Emergency Services Bureau through Justice and Community Safety and Mr Bartlett and Mr Thompson from ACT Forests through Urban Services. Minister, did your officials ensure that you were as well informed as possible about the progress of the fires in the period between 9 January and 17 January 2003? Did your officials ensure that you were advised promptly about significant developments in the fight against the fires at that stage?

**MR WOOD:** Mr Speaker, I took it upon myself as much as anything to keep myself informed, especially by attending those morning briefings. I think, in pursuing this line of questioning, the opposition is overlooking and ignoring a very significant factor. No-one at any time anticipated two things—the speed at which that fire gathered momentum in the last hours and its level of intrusion, not to the city but into the city. I think you need to bear that in mind but I suppose you do not want to do so.

You talk about notifications and the like but that fire took off. If you go into what is now the record you will see that at a certain point it just exploded across the pine forests and into the suburbs. It is something that was entirely not anticipated.

**MR PRATT:** Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. As the answer appears to be no, have you raised with your officials why they did not keep you properly informed about significant developments in the bushfires? What was the reason that they gave you?

**Mr Quinlan:** Don't you listen?

**Ms MacDonald:** Didn't you listen to his answer?

**Mr Pratt:** Ms MacDonald, he said no, they didn't keep him informed.

**MR WOOD:** I think the interjections are fair. You really do need to listen. I took it upon myself as my major responsibility to keep myself informed, and I did that.

**Vardon report**

**MR CORNWELL:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Last week, you outlined the process that the chief executive of your department followed in investigating the leak of the Vardon report. You said:

Directions were given to all officers within the ACT public service that may have had access to the report to give an explanation or undertaking in relation to the way in which they dealt with or handled the report or information in relation to it. As a result of that, there was no explanation provided by anybody identified as having had any contact with the report as to how information contained in the report might have been relayed to the *Canberra Times* or to any journalist.

There are obvious deficiencies in this process. On your admission, there was no investigation as to whether a ministerial office had leaked the report. Secondly, it is obvious that, if a public servant did leak the Vardon report, they would not be silly enough to tell the chief executive of your department that they did so. As somebody has suggested, you may well have asked Inspector Clouseau to look at it.

Chief Minister, why didn't you call in the Australian Federal Police—perhaps one of the 21 new policemen that Mr Wood spoke of earlier—to conduct a proper inquiry once it became obvious that the process conducted by the chief executive of your department would never find out who was responsible? Why do you say that you are satisfied with this process when it is obvious that the process was inadequate?

**MR STANHOPE:** I took the decision that, in light of the detailed inquiry that the chief executive of the Chief Minister's Department undertook, nothing was to be gained by a further or a police inquiry.

**MR CORNWELL:** I have a supplementary question. Why didn't you investigate whether a minister or a ministerial staffer had leaked the report if you were satisfied that it did not come from the department?

**MR STANHOPE:** My memory is that only two offices within the executive received copies of the report, namely, my office and the office of the Minister for Education and Training. The report certainly was not leaked by my office and I have absolute faith in Ms Gallagher and her office. I know that details of the report were not leaked from any ministerial office and I felt no need, nor do I feel any need, to question or even consider the possibility.

### **Child protection**

**MRS BURKE:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Ms Gallagher. Minister, in a joint media release on 25 May 2004 you and the Chief Minister acknowledged "the ongoing administrative failures related to the care and protection of children in the ACT". You have failed to hold anyone accountable for these failures. You have moved the functions relating to the care and protection of children to a newly created unit with the Chief Minister's Department.

Minister, how will you be able to ensure that this unit remains accountable to you when you failed to do this when it was located within your department? Do you intend to have this unit returned to your department at some stage in the future; and, if so, when?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I thank Mrs Burke for the question. Just to clarify: the failure of the department was in relation to handing on allegations of abuse of children in the care of the territory to the Community Advocate, not a failure in care and protection of children in the ACT. And that's a very important clarification, Mrs Burke, and one, I think, that the opposition plays on and clouds in the public debate on this issue.

In relation to your allegation that I failed to keep my department accountable when it was reporting to me under education, youth and family services and how can I assure you now: I just refer back to the Vardon report which clearly shows that I was not briefed on

this issue. There is some expectation, when you are a minister, that your department meet its statutory obligations. I had no reason to believe that they weren't meeting their statutory obligations. In fact, the Vardon report goes back through history to 1996 where a commitment was given by the then minister, Mr Stefaniak, to hand on these reports to the Community Advocate. He didn't do so, and didn't do so for five years before the government changed hands. So there is an expectation that your department meet its statutory obligations.

At the first point that I was notified that my department was not meeting its statutory obligations—and we've been through this a number of times in this place—I acted immediately. That is reflected not only in this government's reaction and, I guess, reform process that has been under way since January but also in the Vardon inquiry and the Vardon report.

In relation to whether or not the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support—I think your question is—returns to the department of education, in the Vardon report there was a recommendation that, during the implementation of the recommendations, it exist attached to the Chief Minister's Department; and that following the implementation, decisions be made about where its permanent future will be. On balance, from what we have seen in the past and the directions in what Vardon says and, I guess, where this government wants to head in relation to the importance of children and young people, I can only see children and young people having their own place in the bureaucracy rather than being attached to a large department which, as we all know, over the past few months has brought some criticism.

**MRS BURKE:** I thank the minister for her answer. I take it from that that it will be a separate entity. Why don't you consider, therefore, that the chief executive of your department should be accountable for, in your words, "the ongoing administrative failures"—and I reiterate those words "administrative failures"—"related to the care and protection of children in the ACT"?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Mr Speaker, I have already answered this question on a number of occasions, and I have nothing further to add.

## **Planning**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question is directed to the Acting Minister for Planning. At the 2004 Boral excellence in building awards last Friday—a gala event at which most of the major building industry players in the ACT were present—you represented Mr Corbell. In relation to planning in the ACT, you said, "We're working on it." Later you gave the following assurance: "Trust us; we'll get it right." This sounds like a variation on the famous line—or lie: "Trust me, I'm from the government." Minister, now that you are the acting planning minister, what will you do to get it right?

**MR QUINLAN:** It surprises me; there seems to be an on-and-off sense of humour on the other side of the house. Today we watch them titter like primary school children in a group giggle—as a defence mechanism—when a fellow of my size makes a relatively light-hearted speech, which I think the people at the time appreciated—

**Mrs Dunne:** The people around me did not think it was light-hearted.

**Mr Stanhope:** It was a joke and you know it. I cannot believe how puerile this is. It is just puerile—absolute puerile garbage.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Chief Minister, please.

**MR QUINLAN:** In answer to the back end of the question, I intend, in the interim period, to continue the good work of Mr Corbell. I say one thing that I know of Mr Corbell, who has been very dedicated to his duties as Minister for Planning: I think that last week in this house he was fairly universally accepted as being a person of vision. He is not a person of limited scope. He will, when he returns to this portfolio, continue to develop. At no point in time will a claim be made that the system is perfect. There will be continued work. In the six weeks or so that Mr Corbell is likely to be away, I will be working on it; when he gets back, I can guarantee you that he will working on it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. How is it, Minister, that the government is still working on it—you are a long way from making it perfect—and that after three years, a mountain of glossy publications, and millions of dollars spent on setting up a new planning authority, it is still nowhere near getting it right?

**MR QUINLAN:** That is quite clearly an opinion that you would like to promulgate. I do not even know whether you believe it. But this is that time of the electoral cycle in which you have to say that, if it belongs to the government, it is rotten.

**Mr Stanhope:** You don't believe anything. It's true. We have seen that over 2½ years: somebody that stands for nothing and believes nothing. And that is what the electorate thinks as well. And we know it and you know it.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Mr Quinlan has the floor.

**Mrs Burke:** Touchy, touchy.

**Mr Pratt:** Says the chief minister for inaction!

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Members of the opposition.

**MR QUINLAN:** Let me assure this house that, while this government works on the planning process, it will be working on the planning process for all. While ever there are events—and every week there will be some issue where there are perceived winners and losers; people will have different opinions about what should happen—this government intends to build on the process it has built to ensure the protection of the rights of all.

You can run around and pick up an example here and say, “The system doesn't work because so-and-so has been waiting this long.” And in another week, if a different constituent sat on you, you would be in here saying, “What's the rush? You haven't consulted enough.” One of the beauties of being in opposition is that you can have two bob each way—but can we keep the double standard to a minimum?

**Digital divide program**

**MS DUNDAS:** My question is to the Chief Minister. As you would be aware, the digital divide program serves older people, migrants and disadvantaged younger people who have never learned how to use computers. You are probably aware that the tutoring offered through the digital divide program is currently oversubscribed and there are lengthy waiting lists at public libraries and community digital divide centres. Over the last few weeks, digital divide centres have received letters informing them that their roving tutor hours are to be cut back at the end of this financial year. I understand that one centre has been told that its tutoring will cease altogether at the end of the 2004-05 financial year. Can you please explain why this dramatic cutback and possible ceasing of the digital divide tutoring is going to happen?

**MR STANHOPE:** There has been a cut in funding for the tutoring program associated with some of the digital divide work that is being done on the placement of computers throughout the community. The expectation was that, as the level of skilling in relation to computer use and the use of the internet rose, there would be a decrease in demand within some of those organisations and institutions and that arrangements would be put in place to allow tutoring and mentoring to be part of the government's response to digital divide issues. Essentially, it was a decision taken in relation to the future of the program. Funding has been decreased. I am not entirely sure of the detail of the decrease in funding for that part or aspect of the digital divide program. I am more than happy to get the details of the current funding arrangements and provide them to the Assembly.

**MS DUNDAS:** I have a supplementary question. Considering the ongoing commitments of this government under the social plan to reduce poverty and exclusion, help older people into the work force and support lifelong learning, what services will be offered either to extend the digital divide program or to replace the digital divide program so that adults can learn essential computer skills, such as using the internet, sending emails and doing word processing?

**MR STANHOPE:** There is continued funding for issues in relation to the digital divide. I do not have the numbers available to me. It may be that they will be discussed today as we continue to debate the budget. But those commitments to the digital divide and to lifelong learning and action to address issues through the social plan are very much part and parcel of the budget that is being debated today. I have received advice from the department that something like \$550 million of the funding incorporated in the budget can be identified as funding going to meet social plan commitments and priorities.

This government's commitment to the disadvantaged, including issues around access to computers and the internet, is very much part of our commitment to ensuring that we do have a truly inclusive and equal society, to an extent, I think, that no other government in Australia has sought. The social plan that we have developed, that we have generated, is the first piece of all-of-the-jurisdiction social work that any jurisdiction in Australia has ever attempted. The social plan has been acknowledged as a pre-eminent piece of long-term strategic social planning of an order that no other jurisdiction in Australia has ever attempted.

We have put our money where our mouth is. You can see that in this budget. Over \$500 million worth of funding is directly targeted at addressing disadvantage and ensuring that we are an inclusive society. What has driven this government for the last 2½ years and will continue to drive us into the next term is our determination to ensure that, above all else, this town actually does live up to its egalitarian ideals, to those ideals of a fair go for everybody, a determination to ensure that every child born into this community has an equal opportunity.

We are working hard in a focused and strategic way to deliver those outcomes. We have the runs on the board and we will continue to deliver those runs through attention to our priorities, through attention to the strategic plan and through attention, commitment and the dedication that we have, as a progressive Labor government, to ensuring that we meet the needs of the disadvantaged in this regard over and above the needs of everybody else.

### **WorkCover**

**MRS CROSS:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer, Mr Quinlan. Minister, as you are aware, the WorkCover dispute with Wizard has taken well over two years to be addressed adequately, and the substantial nature of the payments demonstrates the validity of the original claim where no expenses were paid. The costs, as reported to the Estimates Committee, were over \$500,000. This, combined with the impact on any organisation of having to handle such a dispute and go without such substantial payments for so long, must have been very damaging.

Minister, has the WorkCover dispute with Wizard been resolved; and, if so, what payments have been made for the work undertaken, for interest, for expenses and for damages?

**MR QUINLAN:** Let me clarify one point. It just seems that what we have faced a couple of times in questioning in estimates is: Wizard, 100 per cent right; WorkCover, or government, 100 per cent wrong.

Had we settled with Wizard for what they asked for initially, it would have been a whole lot more than they got now. Therefore, it follows that the process of evaluation and negotiation has had an effect. I can't guarantee you that, if there had been different parties, the result might have been different by some amount or other, because this has turned out to be a very difficult process to sort out—and in no small part difficult to sort out because Wizard kept lousy records. Wizard was very bad at getting authorisation for the work that they did. Unfortunately, WorkCover didn't keep refined records either. The obligation, I would have thought, would have fallen on the bloke who was supplying it to make sure he got an order before he did it, because he's the one that is providing, he's the one that's going to make the claim.

However, the thing is, as far as I know, settled; as far as I know, I think we have got a signature to say "finished"; it is done. I can't be absolutely definite, but I would be 99.9 per cent sure that, had Wizard had this arrangement with any other commercial body, they would not have got the fair treatment that they have got in the way we worked through this process.

In the early days of trying to settle this dispute, the claimant wouldn't give us the most fundamental records. I have to say that it is, to a large extent, unfair on the people that work at the coalface, including people in my office, who are trying to settle this to paint it, by implications in questions, as some sort of process whereby the bad government rode roughshod over this poor innocent supplier. I know it happens in this place that we get now and then a sort of issue that gets off the rails. Take, for example, reporting under the relevant section of the Child Protection Act, which has now turned into something it never was.

This matter, I think, has been settled. I think the government has been more than generous in the settlement. It has not been protracted because the government has purely been obstinate; it has been a very difficult process to sort through—as I said, in no small way difficult because of the poorness and the paucity of records of the providers of the service.

It started off as a very ambitious project on the part of Wizard. They were going to build a product for WorkCover into which they were prepared to invest more than WorkCover would pay them. They would be building a product that would then be a marketable product on the wider market, as I understand it.

That is not the case. When it became clear that that wasn't the case, I'm not sure. Nevertheless, there was a lot of developmental work done, incremental work done, for which, I have to say, the authorisation process was not the best. You would have thought that someone that was providing the level of resources that went into this would have kept better records.

**MRS CROSS:** Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question, and I thank the minister for his assistance in trying to get this resolved. Could you provide the following information to the Assembly: the amount of the final payment for work undertaken by Wizard; the amount of the final payment for the interest incurred by Wizard; and the amount of the final payment for costs incurred in the dispute resolution process by Wizard? Could the minister perhaps advise the Assembly whether Wizard has been compensated for damages or has received any reasonable compensation for loss of business?

**MR QUINLAN:** In order to get the detail, I will take that question on notice. But I cannot recall any question of damages, for God's sake! If anybody gets damages it should be my office. I will work out the costs. I am not sure that we have measured all the costs. Certainly, I do not know that we have measured the costs associated with the work that was done in my office or in Treasury trying to sort it through. So I can only get you the directly recorded costs of the process.

Again, I am not sure exactly how much detail the firm Wizard would want us to put on the public record. In the first instance, with your indulgence, we will check with them and if they are happy for their details to become a matter of public record in this place then so be it. Otherwise, I will seek your indulgence not be required to table it.

**Mr Stanhope:** It could be commercial-in-confidence.

**MR QUINLAN:** Yes.

**MR STANHOPE** (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Environment and Minister for Community Affairs): I ask that further questions be placed on the notice paper. I table the following answer to a question that I took on notice last week:

Fire blight—Answer to question without notice asked of the Chief Minister by Mrs Dunne and taken on notice on 22 June 2004.

### **Correction to statement by minister**

**MR WOOD**: I want to make a correction. Earlier today Mrs Dunne picked up that, in introducing the GDE amendment, I said that we had amended the Nature Conservation Act. Indeed, we have not done that. Let me put that on the record.

### **Estimates 2004-2005—Select Committee Additional correspondence—publication**

**Mr Speaker** presented the following paper:

Estimates 2004-2005—Select Committee—*Appropriation Bill 2004-2005*—  
Correspondence received by the Select Committee.

**MR WOOD** (Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Arts and Heritage, and Acting Minister for Health) (3.29): I move:

That the Assembly authorises the publication of the additional correspondence.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Paper**

**Mr Speaker** presented the following paper, which was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting:

Public Schools—Financial assistance to low income families—Letter and Government response from the Minister for Education and Training, dated 27 May 2004, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly of 10 March 2004.

### **Executive contracts Paper and statement by minister**

**MR STANHOPE** (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Environment and Minister for Community Affairs): For the information of members I present, pursuant to sections 31A and 79 of the Public Sector Management Act 1994, copies of contracts in accordance with the list circulated.

Public Sector Management Act, pursuant to sections 31A and 79—Copies of executive contracts or instruments—

Short-term contracts:

Colin Adrian, dated 15 June 2004.

Michael Ockwell, dated 25 May 2004.

Schedule D variations:

George Tomlins, dated 9 June 2004.

Brett Phillips, dated 7 June and 9 June 2004.

## **Annual reports directions Papers and statement by minister**

**MR STANHOPE** (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Environment and Minister for Community Affairs) (3.30): For the information of members I present the annual reports directions and declarations made under the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act—Annual Reports, June 2004—  
Declarations, including the 2004 Annual Report directions.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the papers.

This instrument is issued in accordance with the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004 and provides the framework for the preparation of the 2003-04 annual reports. The instrument includes the annual reports directions for the reporting year. Under the act the instrument must be tabled, although it is not disallowable. The instrument is notified under the Legislation Act 2001.

This year's directions are the first to be issued under the 2004 act, which commenced on 13 April 2004. The new act includes a 30-day consultation period with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The chair advised on 15 June 2004 that the committee had considered the draft directions and had no further comment or recommendations to make. The 2004 directions have been substantially overhauled, reflecting the changes last year to incorporate a number of suggestions from the Auditor-General's report on the effectiveness of annual reporting.

The 2004 directions also taken into account proposed agreed recommendations from Legislative Assembly committee reviews of 2002-03 annual reports. Further changes have also been made to reflect government policies and legislation changes, such as reporting on costs and benefits of regulatory reforms, reporting on breaches of environment legislation and Territory Records Act compliance.

A different format has been developed to aid agency compliance. The format change should also address requests by Assembly committees and other stakeholders for more consistent reporting across agencies. Under the new act reports must be provided to the

Assembly by 13 September 2004. The reports must include audited financial and performance statements. As there are no September sittings this year, out-of-session arrangements set in the new act will support provision of reports, with tabling to be on commencement of the new Assembly. Agencies have been directed to provide reports to ministers by 24 September 2004.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Financial Management Act 1976**

### **Paper and statement by minister**

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning): For the information of members I present the following paper:

Pursuant to section 17—Instrument varying appropriation to the Department of Urban Services related to Commonwealth grants, including a statement of reasons dated 23 June 2004.

I ask leave to make a statement.

Leave granted.

**MR QUINLAN**: As required by the Financial Management Act 1996, I table an instrument issued under section 17. Under the terms of the act the instrument and statement of reasons must be tabled in the Assembly within three sitting days after being given. The instrument under section 17 relates to the 2003-04 year increases in existing funding from the Commonwealth as part of the Commonwealth's interstate road transport initiative. The instrument will permit the on-passing of these funds to the Department of Urban Services as general payments for outputs. I commend the instrument to the Assembly.

## **Capital works program**

### **Paper and statement by minister**

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning): For the information of members I present the following paper:

2003-04 Capital Works Program—Progress report—March quarter.

## **Affordable housing for low income earners**

### **Paper and statement by minister**

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning): For the information of members I present the following paper:

Affordable housing—Low income earners—Government response, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly of 19 November 2003.

I ask leave to make a statement.

Leave granted.

**MR QUINLAN:** On 19 November 2003 the Legislative Assembly passed a resolution on affordable housing for low income earners, and today I table the government's response. The Department of Treasury has investigated the issues relating to land tax concessions for landlords, providing affordable and suitable housing for low income earners. After consulting Environment ACT, it also investigated the issues relating to more effective financial incentives for the installation of energy and water-efficient appliances and other measures in rental properties. Housing affordability is a national concern and needs to be addressed at all levels of government.

The national concern is highlighted by the fact that many states and territories have amended home ownership schemes. Even this week the passion behind the issue has been witnessed by the public commentary of the participants in the National Summit on Housing Affordability. The ACT has taken the initiative and has implemented, and is continuing to implement, a range of assistance measures to help low income households and those wishing to enter home ownership.

Following extensive work by the Affordable Housing Taskforce and the government's inquiry into homelessness, the government has developed a comprehensive package of measures to alleviate housing stress and improve housing affordability. These measures cover all areas of social and private rental markets and home ownership and include financial assistance in various forms, as well as construction of additional accommodation to help low income households. Emphasis has been given to providing additional support for community and indigenous housing and to the crisis accommodation sector.

Key measures implemented to date and announced in the 2004-05 budget are detailed in the government's response. The ACT government continues to participate in and contribute to the work of bodies involved in establishing and monitoring energy-efficient standards for commercial and household appliances. A prime example of this work is the minimum energy performance standards that have been developed for appliances ranging from dishwashers to airconditioners.

The now familiar energy star rating displayed on new electrical appliances such as refrigerators, microwave ovens and washing machines is another program supported by the ACT government in conjunction with other jurisdictions. These programs work to raise customer awareness on the relative energy efficiency of various appliances and the savings that may accrue with their use. Other programs such as energy-efficient rating programs for residential properties are aimed at the dwelling itself rather than the appliances used within it.

The EER provides an indication to potential buyers of the relative cost of heating and cooling of the home and is widely accepted in the market as a discriminating element. The community too will benefit from the upgrading of ACT's rental stock to be more energy and water efficient over time.

The government's water resources strategy, "Think water, act water", serves as a comprehensive guide to managing ACT's precious water resources. The government has committed \$8.42 million in the 2004-05 budget to implement this strategy over the next four years. The strategy contains a number of initiatives supported by the government, including rebates for AAA showerheads, as well as a major information and awareness campaign to support continual long-term water saving in the community.

The Productivity Commission inquiry report into first home ownership was released last week. The government is currently analysing recommendations made and will provide a response in the near future. The government recognises that housing is critically important for our overall economic and social wellbeing.

Whilst the Canberra property market has increased significantly over the past three years, there is evidence emerging that the housing market may be cooling off. This evidence, combined with the 2004-05 budget initiatives and additional housing funding, should over time provide relief for home buyers, rental property owners and renters, alleviating the need for additional incentives or concessions.

## **Supplementary answer to question without notice**

### **Child protection**

**MS GALLAGHER:** I wish to provide further information on a question I took on notice. On 24 June Mr Cornwell asked me a question concerning the delay in the finalisation of the case audit of children in the care and protection of the territory being conducted by Ms Gwenn Murray.

In my answer to that question I stated I did not know why it had been delayed. I also mentioned that I had received a brief on the issue from Ms Vardon advising me of the delay. I would like to correct the part of my answer where I said I did not know why it had been delayed. In the brief to me Ms Vardon stated:

On 17 May 2004 I received a request from the Acting/CEO of the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services for four out of eight audit team members to return to substantive positions to deal with urgent matters of child safety.

I supported this request as the audit had been dealing in the main with legacy issues and current matters had priority. The effect of the reduction of numbers of the audit team was to double their remaining time for the completion of the audit which I now expect to be completed by mid-July.

Ms Vardon also stated that pressure on the availability of information technology support to develop robust data reports for the finalisation of audit outcomes has the potential to further delay the outcome of the audit report.

As I stated in my answer last week, it was Ms Vardon who commissioned the audit report, and I agree it was very appropriate action for her to take. Ms Murray will be reporting to Ms Vardon on the findings of the audit. It will then be for Ms Vardon to determine when and in what form the outcome of the audit is reported to government. As I stated last week, it is the government's intention to handle the audit findings, much as we handled the Vardon report.

## Papers

**Mr Wood** presented the following papers:

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation Act—

Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation to grant licence (for the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*, section 24) 2004 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2004-102 (LR, 22 June 2004).

Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation to grant licence (for the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*, sections 26 and 39) 2004 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2004-103 (LR, 22 June 2004).

Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation to grant an authority (for the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*, section 43 (5) (b)) 2004 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2004-104 (LR, 22 June 2004).

Gungahlin Drive Extension Authorisation to grant a licence (for the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*, section 42) 2004 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2004-105 (LR, 22 June 2004).

Leases (Commercial and Retail) Act—Leases (Commercial and Retail) Amendment Regulations 2004 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2004-19 (LR, 15 June 2004).

Tertiary Accreditation and Registration Act—Tertiary Accreditation and Registration Regulations 2004—Subordinate Law SL2004-22 (LR, 25 June 2004).

## Griffin Centre

### Ministerial statement

**MR WOOD** (Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Arts and Heritage, and Acting Minister for Health) (3.40): Mr Speaker, I present the following paper:

New Griffin Centre—Development—Ministerial statement, 29 June 2004.

I seek leave of the Assembly to make a ministerial statement concerning the development of the new Griffin Centre.

Leave granted.

**MR WOOD:** I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

I bring to the Assembly's attention the progress that has been made in the allocation of accommodation space in the new Griffin Centre, responding to a motion passed by the

Assembly on 10 December 2003 initiated, I believe, by Ms Tucker. The motion called on the government to—

- develop and implement, as a matter of urgency, a plan to accommodate the vital community-run services for marginalised people that are presently in unsatisfactory or impermanent accommodation around the city, recognising that these services include, but are not limited to the CAHMA, the Free Food Program, WIREDD and Directions ACT.
- not sign off on the internal design and fitout of the building intended to replace the existing Griffin Centre until these accommodation issues in and around Civic have been resolved.

The motion has two parts: firstly the requirement to develop and implement a plan to accommodate community-run services around the city. This requirement can be interpreted to cover all community facilities provided in and around the city by the government. The property branch of the Department of Urban Services is developing a whole-of-government approach to property asset management for all government owned buildings, including community accommodation and community facility buildings. Other ACT government property owners, including the Department of Education and Training, ACT Health and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, are actively involved in the development of this whole-of-government strategy.

Community organisations will also be consulted in the development of the strategy, in particular in relation to community accommodation and facilities. The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services has developed, and the government has approved, an asset management strategy for the 39 community facilities on DHC books. Of the organisations mentioned in the Assembly motion CAHMA and WIREDD are currently tenants of the Griffin Centre and, as with all other current tenants, are guaranteed accommodation in the new centre.

The Free Food Program, which uses the existing building, will continue to operate in the new facility. Directions ACT is a program managed by ACT Health. The government is aware of concerns about the current accommodation for Directions ACT at East Row. ACT Health is working with Directions ACT to locate more appropriate alternative accommodation. Recent discussions are promising but have not yet been finalised.

The second part of the motion concerns the finalisation of space allocation in the new Griffin Centre. This has been a lengthy and detailed process, and both departmental officers and Griffin Centre tenants have contributed to it. Meetings were held with individual tenants and with the board of the ACT Council of Cultural and Community Organisations, and several group presentations were made to tenants. The department engaged Tania Parkes Consulting to assist in finalising tenant accommodation requirements. At this stage tenants are being consulted on the detailed internal design and fitout of the particular tenancy allocations.

As is the norm in such processes, some issues will continue to arise during the design and construction phase. The building design allows for flexible internal use of the building and there is potential to change tenant accommodation layout at any time during

or after construction. While the resolution of some issues has been quite challenging the council, together with the tenants, has indicated that they support the processes undertaken so far.

The department will continue to address issues as they occur, in consultation with the council, the tenants and construction control—the ACT based construction managers. The department has undertaken to meet with the council and construction control on a weekly basis during the construction and fitout stages and manage issues as they arise. Should these ongoing discussions result in changes to the current plans, additional design costs would have to be worn by the department.

The government also recognises that the move to the new centre is an ideal time to ensure that the council is adequately prepared for their role in managing the new Griffin Centre. The department and the council have held joint business planning sessions to develop a business plan for the new centre. This process will continue as needed, and will include a review of the rent structures and facility management practices to ensure that the centre is financially viable and is a successful community building.

The department has also agreed to continue to meet with tenants, as required, to address issues of concern. For example, included in these matters at present are security and parking. The department is also monitoring the situation with Radio 2XX, a major tenant, which is currently experiencing some financial difficulties, although I believe it is working through them.

The architects, Cox Humphries Moss, have agreed to meet with each of the tenants to finalise fit out and it is expected that these meetings will begin shortly. The construction manager has offered to issue a regular newsletter to tenants, to keep them informed of progress. It has also been agreed to have regular open days during key periods to enable tenants in the wider community to view the plans, ask questions and observe construction.

The new Griffin Centre demonstrates this government's commitment to continue the process of providing the best possible facilities for the ACT community. The building has a gross floor area of over 4,000 square metres. It has more functional community office space and meeting and community rooms than the current centre, plus a modern fitout and provision for contemporary information technology systems. It will have a high-level security system. It will contain a cafe with a Lonsdale Street frontage. The cafe will enhance the status of the centre as a vibrant community facility, as well as contributing to its financial viability.

The old Griffin Centre has performed a significant role. It has helped shape the values and character of Canberra. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that the department is working with the board to record this journey through a multimedia presentation for display in the new building. The move to the new centre reflects Canberra maturing as a city. It also reflects the ideals embodied in the Canberra plan, connecting the threads of the past and the present to create a vision for the future—one that will strengthen the fabric of our community. The new centre is well on the way to meeting the aspirations and specific concerns raised in the Assembly motion in December.

**MS TUCKER (3.49):** I would like to respond. I do not think the printed version that has been circulated is as full as what Mr Wood has said—I think he might have said more. I want to make a couple of comments. Mr Wood concluded by saying that the process of the Griffin Centre’s redevelopment and allocation of community space represents a vision for the future. I really cannot agree with that because, in the same speech, Mr Wood said, “We are looking at accommodation for Directions ACT.”

If any member of this Assembly has visited Directions ACT and seen the conditions in which the people are required to work and the conditions the people receiving support are required to put up with, then I think they would be well aware that it is absolutely unacceptable—and it is obvious that it has been unacceptable for a number of years. It really is insulting, in a way, to hear Mr Wood say that this is a vision for the future when, in the same speech, he says, “We’re looking at finding a place for Directions ACT”—as if this is something that has just come up.

**Mr Wood:** Give us a few sites, and we will be grateful!

**MS TUCKER:** Mr Wood is asking me to give him a few sites. The site that we had—

**MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hargreaves):** Order! Ms Tucker has the floor. Minister, please.

**MS TUCKER (3.49):** The point I am trying to make is that we had an opportunity and we had a site. When this whole redevelopment was first mooted the Greens said—the community said—“Can we have a picture of unmet need in the community sector? Can we have a projection of what the need will be? Can we see what the needs in Civic are now—and projected needs into the future—so we know what we need in this redevelopment?” But no. The government said to us, “We will just prepare these briefs. We will get the existing tenants to respond. We don’t want to look more broadly. Don’t you worry about that.” That is the point I want to make—that we did have an opportunity.

We know that these services are difficult to accommodate. We know people do not want these slightly messy people next door to them. That is not news; it is obvious. When we were planning this whole development we were asking that these sorts of services be taken into account. We had the perfect opportunity and we have missed it. I think this speech today absolutely demonstrates that.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Supplementary answer to question without notice Gungahlin Drive extension**

**MR WOOD:** I can give some detail in answer to a question earlier today from Ms Tucker about RSPCA people at the GDE site. There are ecologists who identify and mark potential habitat trees in advance of tree felling. They are there for that purpose, as well as to inspect felled trees for evidence of activity of an animal kind. Generally at least one ecologist is on the site from 8.00 am until the end of felling operations—usually about 4.30 pm or later. To date, one possum and one bat have been found in

felled trees, and neither was injured. The possum left the tree overnight, and the bat left the tree after a few hours.

## **Health professionals regulations 2004**

### **Paper and statement by minister**

**MR WOOD** (Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Arts and Heritage, and Acting Minister for Health) Mr Speaker, with your indulgence, I present the following paper:

Health Professionals Act—Health Professionals Regulations 2004—Exposure draft.

I seek leave to make a statement in relation to the paper.

Leave granted.

**MR WOOD:** These regulations have been developed to provide process and machinery provisions that support the operation of the Health Provisions Bill 2003 that we are about to debate. The regulations are an important source of instruction in relation to how powers and bodies established in the principal act are to be exercised and structured. Such matters have been set in regulation with the dual objectives of having an act that is not overwhelmed by instructional detail and to provide a legislative framework that is readily amenable to examination and review.

I draw the attention of members to some of the key features of the regulations. They provide for the construction of health professional boards to include community representation, they describe the responsibilities of health boards and provide guidance on the assessment of applicants for registration as health professionals. Detail is included about processes that will assist health professionals to maintain their suitability to practise, ensuring added protection to the public against risk of harm which, of course, is the primary aim of the legislation.

Boards are facilitated through the processes in this regulation to establish programs and standards specific to their profession and ensure that health professionals maintain their competence. They also contain generic standards of practice that, if breached, may indicate that the health professional is not suitable to practise. Acknowledging that individual health professions have differing characteristics and, therefore, differing professional requirements the Health Professionals Bill will allow individual health professions to develop their own profession specific regulations.

Those regulations will be formed as schedules to these regulations and will be prescriptive about areas such as qualifications required for suitability to practise in the profession, the criteria for demonstrating continuing competence, board membership, any insurance requirements and a range of other factors specific to the profession. Included in the regulations is an example of a schedule that is being developed with the medical board. I am pleased to table this exposure draft ahead of the later debate.

## **Murray-Darling Basin**

### **Discussion of matter of public importance**

**MR SPEAKER:** I have received a letter from Mrs Dunne proposing that a matter of public importance be submitted to the Assembly for discussion, namely:

The impact of Canberra, as the major urban centre, on the Murray-Darling Basin.

**MRS DUNNE (3.55):** The impact of Canberra as the major urban centre on the Murray-Darling Basin is something that we should all, as legislators and as citizens of this city, be taking very seriously indeed. We saw last Friday the signing-off of the National Water Initiative, and I congratulate the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, and COAG for this momentous occasion. The National Water Initiative looks at issues mainly in relation to the Murray-Darling Basin. The need to increase environmental flows in the basin is clearly urgent and cannot be done by just one government. The means proposed—market mechanisms, buying back water entitlements rather than simply acquiring them compulsorily through legislation—is the only workable approach.

We have to be careful not to understate the achievement of getting agreement on this issue. I have spoken in this place, and in others, on the history of the Murray-Darling Basin on a number of occasions. If we look back over history even before federation we find that, even at the last minute when we were deciding on federation, water was a contentious issue. In the first decade of federation we had the Murray-Darling River Agreement, which has been through various iterations until today, when it comes to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission.

Between the 1870s and 1910 when the Murray River Agreement came into force there was a vast amount of constitutional argy-bargy that almost caused federation to founder. Through that time we have seen a vast amount of inaction but heard a lot of talk about what needs to be done in addition to issues relating to the Murray-Darling Basin and the management of the Great Artesian Basin, which has been glacial in its approach to overcoming difficult problems.

The issue of problems with the Great Artesian Basin was first raised in 1912 but it took until 1939 to commission a report by the Great Artesian Waters Investigation Committee. Because of the war that report was not completed until 1945, and that is perhaps understandable. But it took another nine years before the content of that report reached the state governments who were interested in it. From the signing off of the COAG water reform framework in 1994 to the signing of the National Water Initiative last Friday, that is a sterling achievement. There has been a lot of work done in, comparatively speaking, a very short period of time.

The Murray-Darling Basin is an important part of our geology, our geography and our agriculture. It covers one-seventh of the continent of Australia—over New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory. The basin supports one-quarter of the cattle herd, half the sheep flock, half the cropping land and almost three-quarters of all irrigated land in Australia. There are 16 large cities, including Adelaide and Canberra, which draw from the resources of the basin, as well as many

small communities along the way. The basin faces major and growing problems of salinity and rising water tables. I quote the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. It says:

At the present rates at which the groundwater levels are rising, most of the irrigation areas in the southern section of the Basin will have water tables within two metres of the surface by the year 2020. Where the sub-soils contain large volumes of salt, salinated water begins to poison vegetation when water tables rise to within two metres from the surface. In many parts of the Basin this has already happened.

The commission's Dryland Technical Report No 1 of 1997 noted that, within the Murray-Darling Basin drainage division, at least 2,000 square kilometres of land are grossly affected by dryland salination and an estimated 10,000 square kilometres are at risk of salination by 2010. That is why in the past few years the federal government has undertaken its much needed initiative to address salinity across the country.

As I said, the issue of managing access to the Murray-Darling Basin's waters has been part of the COAG agenda for 10 years, and it has been the thorn in the side of many states during that time. The agreement rightly focuses on agriculture, which accounts for most of Australia's water consumption and, by implication, most of the problems. That does not let us off the hook. The initiative has agreement on a full cost recovery pricing. That is welcome news to people like us who pay 50 to 100 times what many irrigators pay.

According to last week's *Australian* newspaper, while we in the ACT are paying in excess of \$1 a kilolitre, the country's largest irrigators—Murray Irrigation Ltd and Goulburn Valley Water—are paying 2c to 3c a kilolitre. If you look at the extravagance that is Cubbie Station, according to one source they pay \$3 a megalitre, which is 0.3c a kilolitre, for their water. Cubbie Station, by way of information, has a dam that stores as much water as Googong Dam, but over a much larger area, and they are paying next to nothing for the water in it.

The difficulties of securing cross-jurisdiction agreement means that this agreement will not be perfect; there are too many vested interests to get involved. It was a little saddening to see that WA did not sign up—on the pretext that there was nothing in it for them. Although on the surface it does not seem that there is much in it for them, there is the collegial responsibility of taking responsibility for one-seventh of the landmass of the nation.

One of the issues I want to concentrate on today is the role of city dwellers, particularly Canberrans. Ours is the largest city in the basin and the city at the head of the basin. We need to show that we, as well as the irrigators further downstream, are prepared to work to address this issue. The ACT has led the way in addressing the issues of environmental flows and reducing water consumption, but we cannot ask farmers to make sacrifices if we are not prepared to make sacrifices as well. There is a clear understanding in this place that we need to do more.

We need to do more than impose blanket restrictions and pass on the burden and the risk to consumers. We need to have a much more imaginative approach than cutting back on supply; we need government input on the issue—both money and ideas. I question whether this government has any ideas when it comes to addressing the vital issue of water supply in Canberra and the effect that that will have on the Murray-Darling Basin.

On that issue I ask what this government has done. I think that twice in the course of presenting papers, and in answer to questions, members of the government have talked about “Think water, act water”, and they have extolled its virtues. There is much that could be said—and there is probably time for that in another place at another time—about the shortcomings of “Think water, act water”.

I would like to look at a couple of things that have happened this week, for instance, the government’s breathtaking cynicism as shown in the story on page 2 of yesterday’s *Canberra Times* headed, “Rebate on tanks part of new ACT water strategies.” That is new water strategies: n-e-w. Later the Chief Minister is quoted as saying that the existing scheme, which we all know has been in place since 1997, would be improved to encourage more people to install water tanks. That sounds good, but it is it not a new scheme because it has been there since 1997.

It is true that the government yesterday announced a new rebate for water tanks. For tanks of 2,000 to 4,000 litres you will now get a rebate. The story—and I assume the Chief Minister’s release that went with it—does not say that there are already rebates for the two remaining categories and that, up until yesterday, these rebates were higher than the new rebates. In fact, the announcement yesterday cut the rebates for tanks between 4,000 and 8,999 litres by \$100, and the rebate for tanks over 9,000 litres was also cut by \$100. In other words this is really a scheme to reduce rebates for most categories, yet it was announced as a new and generous initiative.

At the same time we have the issue of the water strategy with a pilot tune up scheme. Let no-one say that the government is not interested in recycling. We may not be able to recycle putrescible waste but we can recycle ideas. One might ask why we need a pilot for this scheme, given that the Queanbeyan City Council has been doing this for at least three years. With an initiative which would be, at least for us, cheap to copy, what are we doing? We are running a pilot of a cut-down version rather than embracing the issue front on. What we have seen with this government and its pilot water efficiency scheme is that it is putting its toe in the water of water efficiency. We might also say that their efforts are just a drop in the ocean.

Apart from the pilot scheme scope for indoor water savings have been ignored, when this could be done very cost-effectively. I have spoken in this place in the past about the trial of flow-limiting valves run by ACT Housing over the caretaker period, which showed substantial cuts to the amount of water that would be consumed in the houses—in excess of 20 per cent—and also substantial cuts in energy consumption because people were using less hot water. Not only have we not acted on that report; the results of that report have been effectively suppressed for a number of months.

As I have said in this place on a previous occasion, it took the opposition in excess of four months to obtain that report, which was in fact commissioned by the previous government and therefore a report which the Leader of the Opposition, as then minister for housing, was entitled to receive. I ask the Assembly the question: why is this government prepared to hide a piece of information which shows a way forward which would substantially address issues of water efficiency and allow us to meet the targets we have set ourselves? This Chief Minister has set targets in “Think water, act water”,

but they are very modest targets indeed. We will not achieve even those unless we embrace all the issues we need to embrace.

I find it interesting that the Chief Minister has been able to sign off on the COAG agreement on the National Water Initiative, which talks about trade in water, secure access, entitlements, sophisticated transparent and comprehensive water planning and stakeholder consultation, when in the ACT he is presiding over the opposite. He is presiding over command and control, deep suspicion of market and financial incentives; and he has deep suspicion of community consultation. Do you remember the community consultation where you had to ring up and get permission to come, before they would tell you where you were?

There is quite a contrast between what the Chief Minister is doing on the national stage and what he is doing here. We need to have better planning and the kind of consultation that is more than stage-managed within an inch of it is life and stacked out by public servants to produce predetermined outcomes, indicating that everyone wants the approach the government has chosen in advance. The whole problem is that the community is still complaining to me about the fact that their views were not taken into consideration in that consultation.

Today we heard the Chief Minister talk about the fire damage and the reduction of run-off in the catchments as a result of the January 2003 bushfires. We have to take responsibility for that because not only does it affect us in the ACT, it also affects every crop grower, every rice grower and every person who lives in any small town between here and the Murray mouth.

What we did, or failed to do, in January 2003 will have long-term repercussions not just for our water supply but also for the water supply of everyone who lives in the Murray-Darling Basin downstream of the ACT. We need to hang our heads in shame because we did not act decisively enough and we are now reaping the whirlwind of that indecisiveness. We are now confronted with the possibility of having to spend \$150 million to build a water supply that may not have been needed, except for the vandalism of January 2003.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (4.11): I rise to support Mrs Dunne on this excellent motion. The impact of Canberra as the major urban centre on the Murray-Darling Basin is not important just to us, as the largest city in the basin; it is not important just to the basin itself, which is really the heartland of Australian agriculture; but there is also significant interest around the world as to what we do. In respect of the management of the entire catchment—and your view might vary as to whether it has been good, bad, indifferent or in the middle somewhere—it is considered around the world to be probably the best managed water catchment of this size and kind in the world, the most progressive in terms of the reinforcement by each of the jurisdictions involved, and that the only way to make it work effectively is to do it together.

The interesting thing is that countries like South Africa—other southern hemisphere countries—that have similar problems to ours, given that the cycle that we have also affects them, watch with great interest the leadership that some of the urban centres are also showing. Premier among those urban centres in the Murray-Darling catchment is, of course, the ACT and the city of Canberra. What we say, what we do and what we

achieve is of monumental significance not only to this country but also to other countries around the world.

I remember speaking with Kader Asmal who was, at one stage, the federal minister for water in South Africa. In that role, given his knowledge and the respect his peers held for him, he was also president of the International Dam Commission. The whole question of whether rivers should be dammed and flows controlled is not something that only Australia is discussing. In meetings with Kader Asmal some years ago I can remember his great delight when we got to the issue of water. He said, "Of course, you're on the Murray-Darling!" He knew an awful lot about it.

All the international bodies and all the South African national bodies he was involved with were monitoring what we did. When we talk about reduce, reuse and recycle, we are using words and catchphrases that are being taken up around the world. We are being watched from around the world because, in many ways, we lead in the management of the catchment in the Murray-Darling Basin.

The impact on a city like Canberra has been outlined by Mrs Dunne. I want to take a slightly different tack and look at the effect of what the mismanagement of Canberra's water supply does, beyond our lifestyle. It gets into aesthetics; it gets into the look of the city. That has an impact on how we feel about ourselves, which I suspect has an impact on things like crime. It has an impact, therefore, on investment; it has an impact on things like job creation; it has an impact on things like tourism—and of course that all impacts on the economic viability of the ACT.

At a personal level Canberrans have invested heavily in their personal properties, expecting that there would always be enough water to keep their gardens alive. That might be a false expectation, or it might be an expectation that has to be changed. You only have to look at the progress over the past 40 years of the free plant scheme. I think it would be fair to say that, 30 or 40 years ago, a lot of the plants being issued were inappropriate.

My parents arrived here in 1969 and, as a family, built a new house in Curtin. We were issued with inappropriate native species that did not grow well or, in the conditions here, tended to do silly things like dropping branches, dying at a certain age or not growing to their full capacity. Canberrans have a right to their gardens and there is an expectation, particularly among older Canberrans, that there will always be adequate water to keep those gardens alive.

In some of the practices that we carry out here in the ACT we must ensure that we do not lose the social amenity of where we live. In the short term the crisis of water restrictions means the loss of lawns, and that is perhaps a price we are prepared to pay, but there is tree stress around the city: we are starting to see the loss of shrubs and trees. In our own garden, which we have attempted to water strategically, a number of our gum trees have been affected. One is dead and another looks like it has gone. Throughout the part of Tuggeranong where I live you can see the stress in the gardens which people are desperately trying to keep alive, having nurtured them for a long period of time.

Further cutbacks in watering, another dry summer and the inability of gum trees to rejuvenate during the winter is likely to kill a significant number of street trees, for

instance. Quite importantly, these are trees on leased land—this is government land. Given the government's rhetoric on tree preservation, we have some significant questions on how we, as a city, are to manage our tree resources.

We get a lot of comments, when outdoors and when knocking about the shopping centres on the weekends, from constituents about how tatty the city is looking. I think generally the poor record of upkeep by this government of the city's assets, the increase in graffiti and the impact of the drought on trees and shrubs really does affect the areas where people live. You can hear it in the way people are talking; they are not at all enamoured with the idea of the apparent decline in the look of the city.

As I mentioned before, that has a flow-on effect in terms of sheer confidence. Cities that are vibrant, lively and look good attract confidence; confidence attracts investment and it also attracts tourists. If the place is looking dowdy, or a bit daggy, people are not going to come to the ACT. That impacts on all of us in the long term. It impacts on the government in that they lose revenue, it impacts on the community in that we then cannot have essential services—or it means cutbacks in services—it impacts on young Canberrans who do not get jobs in, say, hospitality. For that matter, it impacts on older Canberrans as well.

There are a number of long-term effects that need to be taken into account. That is why you must have strategies to address this. With regard to the amount of water used in our gardens, we have announced a policy on trying to change the grasses that Canberrans grow. I think it has to be as fundamental as that. We have to go back to what is in our gardens and ask, "Is that appropriate?"

The days of planting Northern Hemisphere Kentucky Bluegrass-type blends are over. They do not work; they are not suited to the ACT. We have some very innovative people in the ACT at places like the botanical gardens, the herbarium and the CSIRO, who are setting up in small business. They are setting up grey water systems that you can put into your house to take all of the water out of the bathroom and laundry and run it into your garden automatically.

We also have some very astute inventors who have come up with systems that will harvest native seed. The problem with growing native lawns is that there has never been enough seed. We have never tackled the problem. I think the impetus is there now to tackle the problem. Unless we start planting native grasses as lawns, it is quite possible that we will just be exacerbating the current problem. It is going to take a lot of innovative thinking to address that problem.

An individual who lives just outside Yass has invented a seed separator that can separate the various sorts of native grasses to facilitate a store of the *Microlina* seeds that work effectively in this area. The good thing about *Microlina* is that it stays greener longer and grows slowly, so it needs less maintenance—and it grows, in the main, in the summertime. It can be a bushfire protection mechanism. I think the lesson that came out of the fires, especially when they hit Duffy, was that the homes that had green grass around them tended to survive better.

If you are growing a native lawn that is active and greener in the summer, you are also putting a fire barrier around your house. In the fire exclusion zone, particularly down the

western side of the city, there is room for significant plantings of native grass as a fire protection barrier. We have to take these opportunities as they present themselves, and we have an opportunity here and now. I think we have an obligation to show best practice in the city. We are asking farmers to show best practice—to get back to sustainable agriculture—and we must do the same.

I notice that, in one of the answers during question time, the Chief Minister said that we have a water-trading arrangement with the ACT—I think he meant New South Wales—with regard to the pipeline. That is a significant backflip from the 1998 sittings, when we passed the water legislation. At that time Mr Corbell said:

The Labor Party has considered very carefully the issue of water allocations, and we are not confident that it is in the best interests of the Territory to enter into such a regime.

It is good to see that we have thrown that one out. It continues:

We are not confident that it will protect the best interests of managing the Territory's water resources.

That apparently has gone by the board. It continues:

We are greatly concerned that it will place the management of these sorts of resources into a competitive market, with the subsequent risk of market failure and the other consequences of such a regime. So, we will be supporting consequential amendments and the key amendment—amendment No. 7.

Basically the Labor Party is saying that it has concerns about a competitive market, as it is called, and the sale and trading of water. I go on to quote Mr Corbell again. He said:

We do not believe that it is an appropriate course of action in dealing with the management of the Territory's water resources.

Obviously there has been an outbreak of commonsense in those opposite—the government benches tend to do that to you. It is good to see that we are at least talking about it; however, I have some concerns about the government's approach. Until recently the advice coming from the CEO of Actew was that the government was particularly interested in the pipeline to Tantangara—the pipeline to nowhere. It is worth having on the record and reiterating for the interests of members that Tantangara Dam is a holding dam. When they have an excess of water in the Snowy Mountain scheme they put it into Tantangara until they can either send it down to Eucumbene, pump it somewhere else or shift it to where it is required.

The holding dam is the first dam that empties out when there is a drought, because there is nothing to pump into it. Tantangara is located in the northern part of the Australian Alps. One water and climate change expert has told me that he thinks that, in 20 years, the chances of any snow that will melt and flow naturally into the Tantangara reservoir—which is the other way some water gets into it—are minimal. From this government we have a proposition to build a pipeline from the ACT to a reservoir that, for most of its life, is empty.

I have been hiking up on the Long Plain area around Tantangara for about 30 years with mates from school. On a number of occasions even the old Currango Homestead is visible. My memory is that that is at one of the deeper parts of the dam. You can see the old buildings because that dam is traditionally so empty, or so low in capacity. If you consult the Snowy Mountain scheme website you will find that, at peak, Tantangara in the last couple of years has had 12 per cent of capacity. This is the water the Chief Minister wants to buy, the water that is not there—because, for most of the year, Tantangara is at about five per cent capacity.

I do not know what sort of negotiator Bob Carr is but I suspect he is not going to have a great deal of sympathy with the ACT buying his water at the height of a drought when Tantangara reservoir is at five per cent or less. So let us be very clear about the option to build a pipeline to the empty dam. It is daft! Why would we build a territory owned asset on land that we do not own across to a dam that we do not control to a dam that is mainly empty so we can buy water from a jurisdiction which, at the height of a time when we would need to buy water, probably has its own problems in either keeping environmental flows going, or supplying water into the Snowy hydro scheme to facilitate the supply of electricity?

Whilst we welcome the backflip from the Labor Party and the fact that they are now considering water trading, which I think is a reasonable use of a resource, particularly if environmental flows are guaranteed, as they are under legislation, and there is an excess at certain parts of the cycle and at certain times of the year, we cannot assist towns like Yass, Goulburn and Cooma and the surrounding areas—the surrounding vineyards.

We all talk about regional engagement, regional sustainability and the Canberra region, the Capital Region. But if we do not have the ability to work with them to further their economic growth, which is a spur to us, then I think we are fooling ourselves. The answer is not to build a pipeline to a dam that is, in the main, empty. The answer is, of course, to build the Naas Valley dam that has been on the books for about 30 years. When it comes to value for money, the building of that dam is probably the best proposition that can be put to the government.

The issue of water tanks is interesting. If everybody put a large water tank on and spent, I think, about \$15,000—

**Mrs Dunne:** A 10,000 litre tank costs about \$2,000.

**MR SMYTH:** We could translate the value of building a dam into putting a tank on every house. A dam for \$150 million will give you 150 gegalitres. A water tank on every house to the same capacity will cost about the same amount of money, but will not give you the same amount of water.

**MR SPEAKER:** The member's time has expired.

**MR STANHOPE** (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Environment and Minister for Community Affairs) (4.26): Mr Speaker, there are many matters which clearly distinguish this government's performance from that of its predecessors.

Sustainable water resource management is at the forefront of our priorities and has been taken very seriously by my government.

My government has prepared a comprehensive, far-reaching and forward-looking water resources strategy, "Think water, act water", which explicitly commits to ensuring future water supply security and a high quality natural and urban environment for the future prosperity of the ACT. This is the first government to explicitly incorporate the concept of sustainability into its water resource management goals and to set challenging yet realistic targets. This is the first government to recognise the need to manage future uncertainties and to identify possible future water sources for more detailed investigation.

We recognise the need for a national approach to managing water, as one of the country's most vital natural resources, and we have been proactively engaging with the Commonwealth and with other states and territories, particularly those of the Murray-Darling Basin. "Think water, act water" recognises our place in the Murray-Darling Basin and the need for the ACT to minimise downstream impacts, including the amount of water we take from the basin and the water quality leaving the ACT.

It is worth reminding the Assembly that at the COAG meeting held in August 2003 the ACT made a firm acknowledgment of our responsibilities, given the ACT's role as an integral part of the Murray-Darling Basin. I announced on 29 August 2003 that the ACT "would allocate \$5 million of new funding to improve water resources management in the territory". I went on to say:

As the largest urban centre in the Murray Darling Basin, the ACT accepts its responsibility to contribute to improving the health of the river system, despite the sound practices we already have in place.

These funds will support the implementation of "Think water, act water" and in particular they will support improved catchment management practices and arrangements, improving the efficiency of water use, increasing the use of treated effluent, implementing water sensitive urban design, and continuing to improve the provision of environmental flows through improvements in their delivery and the science upon which they are based.

Through these measures the ACT will continue to reduce the impact we have on the basin.

The ACT's contribution to this vital initiative is part of the agreement reached today at COAG of a 60:40 State and Commonwealth commitment to the \$500 million program—

which was announced by COAG at that meeting. Accordingly, I am very pleased to formally advise the Assembly that I committed the ACT to the National Water Initiative at last Friday's Council of Australian Governments meeting, which now ensures that these commitments will be implemented.

The new National Water Initiative agreement, which I was part of negotiating and which I was happy to sign on behalf of the ACT last Friday, builds on the earlier 1994 COAG water reforms. The initiative responds to the continuing national imperative to increase

the productivity and efficiency of water use, the need to service rural and urban communities and to ensure the health of river and groundwater systems.

The National Water Initiative is intended to lead to greater certainty for investment and environmental outcomes. It covers a range of areas in which greater compatibility and adoption of best practice approaches to water management will have substantial benefits in terms of stimulating greater investment of the water industry and improving the achievement of environmental outcomes, including those in urban areas.

The key proposals in the agreement centre on water access entitlements, water plans, environmental and other public benefit outcomes, interception, markets and trading, water pricing, urban water management and impacts on the community. The agreement also calls for the preparation of detailed implementation plans in each jurisdiction over the next 12 months and the creation of a national water commission to advise COAG on progress with implementing the agreement and to recommend any actions necessary to better realise its objectives.

Amongst other things, in urban areas, the agreement will:

- implement a national approach to a water efficiency labelling scheme (WELS), to be in place in all jurisdictions by 2005, including mandatory labelling and minimum standards for agreed appliances;
- develop and implement a “smart water mark” for household gardens, including garden irrigation equipment, garden designs and plants;
- review the effectiveness of temporary water restrictions and associated public education strategies and assess the scope for extending low-level restrictions as standard practice;
- develop national health and environmental guidelines for priority elements of water sensitive urban designs by 2005; and
- develop national guidelines for evaluating options for water sensitive urban developments, both in new urban subdivisions and high-rise buildings by 2006.

The ACT has led the way and provided an example for other states and territories in the development and implementation of our “Think water, act water” strategy. An agreed national approach complements the strategy the ACT has already committed to and has begun to fund and implement. As ACT arrangements are already mostly consistent with the National Water Initiative agreement, we should have little difficulty contributing to an effective national approach.

The most significant direct potential benefit to come from the National Water Initiative agreement relates to trading. If the ACT were to seek water from Tantangara in New South Wales—one of the three options that ACTEW is currently doing detailed scientific and other analyses of—the trading arrangements and clearer specifications of water entitlements would be of assistance. Some flow-on effects could arise from New South Wales improving water management in areas surrounding the ACT, particularly in relation to farm dams and bores.

In addition to the National Water Initiative agreement, the ACT is also a signatory to the intergovernmental agreement on the Murray-Darling Basin. Participation in this agreement particularly emphasises the government’s commitment to ensuring that

Canberra, as the largest urban centre in the Murray-Darling Basin, accepts its responsibility to contribute to the health of the river system.

Taking account of this specific commitment to the Murray-Darling, the government committed around \$15 million of new funding to the implementation of “Think water, act water”, as well as to the development of improved catchment management arrangements. These initiatives will all directly improve the health of the Murray-Darling system.

This government is the first since self-government to recognise the fundamental importance of water to the economic prosperity of the region. In “Think water, act water”, the government has confirmed its earlier commitment to develop the integrated water supply strategy and expects to negotiate this strategy with the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments before the end of this year.

Securing our future water supply involves arrangements with New South Wales and with the Commonwealth. These will have a national, regional and subregional focus, respectively through the ACT’s participation in the National Water Initiative, negotiation of an ACT water cap in the Murray-Darling context and an integrated water supply strategy that we are currently developing and negotiating with the region.

In negotiating the integrated water supply strategy, the ACT has consistently argued to New South Wales and the Commonwealth that water security issues, in large part catchment management, are as important as future supply arrangements. That is also the thinking that is reflected in “Think water, act water”.

Initial discussions by officials on the integrated water supply strategy for New South Wales have included cross-border catchment management arrangements with the express intent of negotiating an agreement that protects and improves the Googong catchment upstream of the territory while also committing to our part in securing the quality of water that leaves the ACT. Recognising that regional settlement patterns and water supply are inextricably linked, we will be seeking sustainable urban design and form, as well as settlement patterns that will lessen urban impact on the basin.

The ACT is coordinating work with both the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments on a shared understanding of the legal arrangements and obligations in respect of cross-border water supply as a necessary first step in the development of that strategy. We are partners with both the Commonwealth and New South Wales in this work, and I am very happy to advise the Assembly that there are very high levels of cooperation among officials from the ACT, New South Wales and Commonwealth governments in the development of a coordinated approach to all cross-border issues and the management of the catchments we respectively rely upon.

Key issues for the ACT in the preparation of an integrated water supply strategy include the need to promote sustainability, secure water quality and catchment run-off into Googong Dam and ensure that water supply from the ACT does not support inappropriate development. In that regard it is to be noted, and perhaps be concerned about, that the Leader of the Opposition has now indicated that one of the reasons we need to push ahead with the construction of the Naas dam is so that we can irrigate vineyards that might occur within the region. If that is a justification for the development

of the Naas dam, it raises grave concerns to me that we should build a dam that facilitates more irrigation.

It shows a wonderfully sensitive understanding of the issues in relation to the scarcity of water supply that the Leader of the Opposition has just indicated that his justification for building the Naas dam without any consideration of the economic, social or environmental concerns is that he will be able to irrigate grapes. What a ripper! “Let’s build the Naas dam so that we can irrigate the region’s grapes”—in a debate about what a scarce and valuable resource water is!

As can be seen, the ACT government has a strong, ongoing commitment to the Murray-Darling Basin, and we have backed it with significant financial commitment. We are implementing strategies that will not only secure sustainable water management throughout the basin but will also set a benchmark for responsible water management for other jurisdictions to aspire to.

**MR SPEAKER:** The member’s time has expired. Ms Tucker—to discuss a matter of public importance.

**MS TUCKER (4.36):** It is indeed a matter of public importance, and I thank Mrs Dunne for bringing it on for discussion. The first point I want to make is that on World Environment Day in June 2002 I moved a motion for the Assembly to call on the government to develop an ACT water conservation and reuse strategy to ensure that the water needs of any increase in population could be met as far as possible within existing capacity.

I noted in that motion that the building of further water supply dams in the ACT should be avoided, that the water level in the ACT via the Murrumbidgee River should be of no lesser quality than the water flowing into the ACT and that adequate flows should be maintained in the ACT’s waterways to maintain their environmental values. Then I proceeded to call on the government to take particular steps, including developing a strategy. Of course, now we see the “Think water, act water” document, and things have moved on somewhat.

I want to remind members, and put on the record, what we are actually dealing with here. There is no disagreement among members of any party about the fact that we have a problem but, when you look at the response—I could talk in particular about the one that has just come out of the COAG meeting—there are obviously disagreements about the severity of the problem and how soon we need to deal with it.

I like the list of vital signs in Bill Phillip’s article in the *Canberra Times* of 28 August 2003. I will read them out:

1. Water diversions from the Basin have reached (and at times exceeded) 79 per cent of the system’s average annual discharge to the sea in South Australia.
2. Under natural conditions, the Basin was considered drought-affected five years out of 100; it is now 61 years out of 100.
3. River red gums and black box trees along the lower Murray are seriously affected by lack of floods and dying as you read this.
4. Waters are regulated by 3567 licensed dams and weirs, and also by around the same number of unlicensed structures.

5. Tens of thousands of farm dams and off-stream storages are also denying water from the rivers.
6. Dryland salinity affects 300,000 hectares now, with the prediction this could increase 11-fold over the next 50 years.
7. The cost of dryland salinity is expected to escalate to between \$600 million and \$1 billion annually over the next 100 years.
8. In-stream salinity could mean that within 20 years Adelaide's drinking water will not meet World Health Organisation (WHO) standards for two days out of five.
9. Salinity levels in the Macquarie, Namoi, Lachlan, Loddon, Warrego, Balonne and Condamine rivers are expected to exceed WHO standards for 50 per cent of the time by 2050.
10. About 4000km of rivers in the basin are artificially chilled by thermal pollution.
11. Algal blooms are now common place, adding costs to water use and posing risks to health.
12. Turbidity levels due to soil erosion are a major problem along vast stretches of the rivers.
13. Native fish are at 10 per cent of their pre-European level; eight of 35 species threatened; Murray Cod numbers down 30 per cent in the last 50 years.
14. European carp now represent 60-90 per cent of the fish biomass in some areas; densities can reach one per square metre of water surface.
15. Since European settlement, 259 animal species and 247 plants have become extinct or are endangered, vulnerable or rare.
16. 123 out of 251 woodland bird species from the Basin's wheat and sheep belt are now under threat, 38 of these having been officially listed as extinct, endangered or vulnerable.
17. The platypus has an uncertain status and future.
18. Willows are a looming threat to the waterways.
19. Fifty per cent of the former floodplain wetlands, the natural filters in the system, are gone.
20. Several of the nationally and internationally recognised wetlands of the Basin are under threat.

This MPI focuses on Canberra's impact on the Murray-Darling Basin. People are highlighting what I would agree are the three main points. First is the question of supply: how we can reuse water. Second is the question of how we live, how we change our culture: do we want green gardens and irrigated verges, as the NCA still requires in the National Capital Plan? Third is the question of the quality of water that leaves the ACT. There is an obvious fourth point: the impact our water use has on the ACT ecology and downstream ecology.

People have spoken about the way we can use water and the way we can reuse water and how well we are doing that. I agree with Mrs Dunne that there has not been a strong enough commitment to the reuse of water. In fact, a number of developers who have spoken to me recently who have quite innovative ideas for their developments about the reuse of water are finding real obstruction in ACTPLA. There is real paranoia in ACTPLA about the reuse of water.

That is not so much the case in New South Wales. In fact, one developer was telling me that the response from the ACT bureaucracy to his proposal was, "If you can get it accredited in New South Wales, we might consider accrediting it here." These grey water schemes are not that risky, and I think that the ACT needs to look at its standards and understand that the imperative is so great that we need to move away from being quite so

defensive. This is water for gardens that we are talking about at this point; it is still such a major issue.

On water quality, I acknowledge the work that Environment ACT does in water quality monitoring. The *ACT water report*, which is produced by Environment ACT, comes up with an analysis of our water. I have just been having a look again at the 2002-03 *ACT water report*. It has indicators; it has biological monitoring. I will read out a little bit of it, on the biological monitoring. It says that the results for Spring 2002 and Autumn 2003 show, I quote:

There is significant biological impairment recorded in both the Spring and Autumn samples. Urban activity, agricultural and forest activities resulting in sediment addition leading to habitat degradation are thought to be a major cause of degradation.

The spring 2002 sample shows the reference sites maintained a Band A rating, even though there was a drought. These sites fall on the Murrumbidgee River, which has a large volumetric flow, and more resilience to the drought conditions. Tuggeranong, Ginninderra and Jerrabomberra Creeks and Queanbeyan and Molonglo rivers all indicated serious levels of impairment. These sites fall into rural urban and industrial zonings, which seems to indicate that the effect of the low flows and prolonged drought conditions, is being exacerbated by these land uses.

The Autumn 2003 sample occurred after the January bushfires. This combined with the worsening drought can be seen in the results from the majority of sites...

I think we could see a much greater interest in this sort of reporting from the government and see them set targets for the quality of water that we can all work to and see them be accountable.

I also want to remind members that the Greens have been calling for an upper Murrumbidgee catchment authority, and the reason we have called for it is that it is quite consistent with the Wentworth group notion that we need to have community-based, regional catchment authorities for all major water catchments. They need to be properly resourced, and they need to be statutory and community-based catchment management authorities.

The reason this is so important is the argument that Mr Smyth put up: "We've got Tantangara, and New South Wales has got Googong, and there are issues around management." We obviously have to move away from the lines on the map and understand the regional responsibility and the regional catchment work. That is a really fundamental step to addressing our regional responsibilities for water.

**MR HARGREAVES (4.46):** I welcome the motion put forward by the opposition today and the opportunity it affords the government to assist them in getting up to speed with what the government has been doing for some time. Following extensive consultation with the ACT community and the input of advice from leading national experts, the government released the "Think water, act water" strategy for sustainable water resource management on 28 April this year.

This strategy contains an extensive range of initiatives designed to meet the following six objectives:

- to provide a long-term, reliable source of water for the ACT and region;
- to increase the efficiency of water use;
- to promote the development and implementation of an integrated regional approach to the ACT-New South Wales cross-border water supply and management;
- to protect the water quality of the ACT rivers, lakes and aquifers; to maintain and enhance environmental amenity and recreational and designated use values; and to protect the health of people in the ACT and down river;
- to facilitate the incorporation of water sensitive urban design principles into urban, commercial and industrial development; and
- to promote and provide for community involvement and partnership in the management of the ACT water resources strategy.

I will remind the Assembly that in order to achieve these objectives the strategy sets key targets to focus our attention. They are:

- to reduce mains water usage per capita by 12 per cent by 2013 and by 25 per cent by 2023, achieved through water efficiency, sustainable water recycling and use of stormwater and rainwater;
- to increase the use of treated waste water from five per cent to 20 per cent by 2013;
- to ensure that the level of nutrients and sediments entering ACT waterways is no greater than from a well-managed rural landscape; and
- to reduce the peak flow and volume of urban stormwater flows, so that the run-off event that occurs, on average once every three months, is no larger than it was prior to the development.

This government is proud of the fact that “Think water, act water” will not only fulfil these objectives but will go further. It implements the government’s sustainability policy because it will simultaneously provide for people, protect our place and create prosperity, now and into the future. Importantly, the strategy recognises the critical importance of a secure water supply and of a high quality natural and urban environment to the future prosperity of the ACT and region. It addresses the risks and uncertainties associated with ensuring a secure water supply.

The strategy recognises our place in the Murray-Darling Basin and the need for the ACT to minimise downstream impacts, including the amount of water we take from the basin and the water quality leaving the ACT. The government has made a real commitment to the implementation of “Think water, act water” in the \$8.42 million over the next four years as part of an overall commitment of \$15 million to responsible water management. A strategy of this complexity and importance to the ACT requires adequate resourcing for successful implementation, and the government has ensured that this is the case.

In relation to future water supply, studies undertaken by ACTEW have short-listed three options for further detailed investigation, although a new water source may not necessarily be confined to these three options. The investigations are being designed to determine the best solution for the ACT. This solution may be a smaller version of one of

these options, a combination of these options or an option that has not yet been identified.

The opposition clearly would have us reject the need for proper investigations to support the expenditure of large amounts of public money on a project that will have enormous implications for generations to come. This would be a totally irresponsible path to take, and I do not believe that members of the ACT community would thank us for it.

During consultations on the preparation of "Think water, act water", the community emphasised the need to do full and proper investigations into the need for a new water supply source and the best option. Because of the very nature of large water infrastructure projects, any option is likely to trigger the application of the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Even if the territory were to blindly and irresponsibly commit to the construction of a new source now, we would eventually be forced back to square one to fully, properly and logically assess the need and the relative merits of the different options. This course of action would inevitably lead to delays in undertaking the full range of necessary investigations, putting at risk the capacity to have in place a new water source if, and when, needed.

I emphasise that the government remains committed to securing a reliable water supply for the ACT. ACTEW has begun the process of assessing options. The government expects to have the results of this work by March of next year. This work is being done expeditiously, but carefully. We do not need to panic and spend a lot of money now on what might not be the best option for the ACT.

What do the experts say about our approach? The Institute of Sustainable Futures, who are leading Australian experts in water demand management, advise us that the most cost-effective means of increasing water supply for the ACT in the short term are water efficiency measures. It is estimated that these alone will enable the ACT to meet its initial water use target of a 12 per cent reduction per capita by 2013. Additional savings will also be secured through sustainable reuse and, as mentioned above, a range of other measures.

Professor Paul Perkins from the ANU, an advisor to many governments on water issues and the previous Chief Executive of ACTEW, said recently that the government should not rush into the construction of a new dam if it has the priority to make the most efficient use of what we already have.

In summary, this government takes sustainable water resources management very seriously and has prepared a comprehensive water resources strategy, incorporating sustainability principles and challenging but realistic targets. This is the first ACT government to put forward a policy and strategy to ensure future water supply security for the ACT. It has the support of the community. Water supply security is not just about dams; it is also about the efficient use of water within the ACT and the wider region.

"Think water, act water" is a comprehensive strategy for the efficient management of the ACT's water resources and acknowledges that we are the largest urban centre in the Murray-Darling Basin. It incorporates a responsible process to ensure that we are able to

choose the right new supply option at the right time, with the full knowledge of all implications—environmental, social and economic. It would be irresponsible to do otherwise.

**MS DUNDAS (4.53):** With the time I have left I would like to raise concerns in relation to what the ACT has been arguing for at the Murray-Darling Basin Commission meetings. I understand that the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council is seeking agreement from water users along the length of the river system that water usage should be capped at current levels, with the ultimate goal of increasing river flows over time.

It is disappointing then that our Chief Minister has argued at council meetings that the ACT's water usage should be allowed to increase as our population grows. This position is short-sighted and undermines the spirit of intergovernmental corporation that underpins the Murray-Darling Basin agreement. It is akin to the federal government's embarrassing efforts to get special permission for Australia to increase greenhouse gas emissions instead of committing to emission cuts like other developed countries.

The fact is that the ACT not only can cap water use at current levels but quite possibly can also reduce our overall consumption even as our population rises. Per capita water consumption in the territory has dropped by almost 50 per cent since 1991, without the need for any major changes in our lifestyle or urban landscape. But overall water consumption is only down 10 per cent on 1991 levels, and the recent drought and water restrictions have highlighted the imbalance between our water consumption and supply. Fresh approaches and renewed commitment to water conservation are needed.

We need to be looking at water reuse as a major strategy to actively take pressure off our reservoirs. Melbourne Water is striving for a water reuse target of 20 per cent by 2010. Overseas, Florida is already reusing 34 per cent of its water, and California is reusing 63 per cent. The ACT has explored water reuse through trials, but we have not committed to a water reuse target, and that commitment is long overdue.

We have had no major changes in water management over the last number of years. The capture and treatment of stormwater is an essential first step towards restoring our position as leaders in water management, creating clear, clean lake water for us to use during summer and making sure that the water we are releasing through the Murray-Darling Basin is clean and usable.

**MR SPEAKER:** The discussion is concluded.

## **Appropriation Bill 2004-2005**

[Cognate paper:

Estimates 2004-2005—Select Committee

Report—government response]

### **Detail stage**

Schedule 1—Appropriations

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.4—Chief Minister, \$76,209,000 (net cost of outputs), \$27,856,000 (capital injection) and \$590,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$104,655,000.

Debate resumed.

**MRS DUNNE (4.56):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I hope that all members have held the thought that they had at half past 12 this afternoon. I was speaking about what I thought was the lack of imagination of the Office of Women when they decided that \$8 million funding for the dragway was not an initiative that benefited women, presumably on the basis of thinking that women do not go to motor sports events. But many women do enjoy motor sports events, either directly or indirectly. They might go themselves, and it often affords an opportunity to get the men out of the house, which many women consider to be a benefit to them.

It was a bit condescending of the Office of Women to go through and run some arbitrary set of rules over all the budget initiatives and come up with the fact that 87 per cent of them were of benefit to women. We need to get ourselves a bit more focused here and come up with an appropriate statement on a women's budget.

There were some good initiatives in the women's budget. Ms Dundas has talked about the women's grants scheme, which is a modest start and may do some good. Even though it is a modest amount of money, and agency funded, I am impressed by the scholarships for more disadvantaged women to afford them training at the Institute of Company Directors. I think that would be a great step forward for us in this place.

There are other issues in the Chief Minister's Department that have been touched on. Ms Tucker has touched, quite rightly, on the extent to which the Office of Sustainability has a whole-of-government, coordinated approach. There are many occasions when you scratch your head and think that, if we really did have a fully functioning Office of Sustainability, we would have a better outcome.

Recently, during the visit to Canberra of Hunter Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute, on one of the occasions I had the opportunity to speak with her and at the public lectures, she was very enthusiastic, saying, "You Australians have so much in your favour. You have so many tools at your disposal. You have progressed so far down the path of sustainability."

In a conversation afterwards, when I quizzed her on this and asked her what she thought was the best thing we had done going down that path, she pointed to the Western Australian government's initiatives in sustainability, the appointment of their Office of Sustainability and their sustainability reports, and the work being done by the personnel there, which far eclipsed anything that was done anywhere else in the world in relation to sustainability.

Again, it was not the ACT leading the country. What we hear about is the office being underresourced. We should not criticise the officers for not achieving as much as we would like them to because they do not have the resources and they do not have real backing, real impetus or real leadership from this Chief Minister.

**MRS BURKE (5.00):** I obviously welcome and support the funding for women and that the grants and programs continue to receive good support financially from the government. But I had to smile when I saw the WEL media release saying, "Finally

some good initiatives: now where's the plan?" I had to smile because I am rather surprised that this is one of the few areas where the government does not have a plan.

*At 5.00 pm in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.*

**MRS BURKE:** While we welcome that, it is disappointing to note, by their absence, funding and a strategic plan for men's issues. A couple of members of the committee raised that in the Estimates Committee report. A strategic plan for men's issues in this budget is sadly lacking, and there are significant issues for men in our community: men as fathers, men as heads of families, single fathers and increasing suicide rates.

We do not hear much from this government about the issues of men, and that rather disappoints me. I hope that in the not too distant future some attention will be given to them. Indicative of the level of commitment of this government to men's matters is its pooh-poohing of any attempts by the Liberal opposition, or me, to raise the issue of the plight of men in our community, which is disappointing. Of course, I welcome the funding for the child and family centres and hope that the government continues the theme of the family when it considers its proposal for a commissioner for children.

I have already tabled my legislation for a children and family commissioner along similar lines to the Commissioner for Children in New Zealand, which is being kicked off with \$28 million funding over four years for six commissioners in New Zealand. I note that it is a Labor government, which seems to be fully supportive and inclusive, but some comment was made by some person about the fact that just having the notion of a children's commissioner sent the wrong message. What is in a word? We could all argue that one. But I hope the government considers some of the merits of my legislation and ensures that the family is fully included in any decisions made about children and that decisions are not made in isolation.

We look to the new units and the office of children and family support. Again, we see a cost of a million dollars. Perhaps we will be talking about that later on, but I just wanted to add it here, given that it is now under the wing of the Chief Minister's Department. It would appear to me, and it is clear from the Vardon report, that this new unit—much like the people responsible for failing to report suspected cases of child abuse—has simply been moved sideways. It is more shuffling of the deckchairs.

I am concerned that this will do little, if anything, to change a particular culture that exists in this area, and that is the feedback that I get. We have again thrown a lot of money or done some sideways shuffling and moving—a big cost—when we could have isolated the work within the department without having to move fixtures and fittings. I have to ask why the new unit needed to be moved at all. We need to change the people and the culture, not simply move furniture.

I have a comment about the Community Inclusion Board—again, just over \$8 million to be spent over four years—based on the South Australian model. I understand this has been a monumental failure in South Australia. When I did some research and got feedback on it, there were great and high hopes for this inclusion board—it was established amid much hype. There have been a few media opportunities, but very little

else. That does bring me concern because it is a lot of money—money I believe could have been better spent on the community sector. It is a slap in the face to those groups who work extremely hard in our community to currently give government the advice.

One member of this new board told me the reason for the formation of such a body. “These groups have never been able to coordinate themselves, Jacqui.” I found that absolutely staggering, and I put the question to the government that surely they have the capacity to get these groups together. That is what the government are there to do. They are there to show leadership and demonstrate that they are the head and people can follow.

Surely it does not take this amount of money to organise an information flow. Or is the formation of this group simply a looking after mates exercise? Is it just a game, putting the government at arms length to decision making? I will watch with interest the outcomes of this board, and I sincerely hope that the Canberra community and the taxpayer get bang for buck out of the board because I have no doubt there are some excellently credentialled people on it. I will be watching carefully.

Business support could have been strengthened. I see a missed opportunity for this do-nothing government. “Steady as she goes. We’ll just sit on our hands and hope and pray and keep our fingers, and everything else, crossed that it all steers quite nicely to the election. Then we’ll think about what we do.” We have got all these plans, we have had all these reviews, at an extortionately high cost to the community, and we have the glossy brochures from a government that was not going to do all this—from what I can remember when I was sitting where it is sitting.

Whilst I acknowledge a substantial increase for the Tourism Corporation, I see little or no direct funding commitment to micro and small business, and that gives me some concern. As I have said before, businesses will survive and succeed in spite of this government. They simply have to; it is in their nature to do so. I would say that we have a government that is not business friendly at all. It just wants to depend on something I have previously said: that business people are survivors. But a little bit of help from time to time would not go astray.

We all know that there has been a shift in employment in this town for the better and that we depend on our small to medium enterprises and micro businesses to do a lot of the employing now. Whilst I know there is the “if it isn’t busted why fix it?” approach, businesses certainly could do with a lot more help than is out there. Again, the lack of new funding is a disappointment for those in small business.

**MR STEFANIAK (5.10):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to use my second 10 minutes to talk about a couple of other issues—firstly, the one large issue I left out of my first burst on the sport and rec area, and that is the dragway. It was interesting to query several government ministers in relation to that. Of course, members will be aware that this government, whilst not seeming terribly keen to honour whatever commitments it did or did not give before the 2001 election, suddenly seems to have been spurred into some form of activity by the opposition’s motor sport policy.

To give it credit, it is pleasing to see \$8 million spread over two years for the dragway. That is exactly what we felt should be spent, and it is what the proponents have indicated

is a reasonable figure for a dragway, when one looks at the study done in late 2001. What is more worrying in relation to the dragway is whether it is ever going to be built. Other parts of the budget say it is dependent on a site, and all sorts of problems are now cropping up in relation to sites.

It was pleasing, to an extent, to see that the minister identified the two preferable sites, block 51 and block 52. The study recommends block 52 as the best site. There are some Commonwealth issues, and I understand from the evidence of the Estimates Committee that they might take several months to be resolved. There is a 39 per cent easement type of arrangement for, or a Commonwealth interest in, that block.

Block 51 was one of the preferred sites for the prison. It is not going to go there now. That has no such impediments—except that if the government was serious about a dragway why did it then go and renew all the 50-year leases in that area? If my memory serves me correctly, the evidence before the committee was that block 51 was renewed for 20 years—which is what all of those leases have happening to them—in April of last year. That was a time when the government did not seem too keen to build a dragway and was desperately trying to renege on whatever commitments it gave before the last election there.

That makes it harder and possibly more expensive because to do this properly the government would need to resume the land. Minister Corbell indicated that the land could be resumed if it was for a public purpose, and it was interesting that he seemed to have a different idea from the Treasurer. When I asked him, he gave some exposition of what “public purpose” meant. He indicated that if the site were to be purchased by the government and effectively remain in government control it would be okay. If it were to be bought and then given to another entity that would take over the lease as such, that would be a problem.

I do not think any of the proponents of the dragway suggest that the government should relinquish ownership of the actual land. What they are proposing is some arrangement with government, be it a trust—the planning minister even used that word—or an arrangement whereby they effectively run the site for the government. After all, the government is putting in \$8 million.

On that basis, even on what the government said, there is no terribly good reason why they cannot proceed. They have cost the community a lot more than they needed to. If they had been fair dinkum about a dragway they would not have resumed several of those leases, which were due to expire in December 2005 and which they renewed early. That will cost us more money. I still suspect that some of the reason for that occurring was to look good by putting money in this budget and at the end of the day throwing up their hands and saying, “It’s all too hard; we can’t do this. There are no suitable sites in the territory. Awfully sorry.”

I do not think that is going to wash with the motor sports community. If the government does whatever Mr Corbell suggested it is able to do, whilst it may cost us a little bit more money as a result of basic incompetence and how they went about it, we can still have this much needed motor sports facility. If the government thinks block 51 is the best site and it is easier than block 52 because of Commonwealth considerations, then I would urge the government to go for it.

It is a sorry saga how the government could have handled this better and did not, and I have great suspicions about whether they are fair dinkum about building this much needed facility. If it is built by then, there will be potential for further motor sports activity in the Majura Valley, which has now been mentioned in various studies as being the best site for such activity because it is very close to being under the flight path.

I now mention another aspect of the report, which you, Mr Deputy Speaker, referred to. It relates to comment in the committee's *Territory as parent* report. The case you refer to is a classic case in point. There were eight different mandated persons, any one of whom, had they reported the incident correctly, might well have enabled this six-year-old girl's life to be saved.

I am getting a little bit tired of the minister trying to blame the former government. This act came into effect in about May 2000, for her edification, and I ceased to be minister for family services on December the 15th and in fact took over A-G's then. For her further edification, I have had several detailed conversations with the Community Advocate, some very late in the term of the last government. I recall a very lengthy conversation in my office not long before the caretaker period. The Community Advocate was very concerned about the Gallop inquiry, and she had ample opportunity to mention the other concerns but did not.

When I look at the chronology of the report by Cheryl Vardon, I think the government is really clutching at straws in trying to blame the former government. It will say, "You didn't resource it enough." Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, we did not have a huge amount of money when we became the government. The evidence there indicates that, out of all areas, that one was resourced and had the resourcing increased. The figure of 50 per cent was mentioned at some stage during estimates.

I am pleased to see that now, after all this has occurred, this government is putting further money into this area. But the point, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you made in your speech before lunchtime and the point I make today is that, whilst resourcing will cure a lot of ills, it cannot do everything. It cannot ensure that people are responsible for their own actions. People do need to be responsible for their own actions.

One thing that worries me about this government is that it is very selective about who should be responsible for their own actions. The excuse used for people who quite clearly had not done their job would not be used by the government for a business that had not complied with occupational health and safety laws and regulations. When eight different people who were meant to take certain action did not, quite clearly there is a role for the Public Sector Management Act and, indeed, a duty for government to investigate under that act and take whatever action is needed as a result. That is something that is always rather sad to do, and I had to do it once as Minister for Education. But it is the duty of a government to ensure that that actually occurs. This government has certainly failed in that and, from the response we have here to recommendation 18 of the committee's report, it does not seem to have any intention of doing it.

I would point out to the government in relation to this area that I have had a look at the Vardon report. It details a number of incidents where children have been at risk. These

are not so much in the foster care arrangement but when the child goes back to a completely dysfunctional family and some sort of abuse occurs. That was the case of the little girl that you mentioned, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is the case in most of the examples given in the Vardon report.

Again, for Ms Gallagher's information, situations like that would sometimes be suggested to me as minister, and I caused them to be investigated. Indeed, some court action ensued as a result, occasionally with the final result not being completely to my satisfaction. Those are the situations that need to be investigated; those are the situations where we will continue to have children at risk.

There have been occasions in the past when government officials have not done their duty, have not obeyed the law and have not lived up to their responsibilities, and consequences should flow from that. It is not good enough just to sweep that under the carpet. The government really needs to lift its game because I do not want to see again a situation where two little girls like these—one about two and the other about six in the case you and I are both well aware of, Mr Deputy Speaker—die as a result of these problems. I certainly do not want to see that happen again.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (5.18): Mr Deputy Speaker, the Chief Minister's Department is an essential department. It has the task of coordinating much activity and providing leadership to all the public service. As well, it overlooks a number of very serious parts of the portfolio—everything from ageing through to women's issues—and so it is important to scrutinise it appropriately.

Some of what I will say has been covered already. But it is important to note that, for instance, under the women's grant we finally see the Minister for Women paying attention to her portfolio. There is a single initiative worth \$100,000 to improve the status of women in the ACT by supporting women's groups and research undertaken by the Office of Women. By any stretch of the imagination, that is a very small commitment to women's issues. After considering all the work that has been done by a select committee of this Assembly and the government response to its recommendations, I think we can say that in this Assembly the government has a severe lack of interest in women's issues.

I think the most telling aspect of the government's budget is the fact that this year \$1½ million dollars has been allocated for the Community Inclusion Board. If I recall correctly what the Chief Minister said, it was words to the effect of, "They'll tell us where there is need and what we should spend on it." Surely it is the fundamental role of government to know what the need is. If they are out there doing their work, what is the purpose of having an advisory body?

I note the shift towards advisory bodies that are now being paid for by the government. When we were in office we were always able to get people to willingly sit on boards, but we are now getting boards with directors who are picking up fees. This is money that really should be spent on the community. If you have got a government that is so out of touch with the people of the ACT and so out of touch with reality that they do not know where to spend these funds, then that is a government that should not be in office.

This is a very tired looking government that has produced a very tired looking budget. They have produced a very tired initiative that I like to call the community slush fund rather than the Community Inclusion Board, because all it is is a pot of money that somebody will tell the Chief Minister where to spend. If he does not have the ideas, the drive or the initiative to work out for himself where this money should go, then perhaps he should not be in office.

I note that active ageing is listed as one of the big initiatives and we are told that positive ageing is being promoted through programs such as the ACT seniors card. I know you have got a lot of interest in this issue, Mr Deputy Speaker, and you have been an advocate for ACT seniors in particular for a long time.

It is interesting to pick up on a matter concerning computers that Ms Dundas raised in question time. The government is keen on the aged being active but it does not want them online. When we were in government we initiated work to make online access available through public libraries. We realised that there was an enormous unmet need out there, particularly to get seniors online as a way of keeping them actively involved and engaged with their community, with loved ones, with friends and with world events—with what was going on.

A program that put computers into the ACT library system to give the public access to the Internet was initiated and it has been virtually booked out ever since. You have got to book on for time; you have got to book on for lessons. But we find that this is the budget that logs you off if you are an older Canberra. It will be difficult to re-engage once you get logged off and shunned by a government. I think the unfortunate thing is that the minister responsible was not even aware that this program is to be diminished. He does not know what the effect will be or what needs to be done to compensate for this move.

What sort of commitment does the government have to the aged? The government's lack of interest in concessions, their lack of interest in the ACT seniors card, their lack of interest in negotiating reciprocal transport arrangements with other jurisdictions and their lack of interest in processing a DA to open up another aged care bed facility in the ACT, are compounded by the final insult of the aged being told, "It's time for you guys to log off, you're too old."

There is still interest in the dragway. The conundrum is that we have a government that on one hand says they are committed to the dragway and motor sports in the ACT and yet everything they do indicates that they have no interest in making it happen. This is sham money. It is put there to allay some people's fears but in doing so I think it has actually raised within the community a great deal of ire. The \$8 million has been welcomed—it is \$8 million that we will spend after October if we are elected. But it is money that will not be spent by this government. They have put so many obstacles in front of themselves, obstacles to trip themselves up, that you really do have to question the Treasurer's commitment to the dragway.

I think it is quite important that we look at business and tourism. We have a white paper, costing close to \$1 million to produce, that is severely lacking in serious targets and certainly timelines. I think you will find that this budget is seriously lacking in commitment to actually make things happen. If we talk first and foremost about tourism,

we note that there is an additional \$7.8 million—call it \$8 million. The outyear budget already contained \$12 million, which was a reduction when the V8 money ran out. So if you add \$8 million we get a figure of about \$20 million. That is still well short of the commitment that the Liberal Party have said they will put into tourism.

We understand how important tourism is. We have been trying to say to the government, but they seem to be refusing to listen, that the opportunity is there when you have surpluses to actually build the future—to buy a future, as it were—not simply to squander the money. We welcome the additional \$7.8 million into tourism marketing and promotion but it is well short of the \$12 million that the Liberal Party has offered. You only had to listen to any of the presentations made by Trevor Mules, Brock Cambourne or Gary Watson to know the sort of opportunity that exists in the ACT.

Finally, after many years—and I acknowledge that both governments have for many years been working with the NCA and with the national attractions—we now seem to have a spirit of cooperation to move forward together, and that is important because one group cannot do it in isolation from another. What we need to do is make sure that the money is there now to capitalise on that opportunity. There is growing domestic tourism and we are getting some of it. However, I am not convinced we are getting our share of it and I am not convinced that the government is really backing a winner here, in the way they quite easily could and should.

We will keep an eye on tourism marketing and promotion. What we do not have is an answer to some of the dead spots in the Canberra tourism calendar. Recently, of course, we had the Queen's Birthday long weekend and I understand the accommodation numbers for the weekend were quite flat.

There has been some argy-bargy in the papers lately about the question of whether tourism is flourishing. Some of the attractions are saying, "Yes, we are doing very well" and, based on that, the minister for tourism has gone out and said tourism is flourishing. But if you look at the hotel sector you will see that, firstly, the numbers are probably flatter than expected; and, secondly, the actual take has been flat for several years. So the profitability of the accommodation sector is not what it should be, and that is an indication that the market is not as rosy as the Treasurer would paint. There are still some problems. There are things that need to be addressed but we do not see where this is happening in this budget. We do not see the sort of leadership from the Treasurer that tourism should be getting.

I think the same can be said for the small and micro business programs. A figure of \$3.395 million is listed in the budget papers for these programs. There is a knowledge fund, export growth, a small business program, and mentoring assistance. Much of it is simply rebadging or an extension of existing programs. Again, it is hard to see any money there that really says, "We are committed to the white paper"; it is hard to see any ideas that actually say, "We are committed to small business in this jurisdiction."

The problem for the Treasurer then is what does he do? He has got a white paper but they almost seem afraid to use it. It may be a flaw in the white paper; it may be that the white paper is just so much flim-flam that it is not worth funding. We have got some ideas, we have got lots of gloss, but what we do not have is a solid core of what it is you can do to promote business and grow new businesses in the ACT.

I note that the Office of Film, Television and Digital Media got \$300,000. It finally got some money 18 months after the opposition said, "Let's establish a film industry here and make sure we take it forward." So, again, the government has copied what we said. It was dragged kicking and screaming to tourism and it was dragged kicking and screaming to tourism funding. It has followed our lead but only at two-thirds of the rate that is needed. We said we would have an office of film and that we would do what was required to set up a film industry here. The fledgling industry is here and 20 or so facilities are into serious film making. We have award-winning film makers here. I will take my second 10 minutes, if I may, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes. Proceed.

**MR SMYTH:** The Treasurer and I were at the small business awards last night, where last year's winner, Bearcage, gave a presentation on how their year as the Telstra small business of the year for the ACT went. Clearly, we have got some of the best of the best here in the territory, but it did take the government a further 18 months to at least get on board with the idea that I had floated in December 2002. This has been the case with business generally. The government does not follow our pro business attitude.

You have the paradox that in the white paper the government says, "We are unashamedly pro business" and yet, as we have said many times in this place and will continue to say many times between now and the election, this is a government that is not pro business. You can say it, you can talk the talk, but these guys cannot walk the walk. I think they will find between now and the election a growing response from business communities—small, medium and large—to their approach to business. There should have been further payroll tax relief in both the last budget and this budget—in fact, all the budgets since they have come to office. But it is a case of "No payroll tax relief. We'll keep slugging business".

The government has introduced measures to give unions the right to enter, and business is worried by this. No matter what spin you want to put on it, business is worried about the rights that representatives of unions now have and they do not see that as pro small business. The business community is very much afraid of the industrial manslaughter legislation—this totally unnecessary legislation that this government has put in place as a sop to its union mates. Again, the business community at large is very worried by that legislation.

I notice that there is a private member's bill on the notice paper relating to the portability of long service leave. The government says it is committed to such a move. It is also committed apparently to the portability of sick leave. The business community is dreadfully worried by this activity. The government will simply say that that is its policy and that it is pro small business, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

I noticed an article in today's *Canberra Times* under the heading "Business confidence tipped to stay flat". The Chief Minister is quick to point out that "there is a federal election coming, and of course it's flat. It's flat up to every federal election". The following comment is made about half way through the article:

Local policy issues, such as the introduction of controversial industrial manslaughter legislation and occupational health and safety laws, had also impacted on expectations for the September quarter.

Mr Peters from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry is quoted as saying:

For over six years we've had conditions that are positive—

**Mr Quinlan:** No credibility left mate. He's not there anymore.

**MR SMYTH:** Beg your pardon, Mr Treasurer?

**Mr Quinlan:** There is no credibility left with Mr Peters and he's biased, mate. Gone.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**MR SMYTH:** I hope *Hansard* got the Treasurer saying there is no credibility left in Mr Peters and he is biased.

**Mr Quinlan:** Do you notice he is falling out of the media?

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**MR SMYTH:** Oh, he is falling out of the media. This is interesting. The Chief Minister was all over Mr Peters yesterday and wanted Mr Peters to stand next to him at the podium. Is that why you were not doing the press releases and the media stunt, Mr Treasurer?

**Mr Quinlan:** I don't want Mr Peters standing up next to me, mate, thanks.

**MR SMYTH:** The Treasurer does not want to be seen standing up next to Mr Peters. I hope *Hansard* picked that up as well.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order, please! Come on; get on with the debate.

**MR SMYTH:** Let me quote Mr Peters. The Chief Minister was quite happy to quote parts of Mr Peters's statement. It is interesting to note the division that is appearing between the Treasurer and the Chief Minister over this. I want to read the statistics. Mr Peters said:

For over six years we've had conditions that are positive, but for the past two quarters we've had a situation where confidence is flat.

What two quarters would those be? They would be the quarters since the Treasurer launched his very glossy white paper, the paper with no substance. They would be the quarters in which we have seen the industrial manslaughter legislation put in place. They would be the two quarters in which we have seen the occupational health and safety legislation put in place. Lo and behold, after six years of positive conditions, confidence has been flat for the two quarters in which the government's real industrial relations regime was revealed.

You can hide behind the excuse that this is because a couple of elections are to be held. It is true that in the lead-up to elections things go a bit quiet. But I think there is more to it this time, simply because you cannot hide behind the fact that the industrial relations regime that this government wants to put in place is patently anti-business.

The small business programs that have resulted from the economic white paper are worthy of some scrutiny. Because there are no definitive timelines or targets in the white paper and because the document is so airy-fairy and motherhood, the funds that we see are very broad and are very lacking in detail as to what they will do. When you ask where the innovation is or where growth will come from, there is nothing to indicate that the minister for business actually knows the answers.

I want to contrast that with Creative Canberra, where we have actually nominated the industries. And let us remember that we nominated these industries well before the white paper was released. The other day the Treasurer was talking about how we were copying the government in supporting defence as an industry. We had our paper out a full two months before they had theirs out, so if anybody is copying or anybody came afterwards, it is the Treasurer who is always lagging.

The point is you have got to put more detail into what you want to do and that is what we will outline between now and the election. The government has had 2½ years to come up with an economic white paper at a cost of \$600,000 worth of consultancies and probably the same amount again—more than a million dollars if you take into account the time of staff. In the interim, it probably cost us a chief executive of the Chief Minister's Department, who could not get through the original draft of the white paper, which I understand was quite spectacular and had a lot of support from the business community. Instead, we got the damp squib that is the document delivered last year.

So it is not only just talking the talk, it is walking the walk; it is having the drive to do something and it is having the drive to make it happen. I think you can see that this is a damp squib of a budget for business because this is not a government that is interested in business at all.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (5.35): Mr Deputy Speaker, it will be a long night if we are going to get that sort of repetition on every single line. I want to respond to some of the things that Mr Smyth has said and, although I do not usually like to do so, I must engage in a little bit of tit for tat.

I have got to say that what I have seen come out of the Liberal Party in respect of policy is thin in the extreme and has absolutely no substance. I was present at a budget breakfast at which Mr Smyth spoke. When Mr Smyth started talking about Creative Canberra, someone asked him the obvious question, "What's that? What's in it?" Groping for an answer, he mentioned the fashion industry as his specific example. I am sure that some sort of authoritative study will demonstrate that there will be a huge fillip to the ACT economy as we leap into the fashion industry! But I have to say it was one of those moments. We were up the front of the stage, and looking down at the audience there was a sea of faces that sort of had that just passing "what the?" look. I think that summed up the way that policy would go over.

Mr Smyth and some of his colleagues are now using clichés—but to excess, I have to say. So please spare us just a little. I guess we now feel obliged to invent and build up some mantra using the schoolyard mentality that if you say it often enough it will be right. Well, I don't think so. While you will see the fashion industry take form between now and the election, you will also see the genuine list of the achievements of this government because, yes, we have planned and, yes, we have reviewed but we have also acted.

Not only have we acted, we have done a whole lot of tidying up—and I have had to do a fair bit of it. I think the first one was CanDeliver. Does anybody remember CanDeliver? That was a fabulous idea! That was the Liberals in action on business and it cost us a few million, I think. There was a whole succession of other activities.

Mr Smyth talked about tourism and bemoaned the cessation of the V8 car race. I have heard him in other forums say, “Well, you have got to run these sorts of things for a while before they become profitable.” Well, this one was getting less profitable each year so—

**Mr Smyth:** So you say.

**MR QUINLAN:** Look at the records. It was certainly going to be some sort of J-curve, Mr Smyth. We might put it down as your J-curve. But what you could do for us, just to clarify the matter, is stand on your feet in this place or in a public forum—I do not care—and commit to bringing it back. That is what I want to hear. I do not want to hear you whinging about the “nots”—you are getting a little bit of a reputation of having too many “nots” in your conversation. Stand up in the public forum and either commit to it or forget it. Let us hear you commit, “I, Brendan Smyth, will bring back the V8 car race with the attendant expenditure. And this time I promise the public that all the costs of the race, including the overtime for urban services, et cetera, will be counted in the costing of it.”

Also, I would like to hear a commitment in relation to the dragway. I understand that you are going to spend \$8 million. I think either Mr Stefaniak or Mr Smyth, or both—there has been a fair bit of repetition here today already, of course, as is usual—said \$8 million was what the proponents wanted to spend. Well, they actually do not—they want to spend about \$16 million. But I am happy that you are prepared to contain it at \$8 million.

I would also challenge you to name the block of land that you intend to put it on, if it is not 51 or 52. They may fail. I have stood here before and said—and I am happy to stand here and say again—that there is still considerable doubt over whether we can build a dragway inside the ACT. There is that doubt because it may be that no government, no matter how much they want it, can find a block of land that satisfies all the criteria—or, to put it another way, a block of land that is not ruled out by one criterion or another. But anyway, we shall try. I have recently written to John Anderson making another plea. There has been some promise about land being freed up near the Majura Valley but there does not seem to be much action.

Mr Stefaniak talked about the ACT Academy of Sport. I have to absolutely concede that during the course of the estimates hearing there was some confusion with the numbers in

relation to the amount of funding for the Academy of Sport. But that whole exercise was cleared up within the space of, say, half an hour. That did not stop Mr Stefaniak putting out what I saw as a clearly misleading press release in relation to the funding and funding cuts. I counsel members—I do not have the figures here and I am not going to dig them out—to look at the history of the Academy of Sport and to look at when numbers were cut and when numbers fell. They might find an interesting story.

Mr Pratt in his speech mentioned the divisive speeches that Mr Stanhope gives at multicultural events. It may be the case—we will just see. But if we were to say absolutely nothing in a speech, which is an art in itself, I suppose, we would become more like you lot than we would want to be. Mr Stanhope is a man of principle—a man of high principle. He is a community leader and he is an opinion leader, and maybe during the course of the upcoming election an opinion leader or a real community leader may emerge on the conservative side of politics. But I do not see one now.

**Mr Pratt:** An opinion leader doesn't divide the community, nor does a leader of any government.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Pratt!

**MR QUINLAN:** You are talking to military now, buddy. So between the cliches and the growing mantra we had a little bit of an assault on history in relation to child protection, and I think that was about it.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.5—ACT WorkCover, \$6,874,000 (net cost of outputs), \$258,000 (capital injection), totalling \$7,132,000.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (5.44): Mr Speaker, WorkCover is a vital unit in the ACT public service to protect workers in their workplace and to educate both employers and employees in how they should be making workplace safety more of a priority. It is, of course, the enforcement body for laws such as the occupational health and safety law that was passed by the Assembly recently.

Members will be aware that I have had an interest for some time in what has been going on in WorkCover. During the Estimates Committee hearings questions were asked of the minister and her staff as to what was going on with the workers compensation supplementation fund. Assurances were sought from the minister and officers that everything was functioning well. For instance, in respect of the register of contracts, the government has a law that says contracts over \$50,000 shall be posted on the web. In the last two years \$600,000 and \$900,000 has been spent on legal contracts by WorkCover and none of them is accessible on the web by the public. This situation, which has now reached a very serious level, is a farce. I received a letter from the Auditor-General after I had referred to her some matters concerning the workers compensation supplementation fund. She responded:

After review of the initial information from the Fund, I have decided to conduct a performance audit of the administration of the Fund, to be undertaken as soon as practicable. The proposed objectives of the audit are attached for your information.

I would like to take up your offer of a briefing on this matter, and will contact your office separately to arrange a meeting with you.

I asked of the minister and her staff: have the contracts been posted; are you happy with the way the supplementation fund has been run; and are you aware of whether or not the FMA and the Government Procurement Act have been breached?

In regard to the contracts, we were given assurances—indeed, the secretary of the committee was given assurances—that if you log on to the web you can find them. I rang to be told, yes, you can get on to the web but you cannot access any of this \$1½ million expenditure on the web. Apparently you need a password. I note the government's response to the committee. At paragraph 6.68 the committee said in regard to the workers compensation supplementation fund that despite assurances from the OH&S Commissioner that they are online, the contracts cannot be found on the ACT government contracts register. At paragraph 6.69 the committee stated:

The committee was later advised that the contracts are not available without a specific user log on due to the dates of expiry of the contract.

The committee said that it was concerned about the lack of transparency and recommended that:

- the Government ensure that contracts in relations to the Workers Compensation Supplementation Fund are available publicly;
- all Ministers remind departments and agencies of the need to comply with the Financial Management Act 1996 and the Government Procurement Act 2001; and
- the Government immediately correct any breaches and advise the Assembly.

The government's response to recommendation 22 stated:

Copies of the earlier contracts are publicly available in hardcopy from ACT WorkCover—

so they are not on the web for the public—

and copies are also being provided to the Assembly secretariat for the information of members. A procurement planning process has commenced to establish new contracts for the provision of legal services. Such contracts once established will be notified on the central contracts register.

The curious thing here is that when I asked the minister specifically was she aware of breaches, she said there were no breaches, she was not aware of any breaches. I said:

Are you satisfied that what has been done is in keeping with the law, with the Financial Management Act and the Government Procurement Act?

The minister responded:

As far as I am aware, yes, that is the case.

I went on to ask about the different functions and Ms Gallagher said:

Yes, they do. No, I'll stand by that answer.

I said:

You'll stand by that answer. So it's not a breach therefore of the Financial Management Act, section 31 (2) (f), which relates to adequate control being maintained over the incurring of liabilities by the department. You're not in breach of the Financial Management Act.

Ms Gallagher said:

I'm certainly not aware that I am, that there is a breach of the Financial Management Act along the lines of what you are alleging, no.

So clearly the minister does not believe that there is a breach of the act, the minister is happy with the way things are going, and yet yesterday we had confirmation that the Auditor-General will investigate further.

The terms of reference of the proposed audit are:

Whether administration of the Fund has been in accordance with sub-sections 54 (1) and 54 (3) of the Financial Management Act 1996.

Whether the administration of the Fund is consistent with the Workers Compensation Supplementation Fund Act 1980 ...

Whether the processes for selection of providers of legal services and other services were according to the Procurement Guidelines established under the Government Procurement Act 2001 ...

Whether the provisions of sections 27 to 30 of the Government Procurement Act 2001 (keeping of a register of notifiable contracts, and putting details on a web-site) were adhered to.

So what we now see, contrary to what the minister has said, is quite a comprehensive investigation into the work of the workers compensation supplementation fund. Obviously, the Auditor-General has some concerns and I am sure she will keep us updated, through you, Mr Speaker, of the outcome of her inquiry.

This government has typically tried to spread the blame by saying, "Oh, it happened under you guys. It happened before we came to office." For the interest of members, the expenditure in 2001-02, which is the last year of the Liberal government, is about \$51,000. In the six months from July to December 2001, \$42,728 was spent. So three months of that would have been under the previous government, three months or two months under the new government, and then \$8,000 was spent in the first half of 2002. So none of that would have been notifiable under the government procurement

guidelines and none of the \$42,000 anyway would have been required to have gone on the web. So let us not have this furphy.

The collapse of HIH occurred early in 2001. Some spending occurred and some legal advice was sought in the latter half of 2001. But, quite clearly, the breaches that have potentially occurred took place when \$600,000 was spent without contracts and \$900,000 was spent without contracts under and in the life of this government. Mr Speaker, where I can I will keep members informed of the progress of the audit and I am sure that, at the conclusion of her performance audit, the Auditor-General will, through you, be reporting to the Assembly on what she finds.

There are some other WorkCover issues that need addressing. I am particularly concerned, for instance, that the education unit of WorkCover has been disbanded under this government and I think that is a retrograde step. The excuse given is that all of the inspectors and all of the staff are now educators. But that sort of model does not work. The inspectors have way too much work as it is. I suspect that recent amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act will give them a whole stack of work. Nobody has accounted for how the staff will cope with that work or where the additional funding will come from to keep the staff out in the field to deal with the problems that the government maintains exist.

Stand-alone education units have proven to be effective where you can take the data and run targeted courses, education programs and television programs to educate employers and employees and the general public about their responsibility in workplace safety. I do not believe that you can do that effectively without the education unit. It defies logic to simply say, "We got rid of the unit and everybody is doing it." Who will now do the research? Who will go into the databases and pull out the data? Who will develop the specific programs against the specific injury, against the specific industry? Who will make sure that the programs are targeted and then that they are delivered? Who will be responsible for all that and who will do the satisfaction surveys and the effectiveness surveys afterwards to make sure that they work?

These are jobs you just cannot lump on to the inspectors or the office staff. Without casting any sort of aspersion on the staff, this needs to be done in the most professional manner possible and I do not believe that that will be done if we lose the education unit.

Mr Speaker, I will take my second 10 minutes.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** Another issue I want to address is the hangar collapse. An amount of \$250,000 has been allocated for additional work in regard to the hangar collapse. My understanding is the maximum fine that will be imposed is something like \$50,000. I know we have to prosecute those who break the law and those who put workers at risk but I think, where something like WorkCover is stretched, we need to be realistic about how we go about these processes in making sure that we are getting a good return in safety for the community and, in particular, workers in their workplaces. I raise that as an issue. It is important and I do not think it is being addressed appropriately.

The other issue that came up was the level of training. I have some disquiet over how training is being conducted, what training is available and who ends up paying for training. I understand that some of the staff, some of the inspectors themselves, will be paying to upgrade their own skills. That is not unreasonable in some cases but when it is a work requirement I think the government needs to give consideration to putting in place a program to make sure that the people they are sending out armed with the law are qualified and able to do their job. It seems that a category 4 certificate is now required.

The commissioner has the aspiration to get all the inspectors up to speed. It would be interesting to see some more support from the government for that objective. Again, what we are seeing just points to the lack of real commitment from this government and this minister to WorkCover.

**MS DUNDAS (5.55):** I wish briefly to put some words on the record in relation to WorkCover. When you take out the extraordinary items in the budget of WorkCover, it appears that their funding is remaining fairly static. I am keenly aware that we could achieve better workplace safety if we put more resources into workplace education and inspections. We would like to see more money being spent in workplaces, working with employers and employees, and less money spent in court on prosecutions.

I will continue to monitor the budget of WorkCover. I hope that with the change of management and all the discussions that have taken place over the last number of months about workplace safety, there will be a greater focus on education and working collaboratively in workplaces to improve work safety.

I will also continue to talk with employers, unions and workers about how they feel workplace safety is going. This will be an ongoing issue and debate. If we keep the core focus on ensuring that, as much as we possibly can, our workers are safe and are being treated fairly then, hopefully, this objective will become a reality.

**MR PRATT (5.57):** Mr Speaker, I would like to refer to a couple of specific issues relating to the WorkCover area and then I will talk about some dangerous substances issues. We know from information in budget paper 4 that ACT WorkCover has a 5 per cent decrease in funding from last year. This has resulted, as far as I can determine, in a 62.5 per cent decrease in services through reduced client visits—160,000 down to 60,000—and the deletion of small business OH&S toolkits, and I think that is a concern.

The government claims that the reduction in services is due to the removal of a hardcopy newsletter and the addition of an electronic newsletter. Does this affect the number of client visits or contacts made? That is a good question. If the electronic newsletter is going to fewer workplaces or clients than the hardcopy newsletter did, what does that in fact reflect? Are we getting a degrading of the service in an area where we need to have even more education as regulations and legislation are changing? There have been some quite significant changes and I hope, for the sake of ACT WorkCover, that that is not the case.

We see little effective increase in the WorkCover inspectorate that is required to match the extra demands placed on business and government organisations as a result of new OH&S legislation. How will the new legislation be effective if there are no means to

audit, inspect and provide consultative and training services for WorkCover inspectors, or does the government think inspectors can be relieved now that their union initiative for right of entry is going to bite and come into play? I will come back to that in a minute.

On the industrial manslaughter issue, again we do not see sufficient funding appropriated for an education and information program to ensure that government organisations as well as small business organisations are kept abreast of what the new requirements mean and what obligations are placed on employers and senior managers. I take the opportunity to point out that the introduction of the industrial manslaughter initiative to the ACT was unnecessary. The OH&S legislation and the mechanism that we have in place could have been better developed. Indeed, the OH&S legislation introduced by the government largely contained some very good instruments.

**Ms Gallagher:** You voted against it.

**MR PRATT:** Which I had to seek to amend. But there were some very good provisions in that legislation. Because we were so concerned about the quite evil element of union right of entry, we had no choice but to vote the whole damned thing down. So we lost the opportunity to pick up on those parts of the legislation that contained some very necessary instruments.

OH&S has needed to be upgraded for quite some time, and I commend the government for coming forward with some new initiatives. But, of course, they had to whack on top of it this quite insidious component, the union right of entry. If they had in fact further developed OH&S, they could have done away with the need to change the regulations to introduce a new industrial manslaughter component. I would have thought that an up-graded piece of OH&S legislation, along with the manslaughter provisions that currently exist in ACT law, would have covered all eventualities.

There are renegade employers out there and there are some cases of reckless behaviour, and we need to make sure we have protections in place to protect workers. But it was quite unnecessary to have gone to the extent of introducing that regulation. In fact, it has frightened the horses. It certainly has not done business confidence any good in the ACT. I would simply add that the government did not present any evidence in this place to show that there was a compelling case for the introduction of industrial manslaughter. In fact, it introduced regulations which are extremely unfair on employers and which have negated the responsibility of all people in an organisation, down the chain of command, to supervise and check safety and carry out their own internal audits to make sure that their workers are protected. The legislation did not do that, so what was the use of it?

As Mr Smyth just pointed out, the disbanding of the education unit was probably not a smart move. It was quite a capable unit and it had a very important role to play. In addition to that, we see that at least funding will continue for the 43 WorkCover inspectors who cover a variety of technical areas. But how can 43 inspectors cope with making sure that the thousands of businesses, public organisations and government organisations in the ACT understand their obligations under the industrial manslaughter regulations and the new OH&S provisions? How can 43 inspectors cope? There will need to be an increased capability if we to see these new industrial initiatives put in place.

Not only do I question whether 43 inspectors are going to be enough, but I am also beginning to question whether effectively we actually have 43 inspectors on the ground. There is some pretty strong feedback around the place that there may not even be 43 inspectors. We will certainly be asking questions. We will want to know exactly where these 43 inspectors are. If the minister can answer that in her response, I will be very pleased, I will walk out of here a happy man, and that will be the end of it. Otherwise, we are going to have to come back to that issue later.

We need a good inspectorate capability. Government management of safety must revolve entirely around a regime of proactive behaviour, educational initiatives and preventative strategies rather than punitive measures. The OH&S legislation that is now in place is focussed on punitive initiatives. We would encourage businesses more if we were helping them put in place their safety measures, rather than going in with a great big stick and giving them a bang over the head. The union right of entry is an unacceptable, insidious piece of legislation. There was no need for it.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! I have let this flow long enough. You are reflecting on a vote of the Assembly.

**MR PRATT:** Mr Speaker, I will move on from there. The opposition entirely supports the development of OH&S and we want to see that the legislation is capable of providing the right safety measures.

I welcome the government's recent initiatives on processes put in place to take care of dangerous substances. We have totally supported those initiatives. I welcome, and the opposition totally supports, the financial initiatives in the appropriation that will underpin this.

I now raise an issue concerning potentially highly dangerous substances such as ammonium nitrate. Maybe the government has thought about this, and if they have I would like to know what they are doing about it. The feds are talking about introducing legislation to provide better protections. I would like to know whether the government is now working urgently with the federal authorities and our state counterparts to ensure that we have uniform legislation at the federal, territorial and state level.

Mr Speaker, I wish to take my second 10 minutes.

**MR SPEAKER:** Please proceed.

**MR PRATT:** Thank you. I will go into overdrive and grab my second 10 minutes. On the issue of ammonium nitrate and other similar substances that may be misused by evil people for evil means, we clearly know that there is a threat to this community per se and there is a threat to other communities within Australia. There is no getting around that and we cannot hide from it. This community needs to be very responsible and to take appropriate measures.

I imagine the government would be thinking about this matter but it has not said much. I would simply encourage them to identify this issue and work quickly with the feds to ensure that measures are put in place. Certainly, there should be a collaborative regional

approach with the New South Wales government under the federal umbrella to make sure that very strong measures are put in place to tightly restrict the sale and use of this type of substance and other highly dangerous substances. We have to ensure that the use of substances of this calibre is strictly controlled.

I am pleased to see that there is funding in respect of fireworks. At least the government has now tightened up the legislation on fireworks and introduced stronger measures. But, of course, we will never rest until we see the government ban the damned things. We will just have to wait and see what happens. Otherwise, Mr Speaker, we have little else to say at this point on WorkCover practices.

**MRS CROSS** (6.09): Mr Speaker, I will be very brief. I am pleased to see the government's payment for WorkCover outputs increase this financial year by 30 per cent of what was budgeted for in 2003-04, and 7 per cent from what was actually spent in 2003-04. In my opinion, however, this is not enough. This Assembly has passed three major pieces of legislation in the last year that involved WorkCover—industrial manslaughter, dangerous substances and occupational health and safety. Presumably these pieces of legislation will substantially increase the workload of WorkCover, particularly the level of enforcement WorkCover undertakes. Surely more money is needed by WorkCover to ensure that these pieces of legislation—all designed to improve worker and community safety—are enforced. What is the point of these pieces of legislation if they are not enforced because the enforcement agency, WorkCover, cannot afford to enforce them?

I have long been an advocate of increased expenditure for WorkCover and I reiterated this position in the recent OH&S debate. My concern then, which I will restate now, was why are we allowing union officials to do WorkCover's job? WorkCover should be given more money so they can discover and then take action against those employers who are not complying with legislation.

Discovery of non-compliance should be the role of WorkCover and not trade union officials. The only way to do this is to increase funding for WorkCover. Whilst I am pleased to see WorkCover funding increased this year—and the government should be commended for that increase—I believe it needs to be increased by a far greater amount if they are going to be a truly effective agency.

**MS GALLAGHER** (Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations) (6.10): I will speak briefly to a few points that have been raised on this line item. In relation to some of Mr Pratt's comments, in line with a motion passed by the Assembly, I recently circulated a report to the Assembly about the operations of WorkCover, including statistics on WorkCover's education activities, communication activities and compliance measures. My reading of that report, which I presume that members either have got or will receive shortly—it was in the last day that I signed it off—is that all statistics coming out of WorkCover are showing significant activity around compliance and also around education and communication.

The new commissioner has come in and made some changes to the way WorkCover operates. Although that has caused some turbulence in the organisation, the changes have related to reallocation of the education area within WorkCover to ensure that all

WorkCover inspectors clearly have an educative focus around their work. I think that is probably a very positive measure. Education activity in the workplace and all businesses in the ACT is being facilitated by WorkCover inspectors, instead of this activity being left to what I understand was a very small unit of one or two people.

There have been some changes around communication with workplaces, including the new electronic WorkCover newsletter that, from feedback I have received, has gone down very well. They have increased their contacts in terms of their database that they send that newsletter out to.

I do not want to reflect on debate that has taken place in the Assembly, but Mr Pratt argued that we are looking only at punitive measures for OH&S breaches. That certainly is not the case with the legislation that will be enacted in late July. The focus of that whole compliance mechanism was rather on voluntary compliance and cooperative relations in the workplace. But, in the end, punitive measures are there if breaches are of a serious nature, and we certainly stand by that.

We are moving forward with OH&S reform. I feel that the position taken by the Liberals on that legislation shows that they are determined to stay in the past and not look at a very modern, robust compliance framework which supports workplaces, encourages compliance, but, yes, has a very realistic and fair penalty regime should breaches occur.

In relation to dangerous substances and comments about ammonium nitrate, COAG is looking at that issue. I understand it has been dealt with at heads of government level. I should say that it is very useful for us to have a dangerous substances act in place. Many states do not have such a modern piece of legislation. We can make very minor legislative change and incorporate regulations around ammonium nitrate, and that work is certainly being done.

I note Mr Smyth's interest in the workers compensation supplementation fund. I do not want to say too much other than that the Auditor-General is looking at this. I received yesterday probably similar correspondence to that received by Mr Smyth confirming that the Auditor-General will be conducting quite a wide-ranging audit into the operations of the supplementation fund, and that is entirely appropriate.

Mr Smyth read out some of my comments in estimates, and I still stand by what I said. As I gave that evidence, that was my understanding of the situation. As we have seen in advice subsequent to the estimates appearance, which I have been providing to Mr Smyth, the contracts were not on the BASIS web site, and Mr Smyth is aware of the reasons for that.

The issue around the contracts and the use of the nominal insurer legal panel to provide legal advice for the workers compensation supplementation fund was, as I am advised, a decision taken following the HIH collapse in March 2001, prior to this government's coming in and arrangements that were agreed by the fund manager at the time. Again, I made some comments in estimates about whether it was appropriate for one administrative unit to provide legal advice to the other. I did make the comment that the nature of the work in terms of legal advice around the management of claims was very similar.

But that decision was not a decision of this government. It probably was not a decision of the last government, although it may well have been. From my understanding, it was a decision taken way back in March 2001, or thereabouts—around the same time that I imagine quite a lot of advice was going to the then minister about the \$30 million that was going to be provided to the supplementation fund for the management of HIIH claims.

Mr Smyth made comments in media statements such as there has been an illegal use of funds, that it is \$1.5 million and—

**Mr Smyth:** Possible.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Well, there is a quote in one of your media releases that says there is illegal use of funds underway.

I support totally the Auditor-General having a very thorough look at this. I have been advised that the issue at the moment seems to be a failure of an administrative unit to follow procurement guidelines in how they enter into contracts, and that matter is being looked at by the Auditor-General, along with all the issues about costs that have been made against the workers compensation supplementation fund. I think it is very appropriate that, prior to making decisions, as perhaps Mr Smyth has, about a WorkCover scandal and illegal use of money and all the rest, we stand aside and wait for the Auditor-General to report back following her performance audit of this area of WorkCover.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.6—Department of Treasury, \$29,610,000 (net cost of outputs), \$14,695,000 (capital injection) and \$42,408,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$86,713,000.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (6.18): Mr Speaker, much to the fear of others in this place, I am going to mention the economic cycle. The Treasurer very kindly provided this morning a chart of the economic cycle that was published in 1999 by McGraw-Hill Australia. If this is the economic cycle, as explained by the Treasurer, why isn't it in the budget papers? The Treasurer is probably the only man in the country who can actually predict the economic cycle. If he truly is the only man in the country who can do this then he is wasting his time here. He should be out there working for the JB Weres of the world and making an absolute fortune.

I was pleased that the guru of economics for the ACT has finally come up with a chart of the cycle, but when I looked at it I found that it does not have the dates as to where we are now, what part of the cycle we are in, when will the cycle end, when did it actually begin, what is the gradient of the growth trend, and what sort of growth can we have over the coming years? He has got it wrong again.

If the Treasurer wanted a copy of the economic cycle, I could have provided him with one from any of the basic economics textbooks that have been around for the last 50 or 60 years—all of them contain an economic cycle chart. The principle has not changed.

Apparently, what has changed is the Treasurer's ability to actually predict the economic cycle. If we assume that he can place dates on the chart he provided, because he insists he can predict the economic cycle, where are the dates? That is the critical question.

I think it is quite clear that the Treasurer does not understand what his problem is when he talks about the economic cycle. In budget paper 3 for 2003 the Treasurer talks about the economic cycle through to 2005-06. Well, Treasurer, we have not reached 2005-06. I would be keen to see you indicate exactly where 2005-06 is on the chart. Many of the economists out there, including federal Treasury officials, and I am sure your own Treasury officials, would be pleased to see where the date is.

It is simply not possible for you to say what point in the economic cycle we will reach in 2005-06. Will we be at a peak? Will we be in a trough? Will we be in contraction? Will we be in expansion? You do not know. There is the challenge for the Treasurer. When the Treasurer gets up, perhaps he can point to this chart and say, "That is where we will be in 2005-06." And if he does, then he will be guessing, because you cannot predict the economic cycle.

**Mr Quinlan:** That's economics, baby.

**MR SMYTH:** The Treasurer says, "That's economics." He could be correct. We have this foolish insistence because his pride is getting in the way. He has made a mistake and he has repeated it this year. Treasurer, if you know when the economic cycle is going to end, you should not be sitting over there; you should be out there in the market making an absolute fortune. I suggest again, Treasurer, that what you are talking about is the electoral cycle, not the economic cycle.

On the subject of economic cycle indicators, I have to say that this budget is the budget of lost opportunities. It is a budget that has had the benefit of more than \$200 million worth of surpluses over the last three years. That has been squandered. Even great economic commentators like the editor of the *Canberra Times* have said that it is the budget of lost opportunities.

As we have been saying for the last couple of years, what we should have been doing is building infrastructure, investing in the future, or putting cash away to secure us against the future, not spending all of it. And that is, in effect, what we have been doing—we have squandered a surplus, the like of which the territory is probably not going to see for a number of economic cycles; and I am sure the Treasurer will enlighten us as to where we are in this cycle. In this respect, one only has to look at some of the editorials and articles that have appeared recently in the press. For instance, this morning's *Canberra Times* contained an article headed "Business confidence tipped to stay flat", and there are a number of arguments about that.

Members will be surprised that, given the self-congratulations and the praise the Treasurer has heaped upon himself and his budgets in the last couple of years, the Chief Minister astounded the whole room at an MBA dinner on Friday night when he got up and said that the good state of the ACT economy was fairly and squarely because of the good work of the construction industry. Many were surprised because we all thought we had the leading light of economic and Treasury management with us sitting at our table,

the Treasurer. I think even the Treasurer was surprised at the Chief Minister's comment, that the real reason the budget was going so well was because of the builders.

We have been saying for some time that the real reason the budget has been going so well is because of private enterprise, and what we have now from the Chief Minister is confirmation of that. But the problem for us is that there is a slow down. An article in the *Canberra Times* this morning points out that the clearance rate for auctions in Canberra over the past fortnight was 37 per cent. The average, I understand, for last year, was about 70 per cent, and it peaked some weekends at 95 per cent. Thirty-seven per cent clearance is very low for the ACT. Thirty-nine per cent in Sydney was recently described as "anaemic". So 37 per cent is pretty poor. Although auctions account for only some 10 per cent of the residential property sales in the ACT, they are not a bad indicator of where we are going. As I have said, for the past two years the clearance rate has been running somewhere between 70 and 90 per cent. It does vary from weekend to weekend but it has been very strong, and now this is not the case.

You can understand why investors are nervous. They see a government that does not understand about investment; they see a government that does not understand that investors are not confident in the future and will not invest—they will pull back and wait and hope, and I think they would be hoping for a new government that is pro business. What this government cannot understand is why investors are nervous. They look at a government that is bringing in industrial manslaughter, union right of entry and generic portability of long service leave and sick leave; that has no interest in building on the city sister relationships; and that is foreshadowing tax increases. I think that is what is scaring people.

We have had a fabulous opportunity to go ahead, to reshape the direction, to build and secure a future for the ACT, and it has been squandered. It is the budget of lost opportunities. We have to work out what happens when it all comes off the boil. You only have to read the following from page 96 of budget paper 3:

The estimated outcome continues to remain flat in 2005-06 as expenditure growth outstrips revenue growth—

that would startle or scare any Treasurer or economist worth his salt—

improving in the 2006-07 forward year as revenue growth driven by taxes, fees and fines; grants and other own source revenue, exceeds expenditure growth.

The business community thought they had had a bit of a win in that the parking space tax had actually gone away. But it was buried. It was not levied in this year even though the two million bucks they expect to get from it is actually in the revenue this year. So the Treasurer can explain how he is going to use for recurrent purposes money he is not actually getting this year. That will be a good trick because if we all knew how to do that we would all be spending money we have not got and then not balancing the credit card.

The problem is that the parking space tax has been put off again and it is going to start in 2005-06. But, again, the detail has not been worked out. So we have had a whole year since the last budget where they did not know how to implement the parking tax and we are going to have to wait another year before they tell us how they are going to do so.

We all know that the Treasurer first mentioned this proposal in the budget in 2003 for the 2003-04 year and we learnt that no homework had been done. The Treasurer and his officials had no idea how many spaces would be included in the policy; they had no idea about any exemptions from this tax; and I think it was evident from the Treasurer's stumbling at the relevant estimates hearing that they had done little to develop the proposal beyond thinking it was a good idea and putting the money in the bottom line.

Since then the government has undertaken a substantial consultation program to try to develop a useful policy for the parking space tax but unfortunately the documents do not advance the Treasurer's cause very much and do not elaborate at all on how it will be put into place. I think people will be worried that you are including the revenue but not raising the tax. Also, you have refused to reveal the details of the tax before the coming election. My prediction is that, if they were to win, there will be a mini-budget straight after the election to slug the people of the ACT with fees, fines and charges.

**MS DUNDAS (6.28):** Mr Speaker, last year the budget was heralded by dire predictions from the Treasurer and the Chief Minister about the state of the ACT budget bottom line, due mainly to the cost of the January bushfires. Some mention was also made of reduced stock market earnings. The fires were the reason why many areas of acute need were not funded—we were balancing our priorities. However, it became apparent over the year that revenue projections from stamp duty and land sales were grossly underestimated.

This year's budget has again been delivered with dire predictions for reduced revenue and so, once again, we must ask whether or not those predictions will prove to be true. I will leave the argument about what is an economic cycle to the schoolboys at the front of the room but there are some things that I think are missing from the ACT Treasury portfolio, and that includes what we are doing in relation to the insurance crisis, because it has not gone away. Small community and sporting organisations and some small businesses are still closing down or cutting back their activities due to the cost of insurance. The only help they have been offered by the government is assistance with preparing a risk minimisation plan. But even after doing that, some groups still face unaffordable costs. So it would have been good to see an offer from the government to underwrite some of the community events that contribute so much to our community.

Once again, we have seen the reform of the stamp duty concession scheme and this round of reform does look a lot better than the last round. However, I still am concerned that families are missing out on concessions to buy houses that are big enough to accommodate them. So, there is still room for improvement there.

I think the Department of Treasury has quite a few things to look at over the next financial year, specifically in relation to how budget papers are presented and how initiatives are reported. We look forward to seeing how that work progresses.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

### **Sitting suspended from 6.31 to 8.00 pm**

Proposed expenditure—part 1.7—central financing unit, \$11,687,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$11,687,000.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (8.00): Mr Speaker, it is interesting to recall an issue in the 2003-04 budget about the use of the then departmental banking accounts in addition to the territory banking account. There does not seem to be any comments about the matter in these budget papers. I assume that the new financial arrangements have come into effect and been adopted successfully. Perhaps the Treasurer could confirm that.

I notice from a comment in the 2004-05 budget papers that one of the highlights for the CFU is that for 2004-05 there will be the implementation of new borrowing strategies. According to page 95 of budget paper 4, under a reference to the 2004-05 highlights, the strategic and operational issues to be pursued in 2004-05 include implementing new borrowing strategies consistent with the outcomes of the debt liability management review completed in 2003-04.

The Treasurer might like to fill us in on what that means. I am interested in learning what was the outcome of the review, what the Treasurer has decided to do because of the review and what it says about the borrowings. I had a recollection that the Treasurer said that there would be no new borrowings in the budget. If this is about reborrowing or refinancing, perhaps he could inform us what that means and whether there are any implications arising from this statement for the way in which the Treasurer and the territory would consider funding proposed for new public infrastructure projects—for example, a prison or a dam.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (8.03): As far as the review goes, we are constantly reviewing exactly what our debt structure is to make sure that it is appropriately hedged, that we have minimised the risk profile, and we will continue to do so. The exact details of that review I have not yet received, but it does not herald a raft of new borrowings.

In terms of debt structure, in terms of financing major capital works, so far the budget looks to be in pretty good shape. I think that all members—all members who care, anyway—would have read the review of the budget in the *Australian Financial Review*. It was probably the best objective assessment of it, coming a couple of days after it was brought down, and it included observations by Access Economics to the extent that the ACT budget was considered to be very strong and could run in deficit for a number of years without there being a great bother. Those were the words, I think, of Alan Tregilgas of Access Economics.

I think that it is a little early to be saying exactly what we would do with the prison itself in terms of finance but, unless there is some financial deal that offers us a better financial structure than just investing our own cash, the capacity is there at this stage. That does not preclude us from checking the market and seeing whether there is some form of long-term financing that offers the territory a benefit.

Those structures are less likely to materialise, given that we are not subject to income tax and those deals do swing on income tax. However, some of the lease/buy arrangements that come into play do have tax benefits for the providers of funds. So, a bit closer to when it is necessary, we will be having a look at the market at the time and what is

available at the time, but rest assured that the territory's balance sheet is in pretty good shape and we do have the capacity to build those capital works.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.8—home loan portfolio, nil expenditure.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (8.07): Mr Speaker, the home loan portfolio is an interesting holdover from the days when the Commonwealth ran the ACT. Perhaps the removal by the government of \$33.2 million suggested that there was a bit of a hollow log for the government.

**Mr Quinlan**: It is a shame that you did not see it.

**MR SMYTH**: We knew that it was there. The highlights section of budget paper 4 refers to improving the internal management policies for the home loan portfolio to reduce exposure to bad debts and to reviewing the insurance cover for all home loans. As the portfolio grows and builds up equity at the end of each period—at the end of this year it will be \$14 million and it will go to \$17 million, \$20 million and \$23 million—is it a hollow log?

Is there a need to keep the money there at all? What is the exposure that we have to cover? Are any repayments due to the Commonwealth? Given the declining number of loans in the portfolio, is it worth keeping it at this level? Perhaps the Treasurer will fill us in on that. Another question is: must these funds be used for housing-related activities. For example, they have been used this time for community housing as well as for housing communities. Apart from that, the portfolio was clearly in a strong position.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (8.08): Those are questions that probably should have come out in the estimates process. Let me just say that we had an independent assessment done of the home loan portfolio, identified the excess funds and put them to work for the best benefit of those who need them. So, if not now, as of a matter of months ago the home loan portfolio was in balance.

The reason it is not acquitted straightaway is that it is money provided on such favourable terms that we would have to have holes in our head to acquit it immediately. We have, effectively, the capacity to earn investment returns on those funds above the rate that we have to pay on those funds. So, while we are making a little bit of cream off Commonwealth money, we would have to be lunatics to do otherwise. I repeat that, as best as I am aware, with a modicum of conservatism in the assessment, the home loan portfolio was in balance several months ago.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.9—InTACT, \$3,955,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$10,365,000 (capital injection), totalling \$14,320,000.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (8.10): InTACT, of course, is the unit responsible for I&CT equipment infrastructure services for the whole of the ACT public service. I have only one comment to make. I am concerned that some of the units have had extraordinary rises in the charges apportioned to them by InTACT and, given that units are unable to go anywhere else, I suspect that it is unfortunate that it is done in this way. One example that I am aware of is that the Auditor-General's Office had its IT bill doubled in the course of the year. For some of the units, that comes at great cost.

Of course, the increase this year in the appropriation for the Auditor-General's Office will help cover that, but you would have to question why the government ends up charging itself double a rate. If that is to be the case, I guess the question really is: why can't the individual appropriation units actually go out and access their IT services from somewhere else? That said, the opposition will support the line.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (8.12): Mr Speaker, in response to that, I am not going to be an impassioned defender of InTACT and its monopoly. However, it would seem to be commonsense that we be very careful about disaggregating the systems that we have, thus providing a multiplicity of different solutions.

Certainly, agencies have their own capability as well as the one which they use from InTACT. Of course, as time goes by and technology advances agencies, probably unconsciously, are using the service provided more and more. You have only to look at the service that is available on your own desk to know that technology has come a long way in the last decade or so and continues apace.

It is a simple matter to say, if you are sitting in your office, that you could go out and buy yourself a desktop computer for a lot less than you pay InTACT but, of course, you would not have the back-up, you would not have the connections, you would not have the local area networks, et cetera.

**Mr Smyth:** It doesn't double in a year, though.

**MR QUINLAN:** It depends on what people are using and the demands that they have made. Nobody has come to me and said that it is a major problem, but if their fee has doubled in a year and they have not changed their usage and were not being grossly undercharged for the usage before, I am happy to look at that.

Let me repeat, Mr Speaker, that these are things that probably best should have come out in the estimates process. The Estimates Committee report which we are debating concurrently is pretty damn thin and maybe there was room for a bit more work. We talked earlier today about the work committees do. It is not actually reflected particularly in the report of the Select Committee on Estimates that we have before us today.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.10—superannuation unit, \$122,182,000 (capital injection) and \$1,832,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$124,014,000.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (8.14): Mr Speaker, the superannuation unit is a very important unit that protects the superannuation rights of the workers of the ACT public service. It is difficult to get across the superannuation provision account. Information on that account is scattered widely over separate parts of the budget. For instance, in budget paper 3 it is on pages 31, 96, 117 to 118, 251 to 256, and 257 to 262. I would make a plea that it be amalgamated into one section so that one can get across the entire portfolio and what it is doing.

On page 261 of BP3 there is the following statement:

These financial assets are invested according to an asset allocation strategy that takes into account the long-term nature of the superannuation liabilities and projected cash flow requirements.

I am not sure whether that statement is just rubbish. That statement is continuing to be made, although it is quite evident that this policy has not been followed over probably the last three years because the asset allocation has been biased towards short-term fixed interest investments. Perhaps the statement should be qualified to that extent. The Treasurer might like to comment on that.

Another issue is to be seen in BP 3 on pages 30, 262 and 270. It goes to liabilities for superannuation for the former Totalcare employees. I do not believe that we are yet to receive a total cost for the reincorporation of Totalcare into the ACT public service. The current estimate for this superannuation liability is \$12.5 million, which has been included in the funding analysis for 2003-04, but budget paper 3 does note that further adjustment may be required to the estimate. We have yet to get an update, to the best of my knowledge. Perhaps the Treasurer can tell us whether the investigation has been completed. If not, when will it be completed and has there been a new estimate of this liability?

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (8.17): I can say this much: we anticipate that the liability will be very substantial. This substantial liability is certainly one that we inherited—there ain't no argument about this one—in terms of what was moved into Totalcare during the reign of the Liberals and the information that was given to the people when they went to work there. Certainly, under that one banner, Totalcare inherited a raft of problems. I guess it is commentary on this particular Assembly that the opposition wanted to debate the doings and undoings in relation to the fiasco at a quarry which was, in fact, put together totally under the reign of the Liberal Party.

As we build up to an election, if I can make a general statement, we are seeing persistent attempts to reinvent history. Childcare is an example, even the bushfire. The organisation that this government worked with in 2001 and then 2003 in relation to the bushfire was the organisation that was put together by the former government and manned by people appointed by the former government but, because you have nothing to offer in terms of positive policies, you are running a very negative campaign. You are running a campaign that is based on innuendo and is based on inferences that you make. I have to say to you, Mr Smyth, that over the last couple of years you have learned the trade, but the trade is

to imply. I heard you at question time today saying, “No, I said possibly the law has been broken.”

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Come back to the superannuation unit.

**MR QUINLAN:** Okay. I just needed to get that off my chest, Mr Speaker. I feel better for that. I just want members of the opposition to know, whether it matters a damn to them or not, that I do not have much respect for their approach to politics in recent times.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.11—ACT Health, \$489,505,000 (net cost of outputs), \$29,061,000 (capital injection) and \$15,881,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$534,447,000.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (8.21): Mr Speaker, the key message that one gets out of the health budget for this year is that, quite simply, we have more costs and the same service. The increase in service levels this year is appalling against the rise in the budget and signifies, I believe, the failure of this government’s reforms. Mr Stanhope, in the lead-up to the last election, was saying that the health system was in crisis, that a simple injection of \$6 million was going to fix it and that they were going to absorb it back into the department because the department could run it better.

The reality is that that is not true. We have a bureaucratic model that has seen the appearance of more well paid senior bureaucrats, fewer resources on the ground and an accompanying decline in standards for the ordinary Canberran in terms of being able to access the emergency department and, indeed, to access elective surgery. The way that emergency department bypasses are occurring is an absolute scandal. My recollection of the six years of office of the last government is that bypasses may have happened a dozen times all up. I have checked with two former health ministers and their memory is that it happened. I cannot remember it happening when you were the health minister, Mr Speaker.

In the first year of this government, a bypass was irregular, but in the last seven months we have had 38 occasions of bypass and attempts by the health minister to say that that is normal practice, even to the inclusion of the invention of a national standard on bypassing and the fact that, by the national standard, we are actually doing better than all the other jurisdictions.

We have asked questions in several interesting areas. We talked to the federal health minister and asked him whether there is a national standard on bypassing. There is not. We spoke to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. They do not have one. Indeed, in the report they put out this week on hospitals there is not a national standard on bypassing. We have consulted far and wide to try to find a standard on bypassing and there is no standard.

The other day I asked the health minister whether he had invented the standard to hide his shame at the outcomes and he said no. If he did not invent the standard, it must be there. Perhaps whomever is acting this evening as health minister could stand and tell us what the standard is, where we come in the rankings on the standard and where these

figures are derived from. I can tell you now, Mr Speaker, that none of those opposite will stand and tell us where the national standard on bypassing is from, because one just does not exist.

I would be delighted to have somebody over there prove me wrong, but in my research to this stage I have not been able to discover one. The minister put it on the table. He answered a question on it in the negative; he said that he did not invent it. Obviously, it exists. Perhaps the government could tell us where the standard is from. We will continue to pursue that.

What did we find out this week, Mr Speaker? We found out that elective surgery overdues are way up on the position three years ago. The elective surgery waiting list itself is up 20 per cent on the position three years ago. Almost 40 per cent of the people on it are now overdue and costs are around 30 per cent higher than the national average. The ACT system always will be more expensive to run. We were normally outdone by the Northern Territory, which had huge geographic considerations that added to its costs, but we have even managed to pip the Northern Territory at the post in regard to health care.

We have the scandalous proposal to close RILU, the rehabilitation independent living unit at the hospital. Of course, the Assembly directed the minister last week not to close it. We have had the failure of successive ministers to build a transitional care facility. Three years after it was first proposed, a brick still has not been laid. In fact, there is not even a plan yet and it will be at least another two years before the transitional care facility appears, which will mean that it will have taken five years to build it. The delay is adding every day to the bed block that is causing many problems at the hospital.

The 2004-05 budget is incredibly weak on mental health issues, particularly on new initiatives. The reason for that, as we found out in the estimates process, is that it was all funded last year before the public consultation on the mental health action plan, before the final plan was released, before the plan was costed, and before the plan appeared with no targets and no time lines, or very weak ones if there was any indication of a target or a time line. I have never heard of such an extraordinary excuse—the money was in the budget last year—for not having enough money in the budget this year to fund an initiative such as the mental health action plan that was actually put out this year.

Mr Speaker, if this budget is to be believed, after three years our public hospital system will provide about five per cent more in inpatient services this year than it did two years ago and around 13 per cent more in services than did the last budget of the former government. I say “if” because the figures show that for the first two years of this government’s administration the result did not meet the expectations of the budget. One has only to refer to the AIHW report this year in terms of meeting emergency room timings. As members would know, there are five categories—resuscitation, emergency, urgent, semi-urgent, and non-urgent—and they have standards to be met within certain times.

The government is spruiking that it has achieved the best result, but it is the best result of a very poor batch and it actually shows a decline across previous years. If we run across the various categories in terms of resuscitation we find that four of the eight jurisdictions got 100 per cent. You would want to be able to meet 100 per cent if the patient requires

resuscitation, because if do not you meet 100 per cent the patient will be dead. Unfortunately, four jurisdictions do not, but New South Wales, Victoria, the Northern Territory and the ACT all get 100 per cent.

That is the only category in which we get an equal top, Mr Speaker. For the emergency category, only 82 per cent of the patients were seen on time. We were beaten there by Victoria at 84 per cent. In the urgent category, we got 74 per cent and were beaten by Victoria at 76 per cent. In the semi-urgent category, we were beaten by Western Australia; we got 67 per cent and it got 68 per cent. In the non-urgent category, we were beaten by all the jurisdictions; we were dead last. We got 79 per cent. Even the Northern Territory managed to get 88 per cent. Tasmania beat us with 90 per cent, as did South Australia with 84 per cent, Western Australia with 87 per cent, Queensland with 80 per cent, Victoria with 85 per cent and New South Wales with 86 per cent. You need to look at the numbers to see where we are at. In that regard, our system used to be the best, but it certainly is not now.

Mr Speaker, if you look at the targets this year in output 1.1 for acute services you will find that the target for category 1 is still at 100 per cent, as it should be, for treatment immediately. For category 2, the target in 2003-04 was 80 per cent. The estimated outcome for that year is only 65 per cent. Category 2 is about treatment within 10 minutes, so one is talking about serious illness or injury, and the government has failed to meet the target by 15 per cent, despite all the additional funds that the government has put into the budget over the last couple of years.

For category 3, which is about treatment within 30 minutes, the target for this year was 75 per cent and the estimated outcome has declined to 65 per cent. For category 4, which is about treatment within the hour, a target of 85 per cent was set and the estimated outcome is 85 per cent. So we have a downgrading of all those targets except the one for category 4.

The government has set exactly the same targets for next year, not having reached the majority of them this year. I think there is some doubt as to the ability of this government to deliver against those. The government might take some solace from claiming to have the best system. The report of the AIHW is for last financial year, 2002-03. The financial year 2003-04, feeling the full effect of government reforms, is looking at this stage to be an absolute disaster.

Mr Speaker, we all know that in the first full year of this government elective surgery fell away dramatically because the government simply chose to cut the level of funding for surgery. It cut \$3.5 million out of the budget for Calvary. The 14,000 operations in our last full year of government dipped to just over 10,000. This year, the government expects to get the number back up to close to 14,000. The waiting list has grown by 20 per cent because money was taken out of elective surgery and it is only just recovering.

Some other services have remained static over the year, but over those three years the total expenditure on health has risen from \$480 million annually to \$612 million—a staggering 27 per cent increase, far in excess of any increases in services.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition's time has expired.

**MR SMYTH:** I wish to take my second 10 minutes, Mr Speaker. To sum up the record of this government, roughly the same services are costing a third more of the taxpayers' money. But some services are actually getting worse. As I have said, the number of elective surgery patients overdue has increased dramatically in three years. When the previous government left office, around 26 per cent of the patients were overdue. That was not a good situation, but it was in line with national problems in providing health care. Forty per cent of the patients on the elective surgery list are overdue.

In some categories of surgical treatment, such as ophthalmology, well over half the patients are overdue and in other categories 100 per cent are now late. There has been a disastrous performance in the key area of health service. It shows that this government has failed to move forward on important initiatives such as health. And then we get to robbing Peter to pay Paul. Because the government has not built the transitional care facility after three years and it will take five years to be built, the soft option of trying to close the much prized RILU was trialled in this place. I am pleased to say that members voted not to allow that to occur.

There has been no effective movement in developing the transitional care facility to take nursing home-type patients out of the wards and relieve the pressures that flow all the way back into the emergency department. The previous government was working on that in 2001 and actually had money in the budget to do so. What did Labor do, Mr Speaker? Absolutely nothing.

Even worse, to conceal their neglect, they wanted us to endorse a stupid proposal to close the very successful RILU facility to provide them with a temporary solution to the transitional care problem, while creating more problems for those in serious need of rehabilitation in the transition to their homes. I think that the Assembly took the right decision in demolishing that proposition. Make no mistake: the failure of this government to make progress on transitional care and their ill-considered attempt to sacrifice RILU to create a temporary solution will ring in their ears at the coming election.

On emergency department services, it is becoming very clear that a service that was once perhaps the best in the country has lost its lustre. The situation concerning bypasses—38 emergency bypasses and rising in nine months—is a disgrace. It is equivalent to the department closing its doors continuously for over four days. Mr Speaker, can you imagine the outrage if the ED closed its doors continuously for four days? That would not be allowed.

Mr Speaker, part of the cause of this problem is clearly the mismanagement of labour resources, both nursing and medical. The government has failed during wage negotiations to improve the operating practices of the system itself and to get more out of the system, because it has opted for a bureaucratic model instead of a delivery model. The final reason for the situation is quite plain; it is that bureaucracy. In 2002, this government chose to turn our hospital system into one large departmental bureaucracy. Our hospital system no longer runs as a customer-oriented service with outcomes in mind. I think that that is starting to show to the people of Canberra.

There are other issues of concern in the health area. Let us go to mental health. Recently, the government tabled its mental health action plan, but there is no provision for action in the plan. Indeed, I think that it raises more questions than it answers. The level of service provision in mental health is static. Nothing is budgeted for that will show an increase in service to those who are most in need.

Mr Speaker, if you look at the number of occasions of service for community-based and extended care service, which is where the majority of the work is done, you will see that the target for 2003-04 is 175,000 occasions of service and the target for 2004-05 is exactly the same—175,000 occasions of service.

It is quite interesting that if you go to the measure of throughput in the hospital, that is, real patient separations—that is one measure, but it is not the best measure—you will find that the target was 1,400 in 2003-04. The estimated outcome, with the injections of cash in the second and third appropriations, actually came down to 1,200. According to the notes, the underachievement was related to staff recruitment and retention difficulties and, with adequate staffing, the throughput is expected to rise in 2004-05.

Where will this adequate staffing come from? Is the government going to invent it? The government is still in dispute with the nurses and others workers are still not happy with what they have been offered. I think that it is presumptuous of the government to announce that, particularly as Mr Corbell, quite embarrassingly, was ordered last week by the AIRC to withdraw his letter of final demand. I do not think that threatening the nurses that you will take their back pay off them if they do not agree by a certain date facilitates good staff relations. It is no wonder that there are staff recruitment and retention difficulties if they do not work in a climate that values them. We all hear the words “Yes, we value our staff” used, but when it comes to the raw end of negotiations it is the staff that feel the ire of this department.

I think that we are all quite aware that the government’s approach to mental health services is failing. Members have heard me talk constantly about that for the last two years. There has been a significant number of suicides of people in the care of Mental Health ACT—one a month for almost the last two years—but the action plan does not contain clear action, definite action, defined action, that would go anywhere towards alleviating this situation.

Those most in need rely on the psychiatric services unit at the hospital. There was a report in May of last year to the effect that the unit does not work, that not only is it a threat to the safety of the patients, but also it is not good for staff in occupational health and safety terms. The government immediately allocated \$350,000 to do up the psychiatric services unit. Mr Speaker, we received today the quarterly report on progress with capital works. If you look at that report you will see that says that after the allocation of \$350,000 the upgrade was to be completed in June 2004. That would have been by tomorrow as tomorrow will be the last day of June 2004.

It may be a good bet that tomorrow we will see a press release from the government saying that \$350,000 has been spent, patient safety has been increased and staff are happy because working conditions have been improved. The only problem is that at the end of March only \$20,000 of that \$350,000 had been expended. We have said that the

progress by this government on capital works is glacial. We have said that several times and you will hear us say it again, because it is absolutely true. With regard to one of the most important units at the hospital in terms of the safety of patients and the safety of staff, we have a government that after nine months—to the end of March—had expended only \$20,000 of the \$350,000.

It will be interesting to see whether somebody opposite jumps up in question time tomorrow and asks the acting minister a dorothy dixer about whether the government has completed the upgrade of the PSU and spent all of the \$350,000 to make it safe. Mr Speaker, I will bet you a \$2 scratchie that we will not hear a question like that tomorrow, because that has not happened. It has not happened because the system that the government has put in place militates against anything happening in the health department quickly, efficiently and effectively and because we do not have ministers delivering on their capital works projects. If you look at the capital works report tabled today you will see that none of the ministers are delivering on their capital works projects. None of the ministers are delivering on them because they do not pay attention to them.

In the estimates process we looked at the transition facility and Mr Corbell, as the then minister, said that he was not happy with it and had directed the department to lift its game. I would direct members to all of the capital works projects, but particularly to the capital works projects for health and the upgrading of some pretty important facilities that is lingering, waning or simply has not occurred.

Mr Speaker, the opposition will make something of that in the next couple of days, as you would expect. But, in terms of the PSU, I think that it is a terrible indictment of the government that it will not have that facility ready by tomorrow. I believe that the government is not interested in mental health and not interested in improving the lot of the people of the ACT who suffer from mental health problems.

There are other areas of concern. I am sure that members will speak about respite care in particular. I think that there is a huge amount of unmet need in the community for respite care. There has been a decline in some public health services, sometimes for reasons out of the control of the government. Everybody talks about preventive health but, if we do not move seriously to a preventive health model, pressure will gain on the hospital, particularly on the emergency department, over the next 10 years, between now and 2013, as the aged population of the ACT, those older than 65 years, doubles and puts additional pressure on our health system.

**MS DUNDAS (8.41):** I wish to raise a few points in relation to ACT Health. It is unfortunate and disappointing that, like last year, there is no funding for recruiting nurse practitioners, as there are nurses already working in the ACT who are qualified as nurse practitioners. I think that that is something on which the government should be moving a little bit more quickly. The legislation has been changed so that nurse practitioners can operate. That was done as a result of a trial for over a year in the ACT.

There are people qualified as nurse practitioners who are currently operating as nurses in the ACT. Why can't we support them to use their skills as nurse practitioners? It would do so much for those nurses and so much for our health system and it is something that we should be doing in terms of trying to address the GP shortage that is impacting on so

many ACT residents, particularly those in Tuggeranong and Belconnen. While the government is stalling on nurse practitioners, it is not offering any alternative solutions, such as the mooted reestablishment of a GP night clinic at the Canberra Hospital.

I am disappointed that there appears to be a growing inequity in funding between Calvary Public Hospital and the Canberra Hospital. The intensive care unit at Calvary urgently needs refurbishment. It has not been refurbished in the 25 years the hospital has been in operation. The hospital actually believed that it would see funding provided in this budget to help the project through, so it was sorely disappointed. Instead, a small number of intensive care units were added to the ICU at TCH. That is also an incredibly important initiative, but it is disappointing that an imbalance appears to be growing between the services offered at Calvary and the services offered at TCH.

It was, however, pleasing to see the inclusion of a number of very welcome initiatives in relation to the ACT Health portfolio, including the ones for the practice nurse for the Junction youth centre, the new breast care nurse positions and some programs targeted specifically at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Those are areas that have needed work over a long period and it is pleasing to see some action finally being taken in relation to those issues.

Improved enforcement of tobacco legislation is being picked up by ACT Health. I think that that is a very important preventive health measure. We do need to target ways of enforcing the laws of the ACT in relation to the sale of tobacco to minors and I am pleased that the government, through this funding initiative, is finally taking up the ideas that I put forward two years ago about making this legislation work. A lot needs to be done in terms of preventive health, especially in relation to tobacco smoking, and it is something that needs to continue to be done.

In terms of public health services, it was of concern to see a marked reduction in education and training due to a shortage of health professionals in the territory. That is something that was covered briefly by the Estimates Committee. In terms of preventive health measures and public health measures, we need to continue to have strong education and training through our schools, through our workplaces and through to the community about how to look after yourself and how to take preventive care of yourself, be that safe sex messages or clean living messages. Those messages need to be put out there so we can actually reduce the impact on our critical care areas by supporting people through preventive health care.

The reduction in funding for the Community and Health Services Complaints Commissioner was picked up by the Estimates Committee, which raised concerns about it. Whilst the inquiry is ongoing into statutory authorities in the ACT, we need to continue to support the role of the Community and Health Services Complaints Commissioner. We hope that this minor reduction in funding will not impact on that work. We do not wish to see a reduction in the services provided and hope that in future years funding will be returned to that very important role, depending, of course, on the outcome of the statutory authorities review.

I turn quickly to community health services that are offered by the ACT government, especially women's health services. We did get a commitment that Women's Words would continue to operate. One thing of concern to come out of the budget papers was

that there did not appear to be an increase in the services for women's health; that the status quo was being maintained; that, even though the government was putting on new health nurses and new breast care nurses and a lot of work is being done in the women's health area, things were just remaining static.

I hope that we will have targeted women's health programs into the future that will actually support women in the community and we will see these programs being taken up. One of the answers received through the estimates process was that one of the problems with increasing these services is the availability of staff to support these services. With new breast screening nurses coming on stream, hopefully that will improve into the future.

Mental health is another important part of the ACT health budget. I know that we will have a debate on this subject tomorrow, so I will be brief in saying that there was an interesting conversation going on through the estimates process in relation to how to support people by providing mental health services, be that through the number of beds made available and how they are being taken up or the difference between non-compulsory admissions and compulsory admissions and how they are being balanced by the hospital and how support is actually being given to people who enter those areas to stabilise them and enable them to return to the community.

Concerns were raised about staff recruitment and retention difficulties in the mental health area and how they have impacted on the mental health area's ability to deliver services to the community. I hope that these things will improve and we will not have a continuation of some of the concerns that we have had over the last year in relation to people with mental health problems.

**MR STEFANIAK (8.48):** It is interesting that, as Mr Smyth said, the government started with a promise before the last election that giving \$6 million to the health area would fix the problems, because we are now about \$150 million down the track and have a third as much expenditure again. I can recall similar noble aims in 1995 by the first Carnell government to improve the system and we had to have, I think, an extra \$14 million in a second appropriation bill because of problems with the health system.

The health system, by its very nature, does cost a lot of money. It is one of the most crucially important areas of government and the demands on it will continue to grow because we have an ageing population. Twelve per cent of the population now is over 65 years of age. That is going to rise to 25 per cent by about 2020.

Health is always a difficult area, but from sitting through this estimates process and listening to the various debates and seeing the various figures in recent months in relation to health, I must admit that it is of concern to see where the system is going. I have spoken before in this place about the emergency department's response rates. Until recently, if you went in there with a basic ailment which was not life threatening, it would normally take about two hours—three hours at the most if it was on a busy Saturday when there were lots of football injuries. That was the case until about a year ago or so, certainly until about 2000.

I have had cause to go to the emergency department since about 1970. The first time I noticed a difference was in 2003 when I went there with the inside centre of my team

over a minor injury—a broken bone—and it took six hours for that person to have it attended to. I have heard of a few other people who have had similar experiences with basic injuries that normally would not take long to be attended to and I have heard of other problems arising out of people going to the emergency department. I have mentioned several times and I will mention again the case of the 85-year-old woman who was at the hospital for 3¾ days before she finally had her arm mended and was discharged. For other persons it has taken well over a day for things that used to take only a matter of hours.

That, combined with the fact that the targets of the emergency department for category 2, 3 and 4 patients have not been reached and are not in some instances close to being reached—a 15 per cent variance in relation to category 2 patients was the target and the outcome was 65 per cent—should really get the warning bells going. I think that there are some really worrying signs in relation to our health system. It is stretched. In recent days there have been articles in the newspaper about the hospital system not being able to handle major emergencies. That is of concern because our hospital system is supposed to support not only the people of the ACT but also the people of the region surrounding the ACT and there are these problems despite the fact that we are spending a considerable amount of money on the health system, close to one-third more than we were a few years ago.

I wish to make a number of points in relation to what the Estimates Committee heard. Overtime is a big issue. I was interested to see the figures there. Officers of the department said that something like 3.9 per cent of the nurses do overtime regularly. That may be so, but they are probably concentrated in the most important areas, where you really do want your hospital staff to be on the ball and not to be overtired. I know quite a few nurses in the system. My wife is an ex-nurse. I have spoken to a number of nurses who have been in the system for over 30 years and who have said that the situation has never been so bad but, because they are the dedicated professionals that they are, they feel that they cannot really knock back the overtime, so they take it on.

It might be true, as the officials said, that some nurses like working overtime and use it to manage their personal budgets, but that is not the case with many of the ones I talk to. All the ones I talk to are getting very tired and are sick of having to double up and do overtime. I think that the department and the minister really need to take that on board, because that simply is unsafe and is a situation that we should not allow to continue. You cannot work these professionals until they drop; similarly with the other medical staff. I have spoken to a number of doctors who are working 13 or 14-hour shifts. Again, if you have heavy shifts you get to a dangerous point for everyone. It is simply not fair on those professionals to put them in that situation as often as, sadly, is the case now.

I am not going to go into the issue of entrapment and the smoke police. Ms Dundas said something about that and I probably said something about it in introducing the report of the Estimates Committee. Ms Dundas briefly mentioned preventive health. I think that it is a very important subject. In that regard, the Estimates Committee explored the role of Healthpact and Mrs Dunne and I expressed concern over the funding for Healthpact.

Healthpact was set up to promote healthy outcomes. It was set up initially, probably back in the First Assembly, to buy out tobacco sponsorship of major sporting and artistic events. The sporting events were mainly racing events and I think that only two had to be

bought out in the ACT. The sponsorship was worth about \$75,000, I recall. A couple were exempted. A particular cricket match, a Rothmans cricket match, was exempted. A couple of small artistic events also were bought out.

In the early days, a fair amount of money was going to Healthpact and it was used quite effectively. I recall that for many years there was a ratio which was not dissimilar to the ratio round the rest of the country in that at least 35 per cent of the Healthpact grants—I am talking about \$2 million a year in grants a few years ago—would go to physical activities, to sport and recreational activities, that promoted a healthy lifestyle and they were used to get the message across about health and to provide valuable funds to those organisations.

There were always fairly stringent guidelines and restrictions on how the money could be used, but the system worked very well. I have become increasingly concerned in recent times, over the last 12 months or so, about reports that the sport and recreation community and ACTSport have some very real concerns in relation to how the Healthpact funding is going. One of the major roles of Healthpact is to promote healthy activity and one of the best ways of doing that is by promoting group activities and getting as many people as possible actively involved.

I was very concerned to hear—I might have mentioned it to the officials—that organisations such as Tenfit, which involves hundreds of people from three to 83 years of age, had been led to believe that they would get some funding, but found at the end of the day that they did not. I was also very concerned to hear that the 35 per cent plus that used to be spent on Healthpact—something I was always very keen to keep tabs on to ensure that it kept up to at least that level, even though it was not necessarily within my portfolio when I was a minister—had dropped to an average of 26 per cent of the total Healthpact funding being spent on physical activity events.

I was told that the funding did rise to 31 per cent during the Masters Games because it was a major sponsorship, which was good, but it was readily admitted that it is now at about 26 per cent. Quite frankly, I think that that is wrong. Other states that adopted similar programs actually had 50 per cent as the figure for the level of sponsorship of healthy physical activity in those types of events. For us to be down to 26 per cent is not the best way of getting best value for the buck, of getting more people physically active and reducing the health bill through basic preventive health measures like that. I think that it is common knowledge that if 10 per cent more Australians—for that read 10 per cent more ACT people—got active the health bill would drop by about 10 per cent.

I saw some figures recently suggesting that if we did that in the ACT we would be able to save about \$20 million on actual health costs. I point out to the government, which has responsibility for Healthpact, that in New Zealand doctors now prescribe programs of physical activity as part of preventive medicine. It is actually part of their diagnosis and their recommendations for people to get better. I think that there is a lot that we can learn from schemes like that.

So, in terms of preventive health, I was concerned to see that 26 per cent average figure for Healthpact. That is something I would expect this government to address if it is fair dinkum in terms of trying to reduce things such as childhood obesity and of ensuring

that, as our population ages, those people have the opportunity to be involved in programs that will at least maintain a good level of physical fitness that would in turn lead to less of a need for great increases in health spending.

**MR CORNWELL (8.59):** The amount that has been allocated for health, \$534 million, is a great deal of money. It is a pity that some of it at least is going to be wasted because of the problems of bed block in the ACT hospital system. That was shown very clearly in information provided for me in response to questions on notice. I have mentioned before but believe that it is necessary to mention again that we have a situation where a considerable number of nursing home patients are at the moment, or have been, in hospital beds when they should be, or should have been, somewhere else.

In August of last year there were 23 patients in that category. There were 21 in September, 13 in October, 27 in November, 11 in December, nine in January, seven in February, 23 in March and 21 in April. That was only for Canberra Hospital. Calvary had 10 in August, nine in September, five in October, six in November, seven in December, seven in January, three in February, six in March, and six in April. The average for Canberra Hospital was 17.2 and the average for Calvary was seven.

These figures, however, have to be put into perspective. It costs \$365 a day to keep a nursing home patient in a hospital bed. The figures, as far as I can work them out, indicate that it cost something like \$2.9 million for Canberra Hospital over those nine months and \$1.4 million for Calvary Hospital for 11 months. That is an unforgivable situation. The fact that it has been going on for 2½ years, since this government came to power, is an indictment of the whole system. The worst feature of it, of course, is that it is such a terrible waste of money. These people should be being accommodated at a much lower cost in proper facilities, but are not.

The government has been equally slack in the provision of a subacute/non-acute care facility of 60 beds for aged people, a facility which is still not on line. I understand that it is going to be provided at the Calvary Hospital campus. However, none of the \$5.15 million budgeted for the project has been expended to date. We are told that construction is expected to be completed late in 2005, next year, and the facility is expected to be operational early in 2006.

Mr Speaker, that is simply not an acceptable result after the 2½ years—in fact, three years—of this Labor government's occupation of the treasury bench in this territory. Of the 60 beds, 40 will be allocated for rehabilitation transitional care and the other 20 beds will be for acute psycho-geriatric care. These are all necessary facilities for the ACT; they are all in great demand. I think that it is an appalling indictment of the government that nothing has been done. I repeat that money is being wasted that could properly be used for the provision of care for patients who deserve and need to be in ACT hospitals, rather than nursing home patients who are occupying beds in those facilities.

**MS TUCKER (9.04):** I raised some comments about the health budget in the initial response, so I will not repeat them. I just wanted to add a little more on the question of measures: changing measures and quality of measures. It is frustrating to have changing measures. It is difficult to keep track of changes over time if the measures keep changing. Again, I have to point out problems with the quality of measures. I am looking for a link between quality of outcomes—the people, the environment or whatever is

going to be affected—and the measure. So, for example, for Health and Community Care, output 1.2 for mental health and supported accommodation services, on page 157, the measure of places with a target of 116 has been changed to a bed occupancy target of 95 per cent. For one thing, taking the occupancy target on face value, 95 per cent is a very high target. That is because in supported accommodation there is some necessary time between people.

Let us look at what these two measures tell us. The old measure of the number of beds was at least a quantity that could, with some additional research, be linked to the number of people who are accessing the service. But the occupancy rate is not at all useful. It gives no indication of whether even the number of places is increasing or decreasing, let alone any way to get to the more useful measures of quality. The sorts of things that we want to know about supported accommodation for people with mental health problems include: if, for example, there are 104 people for 104 beds, how many people could have moved on but were not able to find any accommodation—in other words, exit options? How many needed long-term support? How many got it? The same questions apply for short-term support. How many people came back? How many times? What were the genders, primary languages and ethnicity of people accessing the services?

The government may say that you need some focusing measures and outputs, and that is true to an extent, but it could do a lot better at linking the measures to the kinds of information that can really tell you how well the services provision is meeting needs, how much more is needed and of what type. It is also true that the number of outputs was drastically cut under the Carnell government, which was spun at the time as somehow providing more information, but clearly it did not.

Service providers do generally collect good data, but the analysis takes time and surely this is something where the government, interested in inclusion and so on, could do better. It is also a really fundamental part of any social plan that you have a deeper and better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of services and where there are groups in the community who are missing out, so that you can target services where they are needed.

Another example of a measure given under mental health services is:

Non-government organisations maintain Quality review against the National Mental Health Standards or Raising the Standards (Good Practise Standards for Community Service Organisations).

The target is 100 per cent. I have many questions about what is happening there. The 100 per cent target does not work.

Another measure is:

Community service providers implement and maintain agreed quality standards.

The target for the new measure for 2004-05 will be 100 per cent. It is obvious that we are not getting 100 per cent. I really would like to see the government take a serious look at how they can make these measures more meaningful and tell the story about what is happening on the ground. I know that this has been commented on in the Estimates

Committee. It happens every year and I think it happened when Mr Quinlan was chair of the Estimates Committee. I am just raising it as an issue again.

**MRS DUNNE (9.08):** The extraordinarily large sums of money in the budget for health are important; they need to be there. The \$530 million is a fifth of the budget and goes to provide a range of much-needed services for the people in the ACT. But, as Mr Smyth has said, we seem to be paying for more and getting less. It is time that this government started to address some of the issues: the extension of waiting times for elective surgery, the extension of waiting times at accident and emergency and the range of measures, small and large, in the health budget where we are underperforming.

I had an interesting time on Saturday evening at one of the functions that I was very pleased to attend, the 25th anniversary dinner ball or celebration of Calvary Public Hospital. It was very interesting to spend an evening amongst very committed health professionals, whether they be administrative staff, nurses, midwives, doctors or pharmacists. Everyone there was committed to Calvary and everyone seemed to have a story. They would come and say, “Mrs Dunne, I have got this problem. I am really concerned about this” and they would then enumerate the problems and injustices they saw in the health system and the way in which Calvary was dealt with in the health system—the fact that it was not allowed to perform to its optimum level because of what they considered were inappropriate cuts to funding.

A doctor said to me in the course of the evening, “I can’t keep trained theatre staff. If the money runs out in April and I can’t do my speciality, I can’t keep those staff sitting around effectively doing nothing or doing something that they’re not trained to do to the same degree until the money comes on stream in July again. Then you have to ramp up—go out and find specialist nurses to ensure that you can do the work. It is just not a tap that you can turn on and off.”

These complaints were coming to me thick and fast. A range of doctors and professionals are saying this. Do members of this place know that 48 per cent of all presentations to accident and emergency happen at Calvary Hospital? When we talk about the public hospital system in the ACT, we tend to think about the Canberra Hospital. But 48 per cent of all people—the proportion is growing—who go to accident and emergency in the ACT go to Calvary Hospital. This will continue to increase as the population of Gungahlin and Belconnen increases. As Dunlop increases in size, as Crace and Lawson come on line—all the new suburbs in Gungahlin—the pressures on Calvary Hospital will be enormous.

One of the myriad of things that were said to me—it was repeated over and over again—was: “If only we could deal with our bed blockers. We could get people out of accident and emergency if we had a bed to put them in, but we cannot do that because of the bed blockers.”

That brought me to a discussion I had with a number of people about the much-thwarted aged-care facility across the road from the Calvary campus that has been going on and on. Recommendation 48 of the Estimates Committee report states:

The Committee recommends that the Government take steps to ensure the continuation of this project.

As we heard in estimates, the Little Company of Mary is now sitting down and doing their sums to see whether they have the financial wherewithal to proceed, given the planning constraints on the block. The government's response is a complete washing of the hands. The government notes the recommendation, advises that the appropriate planning processes will be followed and continues to support the Little Company of Mary in its aged accommodation proposal. Support, in most cases, is seen by actions, by active participation in the process, by not getting in the way, by not being an emburrance to people. A continuous stream of things are happening out at Bruce with the Little Company of Mary that get in the way and stop the process from going ahead.

One person spoke to me about this subject the other day. He said, "Vicki, if I had known what we were getting into when we started this process, we would not have started." The ACT can ill-afford to have aged-care providers or potential aged-care providers being in the situation of saying, "It is just too hard to build a facility in this town because the planners get in our way." I am not saying that the planners just turn their back, do not do anything and have open slather. That is not what I am saying. There needs to be reasonable regulation and it needs to be dealt with in a timely fashion. We are all getting older and very soon either we or our parents will need a facility just like the one that is not being built at Bruce across the road from Calvary because the planners, in particular, are getting in the way of providing an essential service to the people of the ACT. I do not want to hear another aged-care provider say to me, "If I knew what we were getting into before we started, we would not have started."

We are now not just seeing a flight of capital from the ACT—people cannot build things because of the tortuous planning processes; Mr Quinlan said, "Trust us, we will get onto it and fix it"—but also having people who provide essential services, and increasingly important services, in the ACT being confounded.

Mr Pratt was speaking this morning about the lack of aged-care facilities for the ethnic communities and the lack of support for the Vietnamese and Chinese. The retirement village in Kaleen and other services are things which people in the ethnic community need. These matters are not being addressed. The government response to the recommendation to the Little Company of Mary project in Bruce is unacceptable. The government should be asking, "How can we be part of this solution?" rather than putting more obstacles in the way of the people of Canberra in their need for aged-care accommodation.

**MRS BURKE (9.16):** I have a couple of comments on the health line. I perhaps owe the Treasurer a small apology. I will make a small concession.

**Mrs Dunne:** Only a small one?

**MRS BURKE:** Only a small one because we are talking about only a small amount of money. I refer to the viability of Men's Link. Whilst I have said that there is not much money; in fact, it still holds. It is not much, but at least I recognise, Treasurer, the allocation of \$400,000 over four years for Men's Link. That is a great start, but we certainly need to be able to be doing more than that for men in our community.

I would also like to praise the practice nurse for the Junction. I think that is an excellent beginning in giving support and help to young people. I register my acknowledgement of that initiative. I am not sure whether Mr Smyth has talked about a home-based oxygen scheme. I know that this does not affect many people; hence my horror when a particular case came across our desk. A lady had to almost beg for her life in order to get some sort of support. I think it is pretty sad when it comes to that. However, I again acknowledge that the initiative and the funding will provide for the removal of means testing. I appreciate and thank the government and the Treasurer for doing that.

I also appreciate the fact that there has now been an extension to the after-hours roster, the after-hours service, at the child-at-risk assessment unit, CARAU. It provides 24-hour access to services for children who may have suffered sexual or physical abuse. With all the talk of child protection issues still very much in the news out there, perhaps we can have a memorandum of understanding between all the major stakeholders—the child-at-risk assessment unit, Family Services and ACT Policing. We seem to have one or two linkages but I do not see the need for separate MOUs when one could cover everybody.

Unfortunately the budget has not done much to ease the burden of the community in terms of respite care. I hear constantly that there is more and more unmet need, and that is a concern. Groups that currently support families—Fabric, for instance—have not had the increase in funding that they need to meet that unmet demand. I have had many letters from parents and carers who are at breaking point. The ridiculous thing is that, if we do not help the people at the front end, eventually they break down, become sick and place an even bigger burden on our health system.

I received a rather alarming letter from one lady. She states:

I am only 1 of the 125 families in ACT that currently receives no respite care.

I will not go into the detail. She continues:

At the end of this year, that number will climb to over 160 families—

that was at the end of 2003—

not receiving any respite care.

This is something that we really need to take stock of and the government needs to look at it continually.

Another letter I received states:

In giving our child the love and care needed there are very demanding pressures placed on our family. Respite services provide relief from those pressures for our whole family, not only for parents, but also for our special child and siblings.

A spin-off effect of not giving relief and help where we can to those most in need causes many more people to be disproportionately affected, I suppose.

I am also pleased to see that there is continuing help for people who have sustained severe injuries following the bushfires. The real concern I have is the lack of attention being given to or the voices being heard of those needing respite care in our community. According to some of the letters I have received, they are going to end up becoming a further drain on the health service. That is a bit disappointing, but overall, I think I have made my points on the things that I am pleased about.

Finally, I applaud the government for the expansion of the child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, in Gungahlin Outreach Clinic, but we still need to be looking—if we can and when we are asked—at the real need for respite care in our community.

**MR PRATT (9.21):** I rise to talk about an issue I have raised a number of times and will continue to raise because not much action is being taken—that is, the need for or existence of a Lanyon surgery capability. The Lanyon district has four or five suburbs and 5,000 or 6,000 people. The residents do not have a surgery to service them and have to go to the Calwell or Chisholm shops for routine surgery appointments, which is quite a distance. I think we can do better than that.

I was pleased to see that the Minister for Health and Minister for Planning and departmental staff went to Tuggeranong Community Centre to talk to community leaders and commercial and other stakeholders about the impasse that exists with the allocation of land that had previously been made and how it can be resolved. A great deal of the problem is due simply to commercial enterprise. There do not seem to be too many players, in a commercial sense, who are prepared to commit themselves and there is clearly an urgent need. I hoped that a leg-up, some assistance, would be provided by way of funding in the appropriation or that some policy initiative would accompany the appropriations. This issue is still outstanding.

I am not going to criticise the government at all, but I point out that it is an ongoing issue. I ask the government to continue to look at this issue. Mr Hargreaves agrees with me because he has been to the same meetings. That is one of the most important issues for the Brindabella electorate.

Another issue I would like to raise is whether the government has considered allowing ambulance stations to provide first-line, low-level surgery support, a service they provided a couple of decades ago. This would alleviate the need for people having to drive to Canberra Hospital for weekend injuries which occur on football fields and in the backyard. This Assembly—and the government too—could look at whether or not ambulance services could reactivate the rather old-fashioned first-line support service. I know there are arguments against that because of manpower, but, with some creativity, there may be ways we can overcome some of those hurdles. The ability to provide some sort of a service, particularly at weekends, may alleviate the burden.

**Ms Tucker:** You mean the old first-aid service?

**MR PRATT:** Yes, something like that. This matter deserves to be looked at in order to improve first-line medical capability, particularly for those living in the deep south—

a long way out. They are on the periphery of ambulance response time frames. But that is another issue I will raise again later in the emergency services debate.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (9.26): I thought that there would have been some members who would have leapt up and spoken for another 10 minutes. First of all, I apologise to the house for the absence of both the Minister for Health and the Acting Minister for Health. It is a little unfortunate and does not help the debate, but, unfortunately, that is just the way it is.

Mr Wood has to attend a ministerial council in Tasmania and Mr Corbell is off. Although I sat back and listened to the debate, I wondered right from the early days about the appropriateness of a total focus on waiting lists and not on throughput and performance. It is something that we in opposition lived by; therefore, we cannot complain too much if we have to debate the waiting lists. I do understand that there is a dynamic that works that says that the more you take off waiting lists, the more will be added to them. There is a demand out there that is probably even greater than the official waiting lists, which are broken down and managed by the surgeons themselves.

I will not get much further into that debate. Suffice it to say that, if we want to be honest, I think that any debate on the health system in the ACT has to take into account the throughput of the hospitals and the increasing cost of provision of service. We all know now that there is a different index of cost escalation in the health area than there is anywhere else. As a government, we would like the situation to be better. We will continue to work to make it better.

The subject of nurses is a mixed question. It is amazing the difference three years can make. About this time three years ago the government of the time were refusing to deal with nurses and, in fact, had struck the funding for the nurses EBA that was under negotiation completely out of their budget. So three years ago we were debating a budget that had in it no salary increases for nurses.

I think we need to look at workloads for nurses and also at productivity. The statistics for nurse productivity in the ACT are not good. A lot has been said on this matter and there has been a lot of emotive talk. I have been warned by my confederates here to tread carefully because this is almost sacred ground, but I do believe we need to examine the way we use and manage nurses. Whenever there is a problem with productivity, the first place you should look at is management. That ought to be happening.

In relation to mental health—these are matters that Mr Smyth brought up in particular—I have not got the figures or the detail at my fingertips that the health minister would have. I understand that under the previous government the real reduction in funding for health was quite substantial. For the opposition to be in here today decrying the efforts of this government, given the resources that we have put into mental health, beggars belief. But that is the game we are playing. We do seem to have a level of debate now where quite a number of people just seem to be in denial of reality and where we have come from.

The situation at RILU—again, I do not have absolute detail on this—is of great concern. It is a great concern that all of a sudden there is the heralding of micromanagement from

the floor of this place. It might have been undesirable by itself for RILU to close or to be changed in its function. But, on balance, I understand that what was being done was for an overall positive benefit. This Assembly, by focusing on a single issue without taking into account the broader perspective, has probably cost the territory some funds and has probably delayed some services in the ACT for no good point other than just to gainsay the government. That, to me, is of concern.

I want to mention specifics. I do not like to go into specifics, but Mrs Burke brought up the organisation Fabric and virtually said that it had not been given enough resources to do its job. By sheer coincidence, I have some history of Fabric. It is unfortunate that history may be repeating itself. Fabric was an organisation that had demands placed upon it by clients and potential clients that it could not meet in toto. That is the situation with virtually all NGOs that are trying to meet demand out there and trying to fill unmet need. The contract and the agreement between government and those NGOs is that they will receive and manage the funds and prioritise to make sure that those most in need get appropriate levels of service.

Years ago Fabric virtually had an administrator appointed because it had run out of money. It seems to have happened a couple of times since. It has happened where there has not been a strategic management of resources through the year. You cannot blame people themselves for not knocking back deserving cases, but, at the same time, part of the process of running one of those NGOs is to make sure that you can provide service with the resources you have to the most needy cases within your particular constituency through the course of the full year.

It let the funds go at an unsustainable rate and then went public and said, “We haven’t got enough money.” If all of the NGOs did that—and they could—we would be in a disastrous situation. It is very irresponsible for Mrs Burke to take up one side of that case without looking at the case as it ought be evaluated. We would love to give them more funds.

**Mrs Burke:** It was just an example.

**MR QUINLAN:** It was a bad example, Mrs Burke.

**Mrs Burke:** Be that as it may, respite care is needed.

**MR QUINLAN:** If you had done your homework you would know that it was a bad example. That is the point. You do not do your homework. One of the problems we have, as a government, with you, Mrs Burke, is that you do not do your homework. You are off on 2CC with that idiot, Mike Jeffries, crying “the sky is falling” stuff. You have not done your homework. You have a responsibility in this place and you ought to exercise it to the extent that would come up to a standard required of an MLA. You are not meeting that standard.

**Mrs Burke:** It doesn’t put you out. Let’s get personal, Ted.

**MR QUINLAN:** Yes. I seldom do it but I have to say—

**Mr Smyth:** You do it all the time.

**MR QUINLAN:** I do not, Mr Smyth. I am not in your league, Mr Smyth, in terms of your snide approach.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! The Treasurer will direct his comments through the chair.

*Opposition members interjecting.*

**MR SPEAKER:** The opposition will stop interjecting.

**MR QUINLAN:** Look at the budget breakfast and the budget dinner that followed the presentation of this budget. What did you do after that? All you did was wax lyrical about me. You made a fool of yourself, but it didn't work.

**Mr Smyth:** Yes, it did.

**Mrs Burke:** You are such a boy, Ted.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Treasurer, resume your seat.

**MR QUINLAN:** You look like a man of no substance.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Quinlan, just resume your seat for a minute. Please direct your comments through the chair and the other side won't be provoked. Those on the other side will please restrain themselves. We have a long way to go.

**MR QUINLAN:** Okay. I think that will do me. Thank you.

**MR STANHOPE** (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Environment and Minister for Community Affairs) (9.37): I was listening to the debate and there were a number of points that I felt did require some response, but my colleague the Treasurer has responded and said many of the things that I had thought I might say in relation to issues around health. The thing that occurs to me most starkly in the comments that have been made in this debate is just how short the collective memory or the amnesia of the Liberal Party is. If one goes through point by point, item by item, the issues that have been raised in the debate—

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! The question has just been raised with me as to whether the Treasurer closes the debate. The answer is no because the periods are unspecified for the minister managing the bill.

**MR STANHOPE:** The Leader of the Opposition will come to grips with the standing orders eventually—if he gets to spend enough time in the place. Perhaps that is not all that certain either with just 3½ months to go to the election.

This collective amnesia, this capacity to forget what the Liberal Party bequeathed to the territory after seven years of government, is interesting. It was particularly interesting in the comments that the Liberal Party made that there was not a single mention of the Gallop inquiry or the state of disability services at the time of the changeover of the

government. It is quite interesting in relation to the suite of issues that we confronted in the health portfolio—

**MR SPEAKER:** Come to the health portfolio, please.

**MR STANHOPE:** That was the health portfolio three years ago. It is historically important because of what we inherited.

**Mr Smyth:** The Chief Minister says that I do not know what I am doing, but if he looks at line 1.15 he will see that there is now a department of disability and housing and that is where we will appropriately discuss the Gallop report.

**MR SPEAKER:** I have already raised the point of order.

**MR STANHOPE:** I was raising the point about what we inherited in the health portfolio on the change of government. One of the things we inherited in health at the change of government was disability services. We were left with the Gallop report to implement. I think everybody in Canberra knows of the total disarray in disability services.

We know at the time of the change of government 2½ or two and two-thirds years ago the situation we inherited with the nurses. These were issues that were not touched on. Let us go through them: there were dramatic issues with nurses and the EBA in that the previous government had not appropriated any funds for a nurses pay rise, there was no provision in the outyears for a pay rise for nurses; disability services were in complete and total disarray—we need to remember this; we need to remember the history and we need to remember what we inherited—and mental health was in disarray, with the lowest level of per capita expenditure on mental health of any jurisdiction in Australia. These are the things that we inherited just over 2½ years ago.

We can go on. And it is worth repeating them: nurses pay rises in negotiation, an offer that had been made that had not been funded; disability services in complete and total disarray; the lowest rate of per capita funding for mental health services in Australia—the lowest rate for mental health funding of any jurisdiction in Australia. That is absolutely, completely and totally disgraceful.

I heard in the debate just now a comment that we had not rectified the problems that have been identified in the psychiatric services unit. Who built the psychiatric services unit? Who bequeathed it to us as a government? Here we have the gross hypocrisy that we have not yet remedied the problems of the psychiatric services unit, constructed and developed by the Liberal Party. It was their management; it was their design; it was their construction. We inherited it. Now they stand here and criticise us because it is another Liberal Party mess that we have not yet been able to clean up in the two and two-thirds years we have been in government.

Let us just go through them item by item: nurses pay rises not funded; disability services through the Gallop inquiry in total disarray, a complete mess; the lowest level of funding per capita in Australia for mental health; the psychiatric services unit, which they stand here now and criticise us for not rectifying, is their legacy to the people of the ACT; respite care is almost invisible on the radar, no funding for respite care; and the lowest level of GPs per capita in the nation once again.

What has not been covered in the debate is the issue around the nursing work force: the numbers of nurses, the numbers of therapists and the numbers of health professionals. We look for some explanation of why that situation has persisted. We look for why we have the lowest level of bulk-billing in Australia. We look to understand why we cannot attract GPs to the ACT—and we have to look to their colleagues on the hill. We know where the issue is.

We know that there has been no attempt by the federal government to deal with work force issues. We have seen what has happened. In the last two months the University of Sydney basically abandoned the Faculty of Nursing because of the dereliction of the Liberal Party federally. We know that issues in relation to the lack of training and lack of places for nurses, for therapists and for technicians—indeed, all health work force issues—are issues of responsibility for the federal government. We, as the territory government, have striven mightily to deal with them. Everybody knows that a lack of commitment to primary health care from the federal government and a lack of funding have forced enormous pressure onto the public hospital system.

One of the great pities of this debate is the running down of the public hospitals in the ACT. We have, in the Canberra Hospital and in the Calvary Public Hospital, two of the finest public hospitals in Australia. We are lucky that the people of Canberra understand that. We are lucky that they will not be deceived by the running down of two wonderful hospitals—the Canberra Hospital and the Calvary Public Hospital. They are amongst the greatest hospitals in Australia—there is absolutely no doubt about that.

A point has also been raised by one of the Liberals in relation to aged-care patients. It was suggested that all of a sudden—2½ years ago—a situation described as bedlock occurred. It did not happen before that of course. It never happened under the Liberals! All of a sudden, in October 2001, this new phenomenon occurred. The hospitals had to start dealing with aged-care patients in their hospitals taking beds that might have been better utilised for acute care. It is quite remarkable. It has been known only since October 2001. It did not occur before that; it is just a Labor emanation. It never happened under the Liberals. What a load of codswollop! What a load of garbage! This has been an issue that has confronted hospitals, particularly public hospitals, since the year dot—and you know it. To claim, all of a sudden, that under the Labor Party, under this government, these sorts of things happened is just nonsense. It is just rubbish; it is just garbage. Absolutely nobody will be fooled by that nonsense.

Certainly we face a range of issues with health care. We have touched on some of them and we have cleaned up an awful lot of what we inherited. One of the prices that were paid for the investment we made in disability services, the investment we made in respite care, the investment we made in nurses, was that there was not the same level of investment in elective surgery. We said it at the time—and we say it again. Let us not pretend that the investment in disability services, the investment in nurses, the investment in respite care and the investment in mental health came at the cost of elective surgery. We said it; we were open about it. Of course elective surgery numbers have taken a hit. But we did it deliberately; we did it with our eyes open. We transferred some resources into other areas that had been grossly neglected by the Liberals—namely, disabilities, respite care, mental health and a range of other services that the Liberals refused to fund.

There is more to a public health system than elective surgery. We were prepared to acknowledge that, and I acknowledge it here now. We did transfer funds from elective surgery into mental health, into disability services, into respite care, into psychiatric services, into nurses wages and into VMO salaries. We did do that. It was appropriate that we did, because what you left us was an absolute shambles, an absolute disgrace. We have got public health in the ACT back on the road to recovery. And only a Labor government will do it.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.12—Department of Urban Services, \$241,462,000 (net cost of outputs), \$91,092,000 (capital injection) and \$5,632,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$338,186,000.

**MRS DUNNE (9.47):** Urban Services is the nuts and bolts of much of the ACT government, the interface between the average voter and the ACT government—and what a sorry tale it is! There is a vast amount of money swashing around in Urban Services—\$338 million—and sometimes I think the people of the ACT wonder what they get for their money. When you are out door-knocking and visiting shopping centres, which the Labor Party do not want to do so they probably do not know this, one of the constant cries of people is about the down-at-heel look of Canberra: the graffiti—Mr Cornwell will probably speak at length about this; just a little entree there—and lack of repair to the footpaths, which not just affects the look of the place; it is positively a danger to people.

**Mr Stanhope:** We spent more on it than you did. Get your facts straight.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister has behaved like this most of the day. This afternoon you drew attention to the fact that he was speaking while other people were speaking.

**MR SPEAKER:** Come to the item expenditure. Chief Minister, please desist.

**MRS DUNNE:** Much of what we see in Urban Services is about the nuts and bolts, parish-pump interface which this government is not addressing.

**Mr Stanhope:** We put more money into it than you did.

**MRS DUNNE:** If the government has put more money into it than the previous government did, again it is an instance of paying for more and getting less. The people of the ACT are telling us, because we will listen to them, that they do not like the run-down look of the city. It is not just the fact that their gardens are dying—and they resent that—but the fact that the street trees are dying.

**Mr Stanhope:** No—

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Speaker, very soon I am going to lose patience. I am going to ask you to warn the Chief Minister because he is being entirely unruly here.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Chief Minister, restrain yourself. Mrs Dunne has the floor. If this continues, I will end up going to the position of naming people and all that sort of business and I do not think it leads us anywhere. Mrs Dunne, please proceed. If you direct your comments through the chair that would probably be helpful too.

**MRS DUNNE:** One of the constant themes is that the people of the ACT feel that they are not getting very much value for money when it comes to the nuts and bolts—footpaths, graffiti and general clean-up. On roadsides are car bodies and road kill is left for days at a time. When I was last involved with Urban Services, there was a process for picking up road kill as soon as possible. There are kangaroo and fox corpses on William Hovell Drive and elsewhere that have been there for weeks. Urban Services is not picking them up. It is not a good look. It offends some people and distresses others.

Road kill not being picked up raises an animal welfare issue. This is especially so with kangaroos that have been hit by cars—whether anyone has checked for a joey in the pouch and whether anything has been done about a joey which may still be alive. It is just another instance of not meeting the requirements of the people of the ACT.

We have a range of initiatives set out in the budget, some of which have been addressed by the Estimates Committee. I will just dwell on a few of them. I was pleased to see the response from the government to the Estimates Committee report. The Estimates Committee had suggested that the government might look at getting some economies of scale out of running together both the water audit, under “Think water, act water”, and the energy audit, under the energise your home program. The government has at least been courteous enough to say that there may be some merit in that. I commend the idea to the government for further exploration.

There are other models of energy and water audits such as the one run by COOL communities. There are crossovers and synergies and it would be useful for us to get the most bang for our buck by ensuring that, if we are visiting someone at home to talk about, say, water efficiency and we see a glaring energy efficiency issue, we could address that for the benefit of not just the individual but the whole community.

The greenhouse initiative, energise your home, is good in principle. My concern is that it is a pathetically small sum of money. It boils down to basically \$1 per house, per person, per year or about \$3 per household per year. At that rate, it will take us a very long time to improve the energy efficiency of households in the ACT. We had a long discussion in this place last week about addressing greenhouse strategy. The government said that it is an awfully difficult thing to do—and it is if you are only prepared to spend \$300,000 per year for the next four years because we will not make the progress. We cannot hang our hats on a simple \$300,000 program and hope that that will improve the situation.

Under Urban Services we have a range of issues. We have the issue of the international arboretum. A number of people in this chamber are of the view that, whilst not necessarily disagreeing with the overall principle establishing the international arboretum, \$10 million on that project at this stage of our bushfire recovery may not be the best way to spend our money, considering, for instance, that there is a large amount of fence building to be done. The weed problem is enormous and will get worse, especially if the drought continues, and we should be considering spending more money

on general land management than spending an inordinately large amount of money on planting a relatively small area of land.

We do wonder whether we are getting value for money when we compare the expenditure on the international arboretum over four years with some of the planting expenditure in ACT forests across the river where, for smaller amounts of money, larger areas of land are being replanted. I know that planning has to go into this, but I wonder whether the people of the ACT are going to end up with a resource that is materially superior to a forest planted elsewhere. We have to question whether this is the best way to spend our money.

Another recommendation of the Estimates Committee report was to establish a more appropriate catchment management structure. At one stage in the Estimates Committee we did consider the words “catchment management authority”. Some members had some concerns with that, which I understand, because it is not really the place of an Estimates Committee to recommend to government that they establish an authority, with all the legislation and formality that go with it. On the basis that we could not find better words, we made a more general recommendation.

I note that the government has basically palmed that off to one side, saying, “We have appointed two people to do some work.” That is good, as far as it goes, but appointing two people to do some work and having the odd meeting with Bob Carr from time to time does not address the issues, especially the cross-border issues of catchment management.

**MR SPEAKER:** The member’s time has expired.

**MRS DUNNE:** I will take my extra 10 minutes, Mr Speaker. A forest ecologist is a good enough initiative and a good enough start, but the complex issues of dealing with catchment management, particularly in the Googong catchment, which is outside our borders but which we have a proprietary legislative right to, have not really received enough attention from successive governments and are certainly not receiving enough attention from this government.

I move on to NOWaste by 2010. The NOWaste by 2010 initiative is falling behind and is an issue of considerable concern to members of the community. I have had representations from people—Ms Tucker also raised this during the Estimates Committee hearings—especially those living in multiunit developments, who do not have appropriate access to recycling facilities. It seems to be becoming increasingly difficult for people who do not live in freestanding accommodation to get access to such services.

This is going to be an increasing problem as there is an increasing tendency for people to live in multiunit developments. This is something that the government must address. It must find ways to ensure that people who live in multiunit developments can recycle their paper, tins and bottles.

Also, we have to address what seems to be an intractable problem for this government—that of biowaste. We have not seen any progress on the issue of biowaste. It really has gone into the too-hard basket. While we have this government and this Minister for

Urban Services I do not think we will make progress. There seems to be an irrational fear of picking a technology and going with it. The government wants to wait and see if something new comes onto the market. It will then have another panic attack and a fit of existential angst as it tries to work out whether this technology is better than that, finds it all too difficult and it all ends up with nothing happening.

We have sat on the opposition benches for the past 2½ or two and two-thirds years watching this minister doing nothing about putrescible waste. There are other issues that we need to address in relation to NOWaste by 2010, such as how easy it is for schools, commercial facilities or even government offices to recycle effectively. In this place the recycling of paper is okay but the recycling of other wastes—bottles and things of that nature—is less than user friendly. It does not get cleared very often and gets a bit whiffy. It really is not groundbreaking or state-of-the-art. We should be doing more to address the issues and leading by example.

We have the ongoing saga, with \$71 million appropriated over the next few years, of the building of Gungahlin Drive. We will be back here on Thursday morning trying to sort out yet another problem. Opposition members of the Estimates Committee believe that the time has come to build the whole of Gungahlin Drive. Let us not muck around. We are going to spend \$71 million to build two lanes, all the flyovers and all the bibs and bobs.

Somewhere along the line we are going to have to spend another \$20 million to duplicate that. If we do it now, it will cost us \$20 million, by the government's assessment. If we wait another 10 years, we will pay a premium, which is currently estimated at about \$10 million. As road construction increases in cost over time, I expect that the premium will blow out significantly.

Urban Services' analysis is that we will have a perfectly fine road into and out of Gungahlin for 22 hours a day. The other two hours a day are the really important crunch times—the times when people want to get to and from work in a timely fashion, but they will not be able to do it because, by the admission of Urban Services, the road will be too congested.

These are issues that this government should address. It is the view of the Liberal opposition that the government should bite the bullet and build the road—all four lanes—now.

Much has been said during the early parts of the debate about the budget on the government's commitment or non-commitment to improve transport infrastructure. There has been a lot of talk. There is a nice maroon document with glossy pictures and blurred pictures that suddenly become clear—it is a theme of government publications at the moment. There are some very modest targets which are way out beyond the next election, none of which will be met if the commitment to funding and to do the work is not there.

The minister for transport is committed to doing something but I do not think there is the support of the budget to ensure that anything substantial will be done. In the budget outcomes there is almost no increase in the number of hours of operation of ACTION over the next financial year and a very modest increase in the number of passenger

boardings. If we are going to meet the modest increases projected in the sustainable transport strategy, which is probably a misnomer, we will have to do better than is currently in the budget.

On the subject of targets and going back to some discussion we had earlier in the day in the matter of public importance on “Think water, act water”, we have very modest targets which are set so far out that it will be very difficult to measure the government’s achievements. We certainly will not have to measure this government’s achievements if it is returned to office between one election and the next. Between 2004 and 2008, which is when we will have our next election, there are no targets to be met in water efficiency.

We have to take all that the government promises us on water efficiency on trust—way beyond the next election. This is not the way to make progress, to make our contribution to cutting water consumption in the Murray-Darling Basin.

**Mr Stanhope:** What were your targets? None. You didn’t have a water strategy.

**MRS DUNNE:** Just you wait, Sunshine.

**MR CORNWELL (10.06):** The hour grows late. I do not intend to speak for long. I am tired of hearing my own voice and I am sure that other members are too. I wish to mention three things however, one of which relates to a recommendation made by the select committee looking into appropriations. It relates to the upgrade of shopping centres, and the Chief Minister would be aware of this. I understand that in 2002 the Chief Minister promised the Deakin shops a major upgrade and this has not yet taken place. There were two other shopping centres—I think Duffy and perhaps Hackett—that sought an upgrade. Again, these are not provided in this budget.

However, the government has announced a long-term strategy—here we go again—to ensure that all centres are considered equitably for inclusion in a program of upgrades. It is interesting that the retail activity coordination group provides advice on priorities for the program. It consists of the ACT Planning and Land Authority, the Land Development Agency and the Department of Urban Services. It occurs to me that some community input may not go amiss for that particular coordination group. I leave that for consideration. It states:

It would not be practicable to provide an ongoing program as the centres to be upgraded are subject to funding that is determined on an annual basis in the budgetary context.

I am not sure that I entirely agree with that. Although I can see problems in listing these centres to be upgraded in terms of funding, I do not see a problem in listing them in terms of some sort of priority in the upgrade—“You might not get it this year, you might get it next year.” The shopping centres would at least have some assurance that they were on the list. I will leave that with the government.

There are a number of good initiatives in this budget in relation to Urban Services. Obviously, roads and capital works relating to those roads are difficult things to cost and to time. Other factors such as weather come into it. I must admit that, when I see perfectly good roads being dug up and resealed, I occasionally wonder whether it is

necessary. But I think I have mentioned in this place before that the engineers assure us that if that does not happen within six months the roads will all break up. We have never waited those six months to see whether they do break up. So I am none the wiser or the better off for this.

In the overall scheme of things it appears strange that the outcome for the 2003-04 community path maintenance program showed that 20,000 square metres of path maintenance was to be carried out at a cost of \$2.7 million, which equated to \$136 per square metre. However in this budget we see that 20,000 square metres—the same number—of community path will cost \$3 million. This equates to \$150 a square metre. This is a \$20 increase. This is much greater than the CPI—and it is for the same number of square metres. This is a good case of spending more and getting less.

The same thing has happened with the municipal roads maintenance. The road maintenance for 2003-04 was 97 lane-kilometres at a cost of \$58,146 per kilometre. In this budget however, we see only 95 lane-kilometres of planned maintenance at a cost of \$69,514 per kilometre. We have two kilometres less and a whopping \$11,386 per kilometre increase in cost. I repeat: spending more, getting less. That matter could be investigated.

The third matter I wish to speak about—as my colleague Mrs Dunne indicated—is graffiti. Once again, this government is allocating money to clean up graffiti. It is also putting in some new legislation—which certainly has the support of this side of the house—that will enable graffiti to be cleaned off private property without the consent of the owners. I understand the problem: sometimes the owners cannot be found or they are out at work. There is also provision for reducing the amount of time that abandoned cars can be removed in.

However, the problem in making these moves is that the government is still not addressing the problem of this type of vandalism. There is no attempt being made to control the people who are doing this. This can be done by various means. I have referred to it as “carrot and stick”. But in its approach to vandalism the government has only the carrot. The rabbits over there are offering only the carrot and not the stick. I believe that the people of the ACT want some very firm action taken against graffiti vandals. As far as this side of the house is concerned, we should deliver on it.

**MS DUNDAS (10.13):** As has already been noted, it is disappointing that this budget leaves a lot to be desired in areas of waste management and greenhouse gas abatement. Yet again, there is no funding for kerbside collection of compostable waste and no funding for a disposable facility for commercial kitchen waste. I have trouble seeing how we are going to achieve the NOWaste by 2010 target.

There is also no commitment to recycling bins in public places. The government’s response to the Estimates Committee indicated that it would try to encourage householders to have compost heaps working in their backyards to take some of the putrescible waste. This is another government idea and a government initiative that leaves renters out in the cold. They are a significant part of the ACT housing market. Yet so many initiatives targeted in terms of housing efficiency, water efficiency strategies and now our waste efficiency strategies do not benefit them at all. Unless our approach

takes in the diverse range of the housing market in the ACT, these plans just will not work.

There was no funding for retrofitting of public housing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and there are no funding measures to encourage private landlords to retrofit properties with energy efficiency measures or appliances. There was also too little money to implement the new water strategy. There was absolutely nothing for new water recycling infrastructure. There is no identified funding for capital works to reduce the flow of stormwater into our lakes and divert this water for irrigating our playing fields and parks. It seems such a simple idea. We have concerns about the impact of the drought on our ovals. If we could turn water run-off back onto those ovals, it would be a win-win situation.

Speaking of ovals, this budget contained ongoing expenditure for the maintenance of Phillip oval. I do not think we fully appreciate how that cost will be forgone. The Treasurer and I are aware that a lot of work needs to be done at Phillip oval. We were out there for the AFL match a couple of weeks ago. I am very concerned about whether the money allocated will be enough to bring that oval up to standard.

There were some positive initiatives in the environment section of this budget. However, again we had to raise concerns about the work of the office of the Commissioner for the Environment and how that office is being supported to monitor the state of the environment in the ACT. It needs to be recognised that we should not be looking at the state of the environment in the ACT only when a report is due. It should be ongoing. The office should be supported to do that on an ongoing basis.

The Department of Urban Services also covers the area of arts, and there was an increase in the arts budget for arts grants. Through the estimates process, we learnt that that funding will be paid out through arts organisations already receiving money from the ACT government. Programs that are currently running will soon increase. I do not deny that those programs needed support; they were running on shoestring budgets. However, there are many other arts organisations out there not receiving any support at all or very minimal support. We need to look at how we prioritise our expenditure across the board and see that we are able to support the diverse range of arts here in the ACT.

We are still waiting to see where the government is going in terms of its consultation as called on by this Assembly in relation to music—live music in particular. There was no money in this budget to support the local music industry. However, there was money to turn the feasibility study on the Belconnen cultural centre into a design for the Belconnen cultural centre. I am delighted to see this expenditure finally happening. The people of Belconnen have been working on this for a very long time. We have had a consultation about what we would like to see there. There is a lot of support in the community for a cultural centre. There has been a lot of debate over where to put that. It is time that we buckled down and moved forward.

I will quickly mention what is happening in our libraries. We have a number of libraries going through refurbishments and increases. It will be a little while before we see how that will impact on their operations. I note that the government is providing ongoing consultations in relation to the Link project, and I hope that the remaining issues in relation to the transfer or the move of the Civic Library can be worked out harmoniously.

The Link project does not just mean a new library; it will impact on the Canberra Theatre and the Playhouse Theatre. The Canberra Theatre Corporation has noted that it will impact on its ability to sell tickets over the next two years. We will have to continue to monitor that and work out how to allow theatre-hungry Canberrans access to professional shows in the ACT while that development goes ahead.

I will add one more thing; it is simpler to do it now. There is money in this budget for some greenhouse gas abatement measures. I respond to some comments made in relation to greenhouse gas. The Minister for Environment drew to the attention of the Assembly that he thought that some members had misled the house during a debate on greenhouse gas abatement measures last week. I say to the minister that I went back and checked my *Hansard* and, to the best of my knowledge, I did not say anything that was false. He claims that members said that he had abandoned targets. I checked what I said and I believe that what I said was factual. I wanted to put that on the record and put the minister's mind at rest.

**MR PRATT (10.20):** I want to pick up on a couple of local issues in terms of DUS maintenance. I am pleased to see an extra \$250,000—I think it is—per annum recurrent for local suburban infrastructure. I hope this will do something about the outstanding problems that I have been able to go back and check, particularly things like cracked footpaths. I am talking about Langdon Avenue, Longmore Crescent in Wanniasa, Macfarland Crescent in Pearce and, particularly, Beasley Street in Torrens, which is the footpath link to Mawson shops.

These are areas where many elderly live and they depend on being able to walk along footpaths. I notice that some of these footpaths have been buffered to remove the bumps and grinds in them. But that is not working particularly well. A year or two after that work was done, those paths are now cracking. Yes, it is good money appropriated, but it needs to be spent wisely. The calibre of work is suspect in this particular area.

Hopefully this money will go to doing something about picking up dumped cars in Michie Street, Wanniasa, which have been there since Adam was a boy.

The other issue of maintenance and cleaning up is the area around Lanyon shops. For more than 18 months people have been complaining to me about this. There is a question about whether the government's contractor is complying with its needs and whether government inspectors are indeed auditing the work that they do. Clearly they are not, because the gutters and the drainage areas around the Lanyon shops have been constantly cluttered with plastic bags and rubbish for a long time. That area needs to be looked at.

I gather another \$1 million is allocated to cleaning up graffiti. That is certainly welcome. I hope that the four-kilometre spectacle of back fences covering most of Pearce and Torrens along Athllon Drive is cleaned up. The question is whether some of that \$1 million annually could be saved through better preventative measures. I hear a thundering silence at the question of initiatives that will be taken to try to prevent graffiti happening in the first place rather than just reacting after the event and cleaning it up.

The last issue I raise in relation to DUS is speed cameras. As far as I can see—and somebody can correct me if I am wrong—the DUS speed cameras are mainly located on the major arterial 80-kilometre zones. There are residential areas with a significant number of 60-kilometre through streets—particularly Outtrim Avenue in Calwell, Jackie Howe Crescent in Macarthur and Macfarland Crescent through Pearce connecting with Chifley; they are the three best examples I came come up with—with many children living there. People constantly complain to me that these streets are speed zones for people who take shortcuts, particularly during peak hour traffic. I would like to see the DUS speed cameras deployed even more often in these streets than on the 80-kilometre zones.

I would like to see them also in the 50-kilometre backstreets. I do not think they are being used to raise revenue but that is the argument that many of the public will proffer. They would be seen to be providing a safer service if they were deployed in these low-kilometre-zone streets where people are doing very high speeds. I hope that this money appropriated for the DUS cameras means that they are deployed more efficiently where they are needed in some of these backstreets where people are living a little more dangerously.

**MS TUCKER** (10.25): I am not going to speak for very long on this because I made comments in the original budget debate, and I do not see the point in repeating them all.

There was a question on notice regarding the greenhouse spending and the answer points out the problem of confusing reporting. I do not know that there is a particular desire to make it look like there are new programs when there are not. But I just think it would be much better if we had a clearer breakdown, particularly when a question on notice has asked for expenditure. I apologise because in the debate last week I think I said that there had not been an answer to that question and in fact there was. I was just not informed that there was. The government had responded to that. I clarify that for the record.

The only extra point I make is that the staffing issue in the greenhouse unit bears some more work. Their salaries have increased but are still at a relatively low level. If we need intensive work in this area—and we do—then the staffing resources have to be there to do it.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (10.26): The government can accept that more work needs to be done in the look of the city; it is an ongoing task. We were once fortunate to take over from the Commonwealth a city in pretty good nick. For many years virtually nothing was done because we could live off the condition we had. That no longer obtains. A fair bit of work is going on around the place. It is unfortunate that some of it is just patchwork. But that will continue.

I respond to something Mr Pratt said. I go past Deakin shops very regularly and they look pretty good to me. If I was putting some money into doing up a shopping centre, Deakin would be down the list a bit. But I understand that the Chief Minister said—as he informs me—not that it will be done but that it is on the list. I think that is the qualification.

In terms of footpaths: I live in Weston and have been there for quite a while. The angle grinders have hit the footpaths there. I do a bit of walking around there in the early mornings. There has been considerable improvement. But again, that will be an ongoing task. That concludes what I want to say on that.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

### **Suspension of standing order 76**

Motion (by **Mr Quinlan**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That standing order 76 be suspended for the remainder of the sitting.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.13—Planning and Land Authority, \$34,305,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$14,880,000 (capital injection), totalling \$49,185,000.

**MRS DUNNE** (10.29): The Planning and Land Authority comes under a lot of scrutiny in this place; it was discussed at length here last Wednesday. There is a substantial appropriation for an organisation that touches many aspects of our lives. I hope that, as a result of this appropriation, we will find a way through some of the mire and that we can trust that the acting planning minister is onto it.

The amounts of \$250,000 this year and \$100,000 next year for reform of the planning and land system are well overdue. As we discussed last week, it has been the view of the Liberal opposition that it was much more important to address the issues of the much-pilloried land act and the inconsistencies in the territory plan, and to have a modern and innovative approach to land use policy, than to change the corporate structure of the organisation.

As I have said on a number of occasions, changing the name of an organisation does not change the culture. You do not change what the organisation does if you do not change the tools, and the basic tools of the Planning and Land Authority are the land act and the territory plan. The land act is badly in need of revision. I am glad to see that money is now committed to it.

I question the enormity of that sum—\$350,000 over two years. It is too long. The people of the ACT and business in the ACT cannot afford to wait two years for a review of legislation that is so important, especially when considering the fact that since about April 2002 I have spoken and moved motions in this place for a review of the land act. It was always one of those things on the never-never. The money is here now and that is good. But I suspect that the money is much more than most of us anticipated would be needed for such a task and that the task will take far too long.

A substantial amount of money is in here for capital injection for initiatives around the territory in relation to the land release program. I hope that the land release program is on time, that we manage to release the land that we say that we will and that, when we do, we have auction documents that mean something—that when people buy something at auction, they cannot go off the next day and change what they will do on the site.

At the same time, we should not be auctioning off particularly large tracts of suburb, as in the case of Harrison, where we already have a suburb plan mapped out but a complete and utter failing of town planning—an absolute, abysmal failing. In the Gungahlin town centre there are kilometres of straight, uninterrupted rear lanes that remind you of nothing so much as Coronation Street. It is a sorry indictment of planning in the ACT that we are seeing new developments come up with this lack of quality of town planning. With an injection of money to review the tools, I hope that we come up with a better planning outcome. I hope I do not have to wait too long to see that.

**MRS CROSS** (10.34): I will speak briefly on one aspect of the ACT Planning and Land Authority budget. I note that \$250,000 has been allocated for this budget year, and \$100,000 for budget year 2005-06 to—as Mrs Dunne said—review the territory’s planning and land administration with a view to significantly simplifying the system and streamlining the approval processes.

This review is much needed and has been a long time coming. At present the planning process is so complex and so confusing that it is very often overwhelming for your average Canberran. Since the start of my term, many constituents have sought my help in trying to get through the ACT planning system. Whilst there are, undoubtedly, many benefits to having such a planned city, the current planning regime can, and does, lead to much disenchantment in the community.

The planning process is often long, rigorous and expensive for Canberra citizens and is in much need of review. Worse, the planning process often does not represent the wishes of the community. The perfect example of this was the proposed refurbishment, reconstruction or rebuilding—whatever you want to call it—of the Karralika Drug Rehabilitation Centre in the residential area of Fadden and Macarthur. This was done without public consultation and without consideration of nearby residents.

Whilst I will not drag up all the detail of the Karralika issue, it is an apt example of how the planning process has failed ACT residents. Residents of Macarthur and Fadden were not consulted about a major work that would affect their quality of life. They were not consulted because the minister had the ability to hide behind a regulation—a regulation wrongly enacted in the situation—that allowed him not to consult residents when dealing with a dwelling that provided confidential services.

This is but one example of how the planning process has failed ACT residents. I hope something comes out of this review; I sincerely do. I hope the planning process becomes less complex, less time consuming and less daunting. I hope this is not just another review for review’s sake. But, like Mrs Dunne, I am concerned that this will take two years, and that can only be to the detriment of the residents of the ACT.

**MR PRATT** (10.36): I raise one concern about planning as it may affect the Brindabella electorate. I comment on the funding hopefully allocated for that. I raise my alarm—I am sorry, Mr Hargreaves, but I have to say this—at the wise words of my colleague Mr Hargreaves who, in the *Canberra Times* of 9 June 2004, was quoted as saying:

I’m not going to say that the Canberra plan is doing wonderful things for Tuggeranong, because it isn’t.

**Mrs Cross:** Did he say that?

**MR PRATT:** He did, according to the *Canberra Times*. But we do not necessarily believe everything the media says. I hope that is not a portent of things to come, in terms of the impact of planning in Brindabella. Let's keep our fingers crossed. Was I taking it out of context?

**MR HARGREAVES (10.37):** I have not spoken in this debate. I will be very brief. Mr Pratt, you did not. But I have to say that you were not listening the other day when the Planning Minister and I were talking in this place about his changing the planning paradigm. Mr Pratt had to read my comments in the *Canberra Times* because he did not pay Tuggeranong business the courtesy of turning up and talking to them. If Mr Pratt wants to make a career out of checking my progress through the *Canberra Times*, all power to him.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (10.38): Very briefly, Mr Speaker: I live in a townhouse block. It could look a little like Coronation Street from a couple of angles, but I love it. So to each his own.

**Mrs Dunne:** I suggest you take a trip to Harrison, Mr Acting Planning Minister.

**MR QUINLAN:** Okay. I will have to go and have a bit of a look around.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.14—ACT Forests, \$74,000 (net cost of outputs), totalling \$74,000—agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.15—Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, \$79,278,000 (net cost of outputs), \$4,800,000 (capital injection) and \$23,434,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$107,512,000.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (10.40): I wish to raise concerns about the housing element of the budget and the government's commitment to housing. It was quite interesting that there was a conference on affordable housing at Parliament House yesterday and today. It started with a dinner on Sunday evening to look at the whole issue of housing and where housing stress is.

There was a plea by many of the speakers to ensure that public housing was not overlooked. The conclusions of some speakers were that those in public housing tended to suffer less from housing stress—as it is called—that is, the ability to pay and the impact of paying your rent or mortgage. There was a large amount of evidence that jurisdictions around the country were not—in the opinion of some of the speakers—pulling their weight, particularly in public housing.

I comment on the number of properties in the ACT that are lying idle, unused or are under capacity. One of the criticisms of those opposite of us when we were in office was

that we were always closing facilities and selling off the stock. But we were trying to generate a set of stock that matched the needs of the tenants. That is not happening.

I am sure that shortly Mrs Burke will have a few words to say about this issue. But the important thing is, first, that we have appropriate stock; second, that it is in appropriate locations; and, third, that we are using it appropriately. The area that springs to mind is Northbourne Avenue. For the most part, the Northbourne flats on Northbourne Avenue look pretty much abandoned. There have been a number of issues in regard to that but no answer forthcoming from the minister as to why these flats are, in the main, vacant.

In my term as housing minister, we removed some of the worst blocks. Macpherson Court at Lyneham is now the City Edge. That is a fabulous redevelopment. It is fabulous because it destroyed the concentration of public housing that, for reasons unknown, had become a place where there was a very high concentration of public housing tenants with a mental illness. That is inappropriate. In any other area it would be called a ghetto. I am pleased that we did not get to calling it that.

In terms of renewing it, we had some very high-quality outcomes. A large proportion was for private housing. Some of it was public housing, some of it was aged housing and some was for those with a disability. That is a very good model. We worked with groups such as Community Housing to ensure that we were getting the balance and the mix right. You then have a process of rejuvenation that provides the whole housing stock and makes it usable for all of the people most of the time.

We started to work on the big-flat strategy. Mr Stefaniak, to his credit, started it. He had identified 19 complexes of a certain size that needed a number of things done. Since we have left office, I am not aware of any work being done with the big-flat strategy to announce where it is all going. It would be important to hear from the minister for housing—if he were here—what he is doing. But he is not here, so we will not hear that unless he has briefed the Treasurer. We look forward to the Treasurer's erudite notions on issues such as housing need and housing demand.

The area of most concern to me, and the area I get most complaint about when out doorknocking around the shopping centres, is the provision of aged-care units. Given that we all know we have a problem—the aged population; that is, those over 65 will double in the next 10 years—the question is: what is the government doing about it? From all I can see, the answer is nothing. We seem to have very little happening in terms of the provision of aged housing.

We had several programs and we delivered several hundred aged-persons units during the number of years we were in office. They were welcome not just by the tenants that moved into them but also by the surrounding regions and the local shops. We primarily built them next to shopping centres to reinforce the local shopping centres. It will be interesting to hear from the Treasurer what it is that they are doing.

I also raise the issue of the \$10 million that was given for the Treasurer's Advance almost two years ago for urgent fire upgrade. I am sure Mrs Burke will give an update of where that money is. Two years later a lot of that money for urgent fire upgrade still has not been spent. The problem with this government is its glacial approach. We go off with a bang and end with a whimper: "We need \$10 million; we've got legal advice; we've

got this urgent fire upgrade.” And what has happened? Absolutely nothing. Very little of the money has been spent. It is about time that the government was honest with housing tenants about what it is doing to make their properties safe from fire.

With those few thoughts in regard to the housing section of the budget, it is appropriate that the government gets organised and delivers more on housing, because in the last three years it has let public housing down.

**MS DUNDAS (10.45):** I was very glad to see that in this budget line item for disability, housing and community services there was a big injection of funds to try to clear the waiting list for assessment of children with suspected autism spectrum disorder. I now hope that there will be some innovative ways to attract the workforce we need to make this a reality so that we can keep our assessments and therapy waiting lists down. We can then provide support for those who need it. That means taking some new approaches such as bonded scholarships and making the ACT an attractive place for professionals to come and live.

There is some more money in this budget for initiatives to fight homelessness but still not enough to seriously tackle the problems. The ACT homeless strategy put forward that there are 1,200 homeless people in the ACT at any one time, with more than 100 people sleeping like this each night. As we get into colder months, the situation becomes more dire.

Emergency accommodation services are full and they have been for at least 12 months, because I remember having this discussion in relation to the last budget. Services are turning people away. The shortage of public housing places means emergency housing providers cannot find anywhere to transfer their residents. It is unfortunate that crisis housing ends up functioning as medium-term housing and people on the street are left with nowhere to go. I hope that the community is becoming aware of the need to prioritise funds in this area and the benefit that it has for everyone.

If we are serious about tackling poverty and creating a socially sustainable territory, we need to commit to providing affordable housing. We need to commit to supporting homeless people. Nine new public housing properties is all we are getting out of this increased expenditure in housing and for homelessness. It will not go far enough. More work needs to be done.

I note that the government is doing ongoing work, but this needs to be stepped up. We need to look at specific support for young people, as they are the huge bulk of those who are homeless in the ACT. The government did not take up the idea of a youth night shelter in this budget, as was requested by this Assembly, but I understand that the consultation in relation to that is still ongoing. Hopefully, we will see some action soon—before people freeze in the streets at night because they have nowhere else to go.

The other issue I raise under this point is also in relation to support for children and young people with disabilities. I will say it here and I will say it again when we come to education: I hope that Therapy ACT and the department of education are able to work together to ensure that young people with a disability in our schools and in learning programs are getting the full spectrum of support they need. I also hope that that support continues when they finish school. They are changes that underpin the move by Therapy

ACT. These people need to be supported to be part of the community. The ACT government is not leading the way in terms of disability employment. That seriously needs to be rectified. People with disabilities need support to contribute to the community, as we know they can.

**MRS BURKE (10.49):** Mr Smyth has touched on a few points. Where do I start with housing? Quite frankly, had the minister been here no doubt he would have been able to respond. He probably would have got fairly hot under the collar in doing so. As he has said in this place before, he is quite happy for me to keep going out via the media. At first he got very cross that I was out there with the media. That seems to be the only way I can get any resolution for the people contacting my office.

The minister would say, "Well, we've put this amount of money at it. We're doing this; we're doing that." Simply throwing money at a problem is not the be-all and end-all. Again, we have another department where stronger leadership needs to be shown. Commitment needs to be shown by the government and the minister to lead a department that obviously has an extremely tough job. Indicative of that is the fact that we have a huge turnover of housing managers. Tenants ring into my office with many areas of disappointment. Housing managers are always being shifted. There is no stability. Tenants cannot form relationships with housing managers. They no sooner get on board than there is a change.

Where is that money going? The devil is always in the detail. We have had very little detail about where, for instance, the \$33.2 million is going. The site at Burnie Court is still lying vacant. Public housing is about putting roofs over people's heads. A small piece of land has been sold, and works for aged care are currently under way. This is good to see. The decommissioning of Currong apartments was agreed to. The move to create more houses and put more roofs over people's heads seems to be a long time coming. There is lots of talk, but we do not see bricks and mortar.

We have an increasing and compounding problem in terms of the refurbishment of the older buildings, particularly the multiunit complexes in Canberra. I understand that some of those are slowly coming back on board. But again, matters have been allowed to get behind. This has caused a real bottleneck. We have more people than we should have on the waiting list, because there are a couple of hundred or more empty units awaiting refurbishment.

Mr Wood has explained, for reasons that he knows best, why there is such a delay. We have further delays in Fraser Court. We still have a problem. We probably have 3½ thousand people backlogged. They are waiting and getting extremely frustrated because of the government's inaction when it comes to a commitment to get the buildings built.

I mentioned other difficulties, such as money being thrown at it. During the budget estimates process I was pleased to hear what I believe to be a big problem with maintenance requests and the way that we do maintenance. Many years ago I started expressing my concern about the way that this was done.

I am the first to say that, if a system does not work, we should not keep it. If it is not working, we need to look at it, address the problem and find better ways of doing it. This

would save money that could be used elsewhere. That is another major problem in terms of expenditure in housing. Without cutting back on service or delivery and quality of service, we could make some proper savings.

What we seem to hear in every portfolio area is the government saying that there are no problems. Is it because government members sit on their hands, seemingly incapable of making the hard decisions? What do we then get? We get large amounts of money thrown at it and the government saying, "This is what we're doing; we're looking to the future."

Try telling that to people who have been on the housing list for two years. They are coming to that point of saying, "Look, enough's enough." We do not want people to be pushed ahead of others. But we hear talk of a lot of money coming forward into housing. We are not seeing the efforts of that money. Again, we are spending more and getting less. Yes, it is a mantra, and I have no doubt that the Treasurer will say it is yet another. What else are we supposed to say? They are the facts, the reality.

It is interesting that two planks of public housing policy released by the Liberal opposition have simply been dismissed by the government. Mr Wood is saying, "We're doing all of that. What's Mrs Burke talking about?" Strange, is it not? That policy came about because I made it my business to talk to people about the problems that they face.

The crime prevention through environmental design is a tried and tested national and international project to deal with crime prevention within public housing complexes. Of course, we are talking about the minority of people. But again, I do not see any mention of that anywhere here. No money is to be spent on the upgrading of security for our public housing tenants in multihousing complexes.

While we move people out of these complexes they are very vulnerable. They are more vulnerable because fewer lights are on and the places are darker. This leaves places open to an element that just wants to run riot. It seems that the police, because they do not have some backing or resources, are unable to deal with the problem. People out there are hurting. We need action.

The money is good, but I do not know what it will be spent on; I do not have the detail. Not all the money that Mr Smyth has talked about has been expended. I do not know where that is up to. I have asked, but I do not have a response that says, "This is where this money is going; that's where that money's going." I do not think the government knows. It seems to stab a pen at a paper and say, "That'll do. We'll have \$14 million there. We'll have \$30 million over there."

I am sorry if it makes the Treasurer feel uncomfortable; that is too bad. Perhaps the Treasurer can tell us about the money that he asked for and that he needed so desperately but which we have not yet spent. He probably has answers for that, and he is itching to get to his feet to tell us about it.

Despite throwing money at ACT Housing, we still have problems. What does that say? Mr Wood needs to sit down and talk with me. I have made this offer. I always stand up in this place and say, "Let's talk about the issues." He is obviously not going out and

talking to people as much as I am, because things are not getting fixed. That is why they ring my office and ask. I continue to follow matters through.

The government valiantly attempts to stand up for Mr Wood. I do not want to talk about him while he is not here. I am saying no more than I have said to his face before. I reiterate: we are paying more but getting less. The government needs to really get off its hands. We need to get resolution on Fraser Court and Northbourne Flats. We need to get those flats done, get the people back in and free the backlog on the public waiting list. Let us also see some action on the former Burnie Court site.

**MR PRATT (10.58):** I raise an issue about government-sponsored rental housing in suburbia. I will put on the record the many issues raised with me. Something needs to be done about this. In recent times, I have had a number of approaches about a housing problem in Chisholm. This is one of six or seven examples that I have picked up across the Brindabella Valley.

A house is occupied by three generations of people. In their yard they have one bus, three cars, one truck and a collapsed shed. The place is an eyesore. This house is clearly in poor shape. Despite many reports to the authorities, nothing seems to have improved there. This is pretty sad. It is sad for the people who live in the place, and it is very sad for the neighbours who worry about this house looking like an eyesore. It does not do much for property values either.

In this particular case, the police have been called numerous times because of late night parties. Vandalism and burglaries have been traced back to this family. A neighbour lost a wheel from her car and a laptop computer out of her kitchen, and on it goes. This been reported not only to the police but also to Housing to see whether something could be done. But nothing ever seems to improve. I have seen this repeated in Kambah, Wanniasa and Pearce. This is pretty sad.

The government does have a responsibility to ensure harmony in the community; it is a prime responsibility. Indeed, it is a duty-of-care responsibility to maintain the peace—if you want to put it in those terms. Citizens who are happy to be good neighbours with those living in government-sponsored rental housing in suburbia are entitled to believe that government will also uphold acceptable standards and make sure those standards are maintained.

The government also has a responsibility to ensure that those citizens, regardless of whether those tenants are doing it tough—we recognise that many of these tenants are doing it tough—know that as good citizens they have responsibilities and obligations too. If they do not exhibit such qualities in the first place, then somebody needs to encourage them—and perhaps it should be the government and not the neighbours because that only causes trouble. There is a responsibility there.

There are so many cases of this occurring in the Tuggeranong Valley. I have had the same people come back to me in shopping centres three months later and say, “Mr Pratt, you failed us. Nothing’s happened.” Or they have contacted the department and nothing has happened. It is a bit sad. That is not good. It leads to disharmony and trouble. I exhort the government to do something about it rather than letting this unacceptable practice go on.

**MR HARGREAVES** (11.02): I need only 20 seconds. I want to counterbalance what the opposition was saying. Of the issues that come through my office, well over half are housing issues and well over 80 per cent of those are solved very successfully in a timely manner by the people of ACT Housing. I have no quarrel with what they do whatsoever.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (11.02): Mr Hargreaves made a good point. If a positive view is taken to people's problems rather than telling them that it is all the government's fault and the government should do something—"Ooh, ooh, bad, bad"—there might be a better hope of a settlement being reached.

I am interested in this new approach of the Liberals that bad neighbours are to be thrown out. I gather from the way Mr Pratt presented his case that people were being judged before there was any proof—"The police can't do anything, but those people are guilty." If you are to come to government and introduce this policy of evicting people who are judged as being antisocial, I think you have an obligation to ask yourselves what you are going to do with them.

Had a young family that had some behavioural problems been on the street, I bet pounds to peanuts that Mrs Burke would be on the other side of the fence in a flash. "Ooh, this terrible government leaves these poor people homeless. What are you going to do about them? They're homeless. They can't help it; they need help. You've got to be positive about that. You have to be positive. You can't be negative. You can't just write them off."

I can hear it all. I can hear it on the airwaves. Through you, Mr Speaker, I believe you, the opposition, have a responsibility, otherwise you are not fit to govern. If you said, "Here's a problem. I have half the solution. If you've got the whole solution, tell us the solution," that might be good.

**Mrs Burke**: I have done, many times.

**MR QUINLAN**: The government may be able to adopt that particular solution if there is a solution.

**Mrs Burke**: Pride wouldn't let you. That'll be the day.

**MR QUINLAN**: I do not think there is. I think this is populist appeal. This is politicking at its absolute worst because you do not have the answer to a problem you—

**MR SPEAKER**: Order! Mr Pratt, Mrs Burke, give Mr Quinlan a go.

**MR QUINLAN**: They do not have the answer, Mr Speaker, to the problem they wish to create. Speaking of problems: if Mr Wood was here, I am fairly certain he would be saying, as he has said before in this place, that under the previous government public housing stock was run down. It was run down in quantity, and it was run down in the level of maintenance. Mr Wood has been a very passionate advocate for public housing

in this town, and this town compared to other cities in Australia has a very high level of public housing.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I think the highest per capita.

**MR QUINLAN:** Yes, the stats. I remind Mr Wood of that. Mr Wood and I have tugs-of-war over this in relation to funding and other priorities. Mr Wood has been a very successful advocate for public housing, and for Mr Smyth to come into this place and say, “We started this program” or “We started that program” is getting to the ridiculous stage of this rewriting of history.

Mr Wood would be saying, “You, the Liberals, ran the public housing stock and the maintenance program down.” He has reversed that process—and what is the criticism? Not soon enough. As I have said before, I must get an ordinary, single die cast, with “too high”, “too low”, “not enough”, “too many” and so on, on it, because these are the standard responses from an opposition when a government is doing something that it did not do. It beggars belief that Mr Smyth would stand on his feet and say, “We did all this,” because what they did do was sell off large lumps of public housing stock, full stop.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.16—Housing ACT, \$29,913,000 (net cost of outputs), \$5,000,000 (capital injection), totalling \$34,913,000—agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.17—Department of Justice and Community Safety, \$81,624,000 (net cost of outputs), \$17,277,000 (capital injection) and \$99,219,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$198,120,000.

**MR PRATT (11.08):** I want to talk about the police portfolio within this line item and raise a couple of issues that I raised last week in the MPI about police numbers. A \$4.5 million increase in funding for 2004-05 equals a 4.98 per cent increase in funding from last year. That is to be welcomed. There is a 5.75 per cent decrease in services through a reduction in police personnel. The 2003 ACT Policing annual report lists 817 police personnel, both sworn and unsworn. The 2004-05 ACT budget states that over 770 police personnel will be funded—47 personnel fewer than in the 2002-03 ACT Policing annual report. Ten additional police officer positions for 2004-05 and 10 additional positions for 2005-06 are promised in this appropriation, but are they sworn positions or unsworn positions? Community policing is not only a high priority for the Liberal opposition, it is a high priority for the community.

The Australian Federal Police Association’s 2004-05 budget submission stated that the ACT needs an estimated additional 121 sworn police officers to bring the ACT in line with at least the national average of sworn police officers per 100,000 population. Remember the Labor Party’s promise? I spoke about this in the MPI last week. I do not need to bash that to death, but for the record I say that 181 police per 100,000 population is about 30 per 100,000 less than the national average, and that is not good enough. The sworn police personnel issue can be coupled with the ever-delayed Woden police station saga. We will not hold our breath for that project to be completed. It is promised for June

2005. This continues to show that this government is inactive in community safety, inactive in law and order and inactive in promise keeping.

I acknowledge the media release issued by the minister for police dated 25 June calling for tenders for the new \$7.3 million Woden police station. That is good news. Mr Wood says that the ACT government is serious about community safety and that the new police station will help to ensure and encourage greater interaction between the community and its local police members. That is fine and it is about time, but where will we find the police to fill a new building for up to 120 police officers and personnel? Are we simply building an infrastructure when we do not have enough police? Therefore, is the appropriation properly weighted to make sure that we pick up those numbers? What good is a \$7.3 million police station if there are not enough police officers to put in it to operate it?

The Stanhope government also has a major retention problem. It is going to buy additional police officers. That is certainly better than two years ago, but it has a retention problem. My concern is—and we cannot get a handle on this—what is the net gain or net loss of police officers in view of the existing wastage rates? We know we are losing experienced police. Feedback from the association, from the community and from police individually is that some quite experienced police are going. Part of that is due to the 55-year factor. It happens to be a generational thing, and the government cannot resolve that problem. That is a problem across all portfolios—nursing, teaching and police. However, an alarming number of police in their 30s and 40s are burning out too quickly. Along with the appropriation that we see here to buy additional police, we do not see concrete retention strategies to make sure that we keep experienced police.

We know, for example, that at Belconnen police station a typical police team, which should be six, often is not six and is often made up of quite junior constables and maybe one sergeant. A good police station team of about six should include an experienced sergeant, a senior constable and a balance of junior constables. That way they can operate effectively and safely, and there is a good balance of experience. This is a glaring deficiency at the moment and the government is not addressing that. The need for additional funding in ACT policing is not something that has been invented by us, despite all attempts from the Stanhope government to accuse us of this.

We also have a concern about national operations. Where is the domestic-level counter-terrorist plan? What does it look like? It is not good enough to say that that is a national police problem. I do not want to be romantic about this or extravagant, but the cold, hard facts are the ACT community, because of its federal, international, embassy and Department of Defence assets, is No 2 on the Australian terrorist list. That is the analysis from people who are far more qualified than we are. We do not want our community to get caught up in that, and we expect our ACT police force to be able to complement the national policing effort. National policing and national surveillance have a major role to play but at the community level ACT Police has a complementary role to play. That is why the building of its numbers and community policing are so important.

When I am fulfilling my field campaigning duties, speaking to the people in the electorate, I am overwhelmed by people complaining about the lack of police presence in the suburbs. I see the advertisements on TV and I believe the police are fair dinkum when they say we may not always be able to see them, but they are policing in a clever

way and getting results. That is the story they sell, but I do not know whether the community is all that confident about that. For a long time the community has been saying that it is concerned about the lack of presence and the lack of visibility of police on the streets, particularly in suburbs and shopping centres after 9.00 pm.

In recent days I have talked about the level of vandalism in Jackie Howe Crescent, Macarthur. People there talk about the 20 per cent annual increase in vandalism in their streets. I have talked about the shopkeepers in Chisholm. I have talked about the shopkeepers in Torrens and Pearce who were concerned about damage there. At the weekend I caught up with a majority of shopkeepers in Chisholm who say they have been vandalised so many times it is not funny. A number of these shops have been burgled two, three or four times. Outside the take-away cafe in Chisholm young juveniles are trading drugs in the public phone box. That is exactly the theme I reported last week in my MPI about what happens in Isaacs shops. The crazy thing is: these activities seem to go on and on. In Chisholm, unmarked police cars have diligently responded. They try to get there but it is often too late. There simply are not enough police to be able to sit around for the days and nights that it would take to catch people. There is a big question about resourcing but we simply do not have enough police to take on those layered duties.

I do not believe the community is being unfair or misjudging the situation when it perceives the significant increase in crime and the deterioration in community safety. The community respects the police; everyone tells me that. They like our police and understand they are doing the best they possibly can, but the community feels that more resourcing is required. May I take my extra 10 minutes, or at least part of it?

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** The lack of funding committed by the Stanhope government to ACT Policing exposes the government's lack of commitment to the safety and wellbeing of the Canberra community. We have talked before about the concerns people have about the 131 444 call centre service. That is just another example of the problem we have with policing capacity. We have talked before about the need to have a stronger police presence, with more police officers providing a preventative capability. We have talked before about the deterioration of the mounted police unit and the running down of that force. We have talked before about promises by the government to introduce bicycle patrols and other community-level policing patrols but they have not materialised.

I remind members of Commissioner Keelty's comments the week before last. The government put forward an argument that it cannot find out how many police it has on a given day because it does not know where they are. Commissioner Keelty's response was: "The ACT government gets the police that it pays for." So, he is saying the ACT government clearly ought to know what it has available to it. If he is wrong, I will stand corrected as well. That is what he said, and I would like to hear the argument against that comment.

I will finish my comments there. The picture we portray of the funding and the inability to come to grips with criminal activities indicate that something is wrong in our policing unit capability, and I hope the appropriation does something to address it.

**MR HARGREAVES (11.21):** Mr Pratt loves a boy in a uniform. His whole speech was about the police. The Justice and Community Safety portfolio is a little bit more than just the police. For example, it has corrective services in it. I do not hear Mr Pratt saying how he is going to have innovative programs in the corrective services to stop these people vandalising the back of Chisholm shops. I do not see him congratulating the capital works program for the increased lighting at the back of the Chisholm shops. All I hear is his bleating and saying we need extra police.

I would like to put on the record again something I said in the lead-up to the last election. I said the Labor Party would provide an extra 20 police—in fact, the figure we were talking about was 30 extra police. But that was a case of saying to the Liberal Party “I will see your 10 and raise you 20.” The Liberal Party promised 10 extra police. The Labor Party said, “We’ll put it up by a further 20.” Guess what has happened over the past couple of years? It has gone up by that figure.

I would like Mr Pratt, in this place, to do what I did last time. I committed the Labor government to an extra 20 police during the term, and that is what has been delivered. I challenge Mr Pratt to do what I did, commit your so-called incoming government to 120 police officers in the next term. Commit your shadow Treasurer, yourself and your party to \$12 million worth of expense. I do not think he has the courage to do it, and I think he will squirm out of that policy promise as soon as he can. If he has the courage of his convictions, he will promise the voters of the ACT \$12 million out of their urban services budget, out of their health budget, out of their education budget, for his police officers.

**MS DUNDAS (11.23):** In relation to the JACS portfolio: it was pleasing to see money finally being allocated to the prison project. I hope the government takes due consideration of the recent report of the Community Services and Social Equity Committee in relation to ongoing programs and family support that need to be targeted around what we are doing with our prison. I also hope that the government looks back at the community consultation at the end of the last Assembly in relation to the prison project and work that was done specifically with women’s groups and remembers how important it is, if we are going to have both male and female prisoners remaining in the ACT, that they are housed separately. A number of important issues were covered in depth at the end of the last Assembly, and I hope the government has not lost that work.

It was also pleasing to see funding in this budget for the restorative justice unit and some support to help reduce recidivism. That is a very important part of crime prevention techniques. The Estimates Committee had similar concerns to the Community Services and Social Equity Committee in relation to the work of watchdog agencies and how they report on the things they are watching over. I take heart at the government’s response to the Estimates Committee by saying that the new annual reports directions for 2004 will ask external scrutiny agencies to include a section specifically for issues of significant concern in relation to the agency’s performance.

Hopefully in next year’s annual reports we will be able to find that information a lot easier. Of course, we hope nothing is going wrong, so we do not need that area of the report. But the government responded by saying that the annual reports directions already require agencies to report on external scrutiny and statutory entities are already

required to report on the exercise of their statutory functions. For two committees to raise this, it is a loud and specific concern that that was not happening, and when it was happening, it was not as well as it could be. So, a lot of work has to be done there.

Through the estimates process we heard the Chief Minister's vision for a new Supreme Court building and a new Legislative Assembly building. It is great to have vision, but where is the follow-through? When are we going to see the much-needed refurbishment of the Supreme Court building? We have just witnessed a debate about police numbers and ongoing community safety concerns. Again, the government has shown consistency in allocating far more in this budget towards prosecution than prevention, and that is extremely short-sighted. We need to keep pushing for a re-ordering of priorities so that we tackle the causes instead of the symptoms of crime. Community safety can only get better if we prevent crime being committed in the first place.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (11.26): This afternoon in question time, Mr Wood made the amazing comment: "You never added to the police budget." It is important to get the record right because we have heard Mr Quinlan harping on all night about the rewriting of history. Let us start with the government's rewriting of history, that when it came to office everything was bad and now everything is good.

**MR SPEAKER:** You will do that in the context of the question that is before the house?

**MR SMYTH:** I certainly will. This is about the Department of Justice and Community Safety budget, and obviously police funding is part of that. It is interesting that in 1999-2000, the budget went up 3 per cent, an additional \$7 million. In 2000-2001 it went up 15 per cent, \$8.2 million. In 2001-2002 it went up \$3.1 million, 5 per cent. So it has gone up in the time that I have been in the Assembly and, to give it credit, the budget has gone up since this government has been in office. In 2002-2003 it went up \$11 million, which is 16 per cent. In 2003-2004 it went up \$4.5 million, 5 per cent. The government is predicting that in 2004-2005 it will go up another 5 per cent or \$4.5 million, to bring it to \$90.8 million. So, if we want to talk about the rewriting of history and the blinkered version that Mr Quinlan has been speaking about for the majority of the evening, it is easy to refute with the statistics and the old budget papers.

There is a very important line in the budget. Something I have taken an interest in is the corrections budget, and I have before the house the Corrections Reform Bill. It has been there since December because, although it has been passed in principle, we have been waiting for the Chief Minister to table his Corrections Reform Bill. I thought it might have been tabled last week. If we are lucky—given the Chief Minister's strong commitment to corrections reform—it may be this week, so in the dying days of the Assembly perhaps we can discuss his efforts to reform corrections. I do not think we will ever see his Corrections Reform Bill. I do not think there is a commitment to it. Why not? Because, instead, the Chief Minister is welcoming the US Supreme Court ruling to hear appeals from foreign detainees held as enemy combatants in the US military base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. That is right, the Chief Minister is out there saving the world and neglecting his own duties.

He has been responsible for corrections for more than a year—almost a year and a half—and in that time we have seen very little real activity to progress corrections in this territory. Why? Because he neglects his responsibility to corrections. When we left office

a proposal was on the table for a prison that could have gone ahead. It probably could have been built by now. We know the outcome of the election. That side used a bit of wedge politics with the residents of Red Hill and Narrabundah, and it worked. Congratulations. But it has led to a three-year delay in the delivery of the prison. No prison will be delivered in this term. I suspect we will not even have a confirmed site. I note the PA is out for public consultation, but I suspect we will not even have a confirmed site for the prison. We will be no further advanced after the first term of the Stanhope Labor government. That is its level of commitment to corrections reform in this territory.

We do not have to go any further than the government's own policy to show that they are hiding the embarrassment of the first corrections minister's lack of activity—yes, Mr Quinlan was the first corrections minister—on calls for the prison and nothing happened. Now, under the Chief Minister, almost as little is happening and what is happening is in a rush at the last moment. In the lead-up to the last election, the government promised—and I can quote this virtually off by heart—to put together programs that would lead to reform before it designed the prison. Once it designed the prison, it would select a site so that we could get it all right. There is another abandoned promise. In haste, in our desire to show that we have done something, we have picked a site on the map and said, “We will build it there.”

The work has been done. It may be a reasonable site; it may not be. But it is a total abandonment of the government's election promise to develop programs and then design and select a site. What we have seen to date is also a total abandonment of its Corrections Reform Bill, which we are yet to see. However, we can all sleep well knowing that the Chief Minister is pleased that the US Supreme Court has now agreed with Jon Stanhope that these people should have different sorts of access to justice in America. One cannot get access to justice in the ACT, in that one cannot get the opportunity to be housed in an ACT prison, because in the first term of this government it simply has not done anything.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (11.31): We have turned over a new leaf and we no longer rewrite history, but let us make current or modern history complete. The opposition is aware of the difficulties that have dogged the access to sites for our prison, and they continue to the point where the government has gone to Sutton. The project will go ahead.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.18—Emergency Services, \$44,813,000 (net cost of outputs), \$21,436,000 (capital injection), totalling \$66,249,000.

**MR PRATT** (11.33): I wish to talk about a number of issues, but also to congratulate the government for significant funding and a number of initiatives to upgrade the ACT's emergency management capability. I am pleased to see that the government has now decided to fast-track the outstanding communications equipment issue. I am pleased it has funded additional community fire units. It is pleasing to see that it is appropriating funding to enhance preventative strategies across the ACT and also that there are appropriations and plans to upgrade equipment, vehicles and other ancillary items.

I go back to the communications issue. The plan to expedite the introduction of new radio equipment and a new system is welcome, but it is three years late. A sizeable amount of money has been appropriated and funding is accumulating from previous budgets as well. If the new commissioner was able to fast-track the introduction to service of this outstanding need, why the hell did it take so many years to get to this point? Communication equipment—personal equipment, vehicle equipment and the radio network and the system behind it—is very important. It goes to the heart of efficiency and is also life saving, so I think the community will be very concerned that it has taken so long to crack this.

We have talked before about the McLeod report. In our view, the McLeod report has held up the expedition of the new capability. I will not go into that again now, but we have talked about the 17 months that it has taken. At least now the appropriation provides the means to get on with it, but it has been a long time coming. As I have said before, we sailed through another bushfire season with nothing but the old capability to keep us going.

I raise the issue about the training of the services. I notice that in the appropriation resources and in the emergency bill there is talk about moving along with a joint training academy—something that was put together with ESB—and the funding for the joint academy is welcomed. The academy will have an important role to play in training the basic skills needed across all of the services, for example, administrative tasks, first-aid training and some communication training. The joint academy will have a role to play in supporting the authority in joint service training—that is very important—and the services can come to a central training area to do some other common training as well.

We need to be very careful that this does not replace specialised service training. I would like the Treasurer to correct me on this, but I cannot see in the appropriation where funding is guaranteed for each of the chief officers for the services to ensure that the chief officers can carry out their special-to-service training, that is, the core business training needed within those services. The reason for breaking up the old ESB cluster and going back to dedicated services was to give them autonomy. Autonomy means that they should also have the ability to carry out their own training for those important skills. I am not sure that the appropriation has covered that requirement.

I am pleased to see the Calwell ambulance station has now been properly targeted with funding as well, especially because those living in the Lanyon area in the south are almost out of range of existing ambulance services. So, that is a very welcome move.

Funding for the extra community fire units is important. The government talks about 20 new teams. We maintain that this is far short of the essential needs of the ACT community. We argue, for example, that Kambah, which is a suburb of something like 4,000 people and is certainly vulnerable to the west and north-westerly fire approaches, would need a minimum of five community fire units, and that is a conservative estimate. So extrapolating that example, we believe that somewhere between 40 and 50 CFUs would be required.

We are not saying the government can fund that, but we would like to see a statement somewhere saying that 40 to 50—or in that realm—is the target to be achieved over

a number of years. Perhaps it could not be achieved in the life of this parliament or the next parliament, but the target should be identified so that we can tell the community that something is going to be done to protect all elements of the community sooner or later.

I am pleased to see that the government's emergency bill has taken on board the need for disaster plans so that each of the vulnerable suburbs, the settlements and the villages, will get their own emergency plan. I do not know whether anything in the appropriation shows that that is going to be properly achieved. I presume the government will find the funding somewhere to undertake that capability as well.

These disaster plans are very important. It is important to analyse each vulnerable suburb and draw up a plan for it. It is important to find the vulnerable areas and evacuation routes for each of these suburbs and it is then important to educate and inform the residents of those suburbs about what that plan is. I look forward to the government showing us some detail later on how exactly it is going to do that.

I want to talk briefly about fire fuel management. I see \$500,000 per year over four years is allocated, and this is welcome. In the estimates hearing when I asked what the plan was and how the government was going to spend that money, the answers were not forthcoming. I do not know that the community can be confident that the government will really lock down this need to define bushfire fuel management targets and strategies, and inform the public—land managers, landowners and everybody else—what they are so that everybody knows what their obligations are and to make sure that these very important things are done.

I was also pleased to see the government pick up the community communications and information plan, but that is going to require funding. I do not know whether funding is in the appropriation to make that work. I remind the government that its education plan will need to cover all of those areas as well.

**MS DUNDAS** (11.41): I put on the record that we wish the new Emergency Services Authority well. The development of the structure has been subject to significant debate after the McLeod report but the new Emergency Services Authority does have an important job in supporting the ACT community at times of crisis. In that sense I wish it all the best and I hope that it is able to do the job that we all hope that they can. I also make reference to recommendation 19 of the Estimates Committee, which talked about issues in relation to family services staff dealing with emergency situations.

The government has said that a review or analysis is being undertaken about how the Emergency Services Authority can take on a greater role in dealing with crisis situations and that the aim is to share the response and ongoing recovery effort whilst maintaining a responsive service for children and young people in the care of the territory. It would be interesting to know whether that review or analysis is looking at emergency services taking on the whole of the responsibility as the authority has trained people to deal with those emergency crises, and the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support is free to focus on what its title says.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (11.42): Earlier, Mr Quinlan said the former emergency services arrangements were ours, that we put them in place, selected the staff, they were there in December 2001, and it was still our system in January 2003. He is

right. It was the system we set up. It is the system this government inherited when it came to office in October 2001. The system worked to its limit but worked well on Christmas Eve 2001, and it's the system that Mr Quinlan—who was the minister then—left in place, and with that fire on Christmas Eve 2001 it became his system. He then had the ability to either acknowledge that changes were to be made or that you were happy with what was there. There was a review, and 106 recommendations came out of it. At the end of those recommendations and despite the claim from the government that it implemented all those recommendations, Mr Quinlan has just said that the same system was still in place. That means the minister neglected his responsibility.

We are not going to re-write history here this evening. This city had a wake-up call on Christmas Eve 2001. The system that was in place on that day worked. It was stretched to its limits, and nothing was done to upgrade it significantly to be ready for the 2002-03 fire season. With that baptism of fire, with that event, and with the minister's choice to leave it in place, that system became his system and it is the system that he is responsible for in the coronial inquiry that is under way now.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (11.44): That is a very eloquent summary of where we are today. After the 2001 fire Mr Smyth was out praising the firefighters and the whole system—and rightly so—as we and Mr Pratt were. There was a review and recommendations, and those recommendations were implemented. The point I was making before and the point I make again is that it is a pretty grubby damn process for the opposition to make capital out of the worst disaster that has struck Canberra—even today asking the same question in so many different ways, trying to milk something out of it at the political level. It is well to remember that the people the opposition wishes to lynch, the team that was in place, saw nothing wrong with the system in the time of the previous government, and nothing wrong with it after the 2001 fire.

It is only with hindsight and political need that the opposition is now suddenly saying the system was no good, that it was not sufficient and it is all down to the current government. Had the Liberals been returned to government in 2001, and we went through the 2001 fire as we did, there would not have been a lot different by the time the January 2003 fire struck. I think it is safe to say that and I hope and trust that the coroner's inquest will be aware of that as well.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.19—Department of Education and Training, \$415,320,000 (net cost of outputs), \$33,580,000 (capital injection) and \$135,061,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$583,962,000.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (11.47): I move amendment No 2 circulated in my name [*See schedule 1 at page 3006*]. I present the supplementary explanation statement to the government amendments and associated supplementary budget papers. I present the following papers:

Explanatory memorandum to the Government amendments.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 13—Appropriation Bill 2004-2005—Supplementary budget papers 2004-2005 Appropriation.

The amendments that I shall move tonight, and there are several, are all associated with additional funding for child protection and the reorientation of money to the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support within the Chief Minister's Department. Unless there is an objection to them in any way, I will just move them without ceremony as we go through—if nobody has a problem with that.

**Mr Pratt:** Mr Speaker, I presume I can talk to the line item in general?

**MR SPEAKER:** No. You are speaking to the amendment.

**MR QUINLAN:** Agree with the amendment and then we will talk about the line item—unless you have a problem with the amendment.

**MR SPEAKER:** We will come to the line item.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (11.48): The government's amendment breaks down the existing line 1.19, Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, into Department of Education and Training and inserts a new part 1.19A, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support. Unless I missed it when it was before the Estimates Committee, I do not think this money has been through the estimates process. I am not sure how much warning the Assembly has been given and whether or not this could have been brought up in the estimates process and given the proper scrutiny. I think that is the appropriate way; that is what should have happened. That being said, the money is going to address issues within child protection. I suspect, with that, the opposition will support the amendment.

**MS DUNDAS** (11.49): It was a concern of members in the Estimates Committee that they were not able to see the amendments so that they could be considered in the context of the estimates process, even though we made that request of the ministers when they appeared. I understand that it does take a bit of time to set up a new \$6 million office, but it would have been useful to have some analysis of how this was being broken down—which bits were staying in the Department of Education and Training, which bits were moving into the new office, the staff make-up across those two areas and the support the Chief Minister's Department will be providing.

The Vardon report recommended only a transitional phase. At the end of six months we will have a new Office for Children, Youth and Family Support. There were a number of questions, specifically in relation to these amendments, that the Estimates Committee was not able to put forward. In that sense, there are still a lot of questions floating around. We will be supporting this amendment. The Democrats are in favour of the establishment of the new office but it would have been good and wise to be able to provide greater scrutiny into how this is being done.

Amendment agreed to.

**MR PRATT** (11.51): Budget paper 2 lists a 5 per cent increase in funding for 2004-05, resulting in 910 fewer education places for students than was the case last year but with an increase of two schools. There is \$16.4 million more funding being put into education but with 910 fewer education places for Canberra students. The issue here is not the 910 fewer places but the dichotomy between the two figures, which raises the question: what are we getting for the extra money?

The information taken from budget paper 4 is that the increase of \$32.476 million in funding for 2004-05 from the 2003-04 estimated outcome, which is being partly offset by declining student enrolments in government schools, equalling \$2.263 million, is not an element of education funding that this bill is presenting as an advantage to the parents, students and teachers of the ACT. Instead of the Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support trying to fund initiatives to attract and retain students in ACT government schools, she seems to have accepted the loss and thought, "Oh, well, we can just spend the money on something else!"

The appropriation bill also includes a 4.1 per cent increase in spending per government preschool student. There are no increases in services, quality or effectiveness for government preschool students and only one additional education place has been offered. There is a recurring theme with this appropriation bill—we are funding more and receiving less. That is the theme that runs throughout. The minister for education in this appropriation bill is bringing to the students and parents of Canberra one additional government preschool place.

**Mrs Dunne:** One—one kid?

**MR PRATT:** That is it.

**Ms Gallagher:** One enrolment. There are plenty of places.

**MR PRATT:** No wonder there are declining enrolments in the government school sector. The minister is not addressing the problem. She does not care about the impact this has on public education and prefers to spend the money on things other than attraction and retention strategies—strategies which stakeholders and community representatives say must target students at risk of failing to complete their education, strategies targeting early high-schooling, strategies targeting children at risk in primary schools and strategies that reduce disruptions in the classroom. The government should be focusing more effectively on pastoral care, values and discipline. I am pleased to see that the government is paying at least modest attention to this in its curriculum renewal process.

Let us look at the issue of disruptive students and students at risk. I asked the following questions of the minister in the estimates hearings: why is there no funding for a centralised alternative setting for students with severe behavioural dysfunction in years 7 and 8? What is your plan for dealing with severely disruptive children in early high schools? The minister gave a fairly good briefing on a number of issues—schools as communities was one of the issues raised—but there was not a clear-cut strategy about what to do with kids falling by the wayside in years 7 and 8, particularly when they are disrupting other kids in the classrooms. I make the observation that while it was

promising to see some effort being put back in this area—an area of education impacting significantly on the learning and teaching environments—we are not seeing any firm initiatives or statements, which ought to be accompanying this appropriation, in this particularly important area.

Where in the appropriation do we have the resources to take on the types of strategies to retain good teachers? These strategies ought to be more heavily funded to help our younger teachers, too many of whom are struggling to cope with disruptive students and often feel ill equipped to carry out student management or pastoral care duties. What is the situation in schools with regards to teacher capability? We are reaching a point where a lot of very experienced teachers in their early to mid-fifties are retiring. This is a major problem for which we cannot hold the government responsible.

This is the same issue I raised when talking about the police earlier. No government in this country can deal with the problem that has occurred as a result of the baby boomer exodus. However, some younger teachers do not seem to be getting past the five or six-year mark; they seem to be burning out. We want to see more being done in the way of retention.

What about the balance of experience, mentoring and leadership in schools? We have heard the formula of one executive teacher to six level-one teachers being discussed a number of times. I know that the minister has heard about that and I think she agrees that that would be a desirable level. I hope she can do that. The aim to improve the ratio so that younger teachers are better mentored is important to this retention strategy, one would have thought. I hope that the minister is able to come up with some clear strategies, in addition to what is being appropriated, to improve the retention factor.

What about the personal development of teachers? During the estimates hearings I asked the minister whether additional funding was being set aside for personal development and whether, as part of the negotiation process for the EBA, any thought had been given to a larger personal development allowance being factored in for teachers. I do not think there is. Unfortunately it would seem that the bag of gold set aside for personal development is not being increased. There do not appear to be any further appropriations provided to build that capability.

I want to address the issue of health and fitness. In the appropriation no concrete action has been taken and no resources have been given to move forward in an area that has been identified by our Assembly Health Committee and a variety of other community bodies as needing major attention. We have talked before about the number of children suffering from obesity and health problems. We do not seem to have enough funding being provided.

During estimates I have asked the department about the plans it has, but I have not heard of any plans to even significantly increase the PE teacher capability. If we are going to do something about tackling obesity and health issues, we need to do something to formalise PE in all of our schools—and that means increasing the number of teachers who are capable of teaching PE. Also, I do not see any additional resources being made available to upgrade sporting activities in schools or to find a stronger marriage between schools and communities for community and school-sponsored sporting activities at the weekends just to keep things moving along.

I want to talk about school canteens, which are relative to health. I asked the minister during the estimates hearings what the government's position was on the issue of healthy school canteens. She replied that the government was still negotiating and discussing the issue with P&Cs. That is not really good. I would have thought that, if people who know something about school and child health issues are saying that this is an issue that must be addressed, the department, with the government behind it, would be putting down some fairly clear strategies. The observation I have made from the estimates program is that the government will still be negotiating with P&Cs to encourage them to change the food content in school canteens.

Why can't the minister and the department give direction to all schools that there will be an ACT benchmark for what canteens should stock? They could simply give the instruction: "The following food and drinks will be allowed." I do not buy the argument that I have heard too many times now through the estimates hearings program that P&C profits raised from canteens for schools aid might suffer. That is understandable, but I would have thought that, once canteens are given a clear direction and a benchmark that they can only stock certain food, they would survive.

**MR SPEAKER:** The member's time has expired.

**MR PRATT:** I seek to speak for some of my second 10 minutes, please.

**MR SPEAKER:** On the question that the expenditure be agreed to.

**MR PRATT:** This is a situation where the department, with the government behind it, should be laying down clear benchmarks and saying to P&Cs, "I am sorry, guys, you have got three months to adapt. You have to get over the Cherry Ripe profit and see if you can turn it into a broccoli sandwich profit." This is so important as we have an obesity problem. That will not stop kids from going to Erindale takeaway shop on the way home—of course it won't. In their own time they will still go and by scallops and chips. If the school canteen is stocked with fruit juices, healthy sandwiches, fruit, muesli bars and the like during school hours, during that time frame, our children's exposure to eating unhealthy food will be minimised.

I turn now to non-government school funding and the lack of assistance in the budget and now the appropriations. Let us have a look at ICT. Funding for ICT is just abysmal. ICT programs are so paltry as to be nothing but token gestures. But even worse than that is the provision of funding for children with difficulties, children with special needs. On my calculations, the amount of money that has been made available for children with special needs is a lousy \$214 a head per year. That is quite sad. Some non-government schools certainly have not pulled their weight in trying to retain children with special needs—there is no question about that. The government is right to encourage them to pick up their responsibility.

It does not help when the amount of funding that is being made available to the non-government sector has not even addressed the issue. If we are going to encourage these schools to take on their responsibility and shoulder their fair share, we need to make sure that they get some decent funding. That is a major concern. I do not know what the

government's plan is yet to replace the old ISS scheme. I gather that it is still in negotiation as to how that recovered money is going to be spent.

I will now talk about a couple of school issues in my electorate. I am very pleased to see that the Melrose High School gym is to be funded. That is well overdue. A couple of other schools still have to share facilities—they do not have a standalone gym or a standalone hall—but at least that is a start. A number of primary schools also need to have their facilities addressed. As I was saying earlier, we need to have more physical education training and more PE teachers. The University of Canberra is talking about running a couple of special PE teaching degrees. A teacher who specialises in one subject may pick up a PE qualification as a second string—and that may be the way to go.

I am very pleased to see that the wireless broadband program is being connected to schools in the Tuggeranong Valley. It has been a long time coming but it is there now. This facility will ensure that our students have and are able to access the crucially important IT capability.

I am pleased to see that the Birrigai Outdoor Centre is now back on its feet. I hope the government is able to pick up the two years of slack with the kids who perhaps missed out on that training in the past.

I have made enough comments about the budget and the appropriations. I may come back and address youth issues shortly.

**MRS DUNNE (12.06):** I want to touch on some issues that directly affect the electorate of Ginninderra. I will start close to where Mr Pratt left off in relation to the money in the capital works budget for the gyms at Melrose and Belconnen high schools. That money is laudable and welcome. I know that those school communities are very anxious to receive those grants, but I do bemoan the fact that poor little Hall lost out.

When I raised this in the Estimates Committee I think that, in order to quickly run to the minister's defence, Ms MacDonald piped up and said, "How many children are there?" as if to say, "Well, because there are not very many children at Hall, they are not so deserving as perhaps the children of Melrose or Belconnen high schools." It is quite the contrary. The children who live at Hall do not have easy public transport access to a range of other facilities and some of them live in outlying rural areas. For them Hall is as important as the Woden Plaza might be for the students of Melrose high. In Hall, there are no facilities of the type that most schools take for granted.

Even to have a hall that is higher than a classroom in ceiling height would be a luxury for the children who attend the Hall Primary School. I have spoken about it in this place before and I am deeply concerned that, for instance, the teachers at Hall Primary School cannot run the things that I would take for granted, the things that I expect my children would receive whether they were in the government or the non-government school sector.

They cannot run programs like gross motor exercises for children who have trouble with handwriting and things like that, because they do not have the space. They can barely run their band program, and they cannot run a concert very efficiently. They have two

demountable classrooms put together with a standard nine or 10 foot ceiling; they do not have a stage and they do not have any place where they can put up a climbing net or climbing frame, or run any of the things that most schools take for granted.

The minister claims that she took it upon herself to make this decision. I think, Minister, it was a bad decision. Certainly there were students at Melrose High School who needed things, but the need of the children of Hall is at least as great, if not greater, because they have no facilities. They might be fewer in number but their needs are just as great.

I have also received a number of representations from parents and citizens associations across the electorate. They are from a number of the Kaleen schools—Kaleen High School, Maribyrnong Primary School and a couple of others whose names escape me at the moment. These associations have written to me and, I suspect, to other members with their concerns about funding in the 2004-05 budget. I would like to share with members some of the issues raised by the parents and citizens associations of some of our government primary and high schools about the budget. They write to me and say:

We would like to express our dismay at the small increase in funding for new initiatives for government schools in the 2004-05 ACT Budget and the Government's failure to follow up on the educational equity component of the ACT Social Plan.

The Budget provides for increased funding of \$4.3 million to support new initiatives relating to IT, repairs and maintenance, students with disabilities and indigenous students.

I might add that \$4.3 million does not look as if it will go very far over all of those things. It continues:

This represents only about a 1.5% increase in funding. I/we believe that increased funding for new initiatives of over \$20 million (an increase of over 7%) is needed to address outstanding issues in the government school system.

It is a major concern that the major priorities to improve education equity identified in the Government's Social Plan have been ignored in the Budget. The Social Plan sets the goals of improving equity in education by improving completion rates to Year 12 and increasing literacy and numeracy achievements of students 'at risk'. None of the new Budget programs directly address these goals.

There are many students in government schools who have not reached crisis point, but are at risk of not achieving adequate school outcomes to sustain them in adult life and further learning.

The major area of learning need in the government school system is in high schools. Over 10 per cent of Year 9 students are not achieving adequate literacy standards. There is a large disparity in outcomes between the highest and lowest performing students. About 50 per cent of high school students do not like being at school. Some 20 to 30 per cent of students drop out of school before completing Year 12.

There is also a need for greater learning support for students at risk of not achieving expected outcomes in the upper primary years and in colleges.

Many proposals have been put to the ACT Government to address these problems. It is very disappointing that, after three years, the Government has failed to act in any significant manner. Some initiatives have been taken in the past, such as the High School Development Program, but the funding devoted to them has been entirely inadequate to date and amounts only to a token effort.

These are very strong complaints from the people whom this minister and this government claim they represent more than anybody else. This minister and this government talk at length about how important government schooling is. As a consumer of government schooling, I would agree with them wholeheartedly. But when the people at the coalface—the parents who are involved in the community to the extent of going along to parents and citizens association meetings—are writing such scathing criticism of this government it is time that we, as a community, took serious note of it. We should start to wonder why, when we are spending in excess of \$400 million on education—most of which is aimed at the government sector—there can be so much discontent in the community they are set to serve.

**MS DUNDAS (12.14):** In the lead-up to the 2004-05 budget's being brought down the government was urged to commit extra funding to learning assistance and reading recovery teachers, extra welfare support staff and parent involvement programs, to help close the gap between our outstanding students and our struggling students. As I have said previously in this place, it was disappointing that none of these proposals was supported.

This Assembly supported a motion I moved calling for the establishment of a fund to cover the costs of excursions, camps and subject levies for kids who are missing out due to poverty. This proposal, whilst supported by the government, was not funded. It is now up to the schools to find the funds in their budgets. Whilst that is certainly better than nothing, I hope it does not mean that low income students miss out on school activities, or that other areas of those already stretched school budgets suffer.

Schools received extra funding in the area of information technology but it will be interesting to see whether or not this spending will make a significant difference in the range of educational outcomes among our ACT public school students which should, I believe, be the government's first priority. Whilst there was some support for students with learning disabilities, which I talked about under the disability line, I think it is important that Therapy ACT and the Department of Education and Training come together to ensure that, in the development of the individual learning plans for students with disabilities, we are working in a holistic way to get the best outcomes for those children.

I thank the minister for the ongoing provision of information in relation to students who need to access individual learning plans and information as to how they are being implemented across the territory. I was hearing stories that students were not having their ILPs completed because of ongoing issues about what would be involved in their ILPs. I believe that those issues are now being worked through, following many discussions between parents and teachers and those involved in the training and educational needs of these young people.

We also need to be looking not just at students with disabilities but also at students with other sorts of learning disabilities, such as dyslexia and the maths based dyslexia, which

is dyscalculia. We need to look at how we are supporting those children and whether they are being identified early, so we can help to support them from the very early stages.

I am waiting, as I hope the rest of the Assembly is, with bated breath for the release of the school based management report. This report was meant to be delivered at least two months ago. It arose out of concerns I had in relation to school cleaning services. We had a WorkCover audit of those services and we now have a standard of agreement in relation to school cleaning standards. But the broader response to how school based management is going has not yet been put down by the government. We were not able to see any changes, if there were going to be any, in this budget so it will be at least another year—which is a year and a half in school terms—as we wait to see the future of school based management.

I point out that this relates to the Department of Education and Training. There were quite a few initiatives in relation to vocational education and training put forward in this budget, specifically for supporting young people at risk. I note that the government put forward funding for a range of new vocational training initiatives such as pathways.

It is good to see that commitment to vocational training in the ACT. It would be better, however, to see more of a commitment to the main provider of vocational education and training in the ACT—the Canberra Institute of Technology. They have continued to provide increased services, increased classes and increased support for students, without receiving any increased funding from the ACT government. For far too long they were obliged to work within efficiency measures forced upon them by the former government. It was pleasing to get the minister on the record saying that that program of meeting efficiencies, to have any flexibility in the budget, would not continue.

We need to see more support put into the Canberra Institute of Technology. I know a lot of work has been done in relation to moving the casual work force into full-time work, but there is a lot more that can be done at the CIT to support students and staff. I urge the government to pick up the CIT challenge and support that institution in a better way.

**MRS CROSS (12.19):** I note with great interest a substantial increase in money devoted to child protection in this year's budget. It is a little disappointing that it took the discovery of such large systemic and departmental deficiencies, and a subsequent inquiry into these deficiencies, to see the funding in the area of child protection increased by any substantial amount.

The Vardon report came to the conclusion that the reason for the department's failings and non-compliance with their statutory obligations—failings which have ensured that the deaths of 14 children between 2000 and 2003 have remained unexplained and failings that have resulted in up to 100 files being unlocated—is insufficient resources. The conclusion of the Vardon report, agreed upon by the government in their response, has been that staff shortages, high staff turnover, case overload and a general lack of resources were the reasons the department failed in its duties to children in the care of the ACT. It is a shame that it reached this level before the department received enough funding to be resourced adequately.

One must question why the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services did not receive more resources when the Community Advocate informed Minister Corbell in late 2002 of the department's non-compliance with their statutory obligations. What are the reasons why this non-compliance was not looked at in any way? Why were these issues not looked at when the Community Advocate first brought the issue of non-compliance to the director's attention in February 2001? Surely there were loud enough alarm bells to at least signify that the department was underresourced.

There is no point in rehashing the whole child protection issue tonight but I am a little disappointed that it took the discovery of such a large and systemic failing within the department to get the government to more adequately resource child protection services in the ACT. I hope resources devoted to child protection services are now adequate and that those in charge of protecting children in the ACT can fulfil their most important duty—protecting children in the ACT.

**MS GALLAGHER** (Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations) (12.22): I will quickly go through some of the issues that have been raised in the debate tonight. We went through many of them in estimates, so I am going over some of the information I have already given. The opposition keeps raising the fact that there are increases in costs and fewer education places. As explained in estimates, that is largely to do with the costs of teachers' salaries and pay increases.

In relation to the preschool issue that Mr Pratt raised, the places are there: it is about how many enrolments we have in that system. Where there has been an increase in relation to the enrolments in preschools—but not necessarily the capacity for places—the increases in costs, as I explained in estimates, are largely around the increases in salaries, which take the majority of the education budget.

Mr Pratt talked quite extensively about initiatives to retain good teachers, new teacher support, professional development, leadership in schools and mentoring of teachers. All those issues are employment related. They are less specific initiatives to be funded through a budget and more to be funded through the certified agreement—which, of course, is funded through the budget, but not as education initiatives. They are employment related initiatives. All of those issues, Mr Pratt, are contained in the new certified agreement which we hope will be endorsed by AEU members on, I think, 22 July when they return to work.

Around health and fitness, I take the point raised in estimates and again in speeches here today that there could be better coordination between the agencies looking at this. The point was made in estimates that sport is doing something, health is doing something and education is doing something through their various agencies. The health minister and I had arranged a meeting around better coordination of health and fitness to discuss that, but that will be delayed somewhat by the minister's absence from work. In relation to some of the physical exercise comments, I think the ACT is very well placed. It is well placed because of, I believe, Mr Stefaniak's initiative when he brought in mandated times for PE.

That is not something I agree with as an individual but it is well received by school communities and, it seems, by many students. The federal government is currently looking to have, I think, two hours of physical exercise joined in to the new funding agreement. In ACT schools, about 150 minutes a week are spent on physical exercise. Even the kindies to year 2 do between 20 and 30 minutes a day. So we are very well placed there.

The issue of canteens is a little more complicated than Mr Pratt makes out. I imagine you have received a letter from the Heart Foundation, as I did, following the estimates appearance, where they were outraged by comments that canteens are unhealthy places. I will be meeting with them in the next week or so to go through some of the concerns they have had when training canteen managers or accrediting canteens to a certain standard around healthy food.

A number of schools have adopted the "health promoting schools program", which focuses on a whole range of health issues, but especially nutrition and healthy eating. There are a number of projects and initiatives in place. There is \$1 million in this year's budget to increase efforts around the health and fitness of children, and I see that as an area of growth. I take the point that there could be better coordination around non-government school funding. Since the Stanhope government came in we have increased non-government school funding in every budget.

In last year's budget there was an increase of about 3.8 per cent and this year there is an increase of over six per cent. The ACT government provides \$35 million to the non-government schools here, which is, I should say, more than the Commonwealth provides to the ACT government for funding or support to our government schools for double the number of schools. There is a substantial amount of money going to the non-government sector.

In relation to children with disabilities we look at the grants as they are spread over the number of children in the non-government sector. We had quite an extensive discussion on this in estimates. The ACT government has increased the allocation of funding for students with disabilities in the non-government sector by 10 per cent in this year's budget alone. At the same time we are going through a process where we are measuring the needs of children with disabilities in the non-government sector, with the cooperation of the sector. I think that will give us a real indication of the need and, subsequently, the funding commitments we have to make if we are not meeting the needs. On the surface, looking at the contribution from the Commonwealth in relation to children with disabilities in the non-government sector, I would say that that is the area where that funding commitment has not been maintained.

Mrs Dunne read out the letter from the P&C association. I am not sure whether, by reading it out, she was adopting their position and subscribing to the expenditure they sought, which was, I think, about \$20 million a year. You were not clear on that; you just read out the letter; so I am not sure whether you are taking their side and adopting their argument that that is the amount needed in the government system.

You can always argue for more money in education; it is one of those areas where you can always find more need. I have met with Ian Morgan from the P&C association—I have been getting a form letter from a number of schools; they come through as they hold their meetings—and I believe his analysis is incorrect. His criticism is unfair on the government and I have told him that. I do not think his expectations in the budget were realistic.

He ignored the initiatives in the youth area that we funded around support for youth at risk and was just focusing on support for youth at risk in government schooling. I have had a discussion with him on that. I note that those letters are going around and I am responding to all of them. Ms Dundas mentioned the school based management report. I understand I will be receiving it in the next week, and I will be making the report public when I get it. That will be an interesting report, I hope. I thank members for their comments, and I hope I have addressed some of the concerns expressed throughout the debate.

Proposed expenditure, as amended, agreed to.

New part 1.19A

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (12.30): I move amendment No 3 circulated in my name, which inserts a new Part 1.19A, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support [*see schedule 1 at page 3006*].

**MRS BURKE** (12.30): We should be alarmed that, once again, the government thinks that simply glossing over issues with respect to accountability and responsibility and throwing money at a problem will make the problem go away. Again, I assert that this funding will need to change the culture of the department for us to see real benefit. Nobody is knocking back or decrying the money—and I will move on to that in a moment.

Much of the money, we are told, is simply to maintain current levels of service. We should also note that, for some reason, this government reduced its funding in 2003-04 by over \$3 million, which I find quite amazing, even though it states that the number of substitute care days was 82,743, while the cost per substitute day care increased from \$127 in 2002-03, to a target of \$146 in 2003-04. So, again, we see less money for more service. I do not know if the minister wants to respond to that, and whether I have got it wrong, but that is definitely what the budget papers are telling me.

We will hear the cries of this government saying that this has been happening for years. With respect, when the government was in opposition for six years, it was saying that it was going to fix this up and fix that up. It has been in government for 2½ years. It has taken the government that long to address a problem that it has been well aware of in relation to child protection services. It has been made aware of this problem by the Community Advocate on more than seven occasions since 2001, at least. How far back are we going to go? You have to maintain and take responsibility—

**Mr Hargreaves:** 1996!

**MRS BURKE:** No. You see, Mr Hargreaves, eventually there comes a time near to the election when we can say, “We’ll take responsibility; we’re in government; we should be making the decisions.” There is an enormous amount of money being pushed towards child protection, but it is under this Labor government that matters have gone unchecked. It is no good continuing to push the line that problems go back years.

The government said it was going to be the saviour of the city. Well, here we are: what a fiasco! What a cover up! What a sham! It is nothing more than an audacious attempt to bury the real facts and sideline responsibility, no matter how much money you put into it. The fact is we are told that this money will make a difference. I am sure it will. Large amounts of money are going to increase resources.

The minister is aware; and she will have something to say on this, that I am very concerned about the culture within the department. That does not come from me alone; it comes from the people who approach me constantly about this matter. You can smirk, Mr Quinlan. I do not know who talks to you; perhaps nobody does. But I certainly get a constant flow of calls, emails and letters, which I pass on to the minister and/or to others: there is a culture there. I really want to move forward, like the minister, but you have to address some of the problems. You cannot keep glossing over things in the hope that they will go away.

It is quite clear, from the many figures that have been bandied about by the minister—and the Chief Minister, come to that—that the minister and her department are in disarray. I can say that because I have a sheet here full of child protection funding, and I will list some of the items. It is worth it for the public record to see the number of times different figures have been raised. The clear figure, we are told now, is \$71 million, but there have been many different figures cited. Budget paper 4 on page 348 shows \$7.382 million; budget paper 4 at page 339 shows \$1.615 million; budget paper 3 at page 183, new initiatives, shows \$2.845 million, \$46,000 and \$6.152 million.

A media statement put out by Mr Stanhope on 14 May said \$1.8 million in February, then it said \$37.2 million over four years. The *Canberra Times* on 18 May said \$1.8 million and then \$40 million over four years. In another media statement put out by Mr Stanhope on 25 May—at the media launch at the Assembly—he said \$75 million. In a media statement, again by Mr Stanhope, on 25 May on ABC radio he quoted \$68 million and \$70 million.

In the estimates hearings we heard \$61 million over the period of funding, and we heard \$24 million—I presume that must be a one-off. It says that \$61 million in new funding has been allocated to support children at risk over the next four years. This includes moneys from the third appropriation of 2003-04 and an additional \$24 million to be allocated in response to the Territory as Parent. The total proposed annual budget for the area is approximately \$33 million.

The funding allocation, I have to say, is all over the shop. There are no clear figures about what is being spent where, unless the Treasurer is going to stand up in a moment and tell me everything—or perhaps the minister will stand up. This is a great little game, isn’t it? It is just a shame that we do not have the facts to hand to know what you are

going to do with the money and where you are going to spend it. I think that is a reasonable ask, is it not? Perhaps not.

The moneys announced simply do not add up—anybody can see that. I am wondering if the minister really knows what is going on, or if she is simply a puppet in the hands of some very experienced bureaucrats. I think we have to say that the level of scrutiny is evident by its absence. We are certainly not opposing the funding. The sector is in desperate need of a boost of some sort. It needs leadership. We in this place also need to know where that money is going and what it is going to be spent on specifically. I would suggest that we could have, and should have, been given the courtesy of more notice to consider the funding before us today.

**MS DUNDAS (12.37):** In the Estimates Committee and through various other means we have had some very long debates about the Vardon report and the role of the department and the role of the ACT government in looking after children in the ACT. However, because the Estimates Committee was not able to proceed with looking over this amendment, it is unclear what the \$6 million being included through this amendment is going towards. How much of it is going to supporting more cases in care, and in care and protection? We have already seen extra money through the appropriation bills after the last budget for the increase in foster care services that was required. It is disappointing that we are not sure where the \$6 million is going and what it is going to be used for. I hope the minister can provide some more advice on that tonight.

There is also the question that, because we do not know specifically what the \$6 million is for, we are not quite sure how much of Vardon is being implemented at this stage, especially in relation to the fact that the audit and case review have not been finished, so the picture of what needs to be done has not yet been completed. We need further information from the government about what they are implementing out of Vardon—what the \$6 million is being used to prioritise. Without a doubt, after this budget is passed we will be presented with a new appropriation bill, so that, once we have seen that audit and case review, we can work through the other funding initiatives that will be needed to support children and young people in the ACT.

I do not have a problem with that. In each of the years I have been in this Assembly we have done four appropriation bills every year, and I do not expect that the 2004-05 financial year will be any different. An appropriation bill provides us with the opportunity to look at the funding requirements in detail and provide some scrutiny on those. We were not able to do that with this initial response to the Vardon report.

The \$6 million is the key first initiative in getting things moving on the question of how we care for our children in the ACT, and the other key component is how we report on their care. We just do not know how it is going to work, and the Assembly has not had the opportunity to properly scrutinise that. Whilst I am glad that there are changes going on, I am just not sure what those changes are.

Amendment agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.19A—Children, Youth and Family Support, \$60,972,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$10,485,000 (capital injection), totalling \$71,457,000.

**MS GALLAGHER** (Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations) (12.41): I will respond to some of the issues that have been raised around this. I thank members for their support for this amendment and very important line in the budget. It has been a very difficult year for child protection.

I should point out that this line also relates to the Office for Children, Youth, and Family Support. There was a significant amount of expenditure in the budget around initiatives for young people, youth justice, youth centres, turnaround and funding for the Messengers program in Tuggeranong. That was a very strong part of the budget—the recognition that we needed to provide additional support for young people at risk. There was some additional money there for the youth coalition to continue their very important work in providing a voice in the youth policy debates.

Around child protection, Mrs Burke has said that the government needs to take responsibility and make decisions. I would argue that that is exactly what we have been doing since January. We have taken responsibility for a system that has been in failure for a number of years. We have instigated something that I do not believe has ever been done in the ACT—a thorough review—with the audit report still to come. That level of work has never been done on child protection in the ACT. I would say that that is taking responsibility for a system that provides a very important service to children and young people in the ACT. No matter how much Mrs Burke wants to lay the failure of child protection at the feet of this government, it did happen under the previous government.

**Mrs Burke:** No. It came to the attention of your government. No way! Look at the chronology.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I have looked at the chronology, and it did happen under the previous government. No matter how hard it is for you to hear that and no matter how much you do not want to hear it, it did happen, Mrs Burke. If you have read the chronology you will understand that. If you want to start from when the law was implemented in May 2001, we can argue about that. That is when it started.

In relation to Mrs Burke's allegations that there has not been enough scrutiny of the money being allocated to this, she cited different figures, and I can certainly go through some of those figures. The \$7.382 million was to provide for the additional cost of substitute care days required and the increase in the cost of those substitute care days. I provided extensive evidence to the Estimates Committee on the third appropriation about that. In fact, I appeared twice before that committee. The \$2.845 million is the \$1.8 million for substitute care that was announced by the Chief Minister in January, plus an additional \$1 million for additional staff; \$64,000 is depreciation and the \$464,000, from memory, is a capital injection to provide for those extra staff.

The \$24 million is the \$6 million over four years. That is simple times tabling—if you multiply six by four, you get 24. The scrutiny I went under included four hours in front of you, Mrs Burke, in the Estimates Committee process where all the figures were provided including the announcement that there would be a further \$6 million sought for response to Vardon. I must commend Ms Dundas, who asked tonight what the \$6 million is going towards. I let the Assembly know that that is the first time I have been asked that

question. I appeared for four hours in estimates on this and not once did anyone ask me what the \$6 million is for. I was prepared to answer in estimates; it is just that, at the end of 4½ hours, nobody had asked the question.

*Government members interjecting—*

**Mrs Burke:** Smokescreens and mirrors, I think we call it.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, Mrs Burke and Mr Hargreaves!

**MS GALLAGHER:** The implementation of Vardon is very much underway. A newsletter has been sent out, and there are five working groups working very hard on prioritising the recommendations of Vardon. It is a very inclusive approach. I think there are representatives, depending on the working group, from most non-government agencies involved in the care and protection of children in the ACT. There are high-level public servants. I believe the Office of the Community Advocate is involved in one of the groups. Certainly the Children's Services Council is involved. Those working groups are meeting once a week to work through the report.

When the report was released I said that the government provided initial response and would then seek advice from the department, through this process, of how to implement, and priorities to implement, Vardon. I originally said that that would take about a month. I think it is going to take a little bit longer than that, but when that information comes to the government, of course as we have been doing all along with this process, we will be making that information available to members.

Initially the advice around the \$6 million was to continue adding staff to the child protection work force. At the moment there is a recruitment process underway overseas to strengthen early intervention and family support services and develop alternative accommodation options for children and young people. That was a strong recommendation that has been supported by a number of agencies about the lack of options for children, particularly children and young people who are difficult to place; to increase staff in services for children in the indigenous unit; to look at and fund ways for increased advocacy on behalf of children and young people; and also to establish the new office.

In a nutshell, that is where that money will be going. I thank you for asking the question. I have been waiting for it. I hoped I could have been asked that question in estimates, but the question was not asked. We will be providing a report to the Assembly once we get the advice. If members would like additional information about how that implementation is working—the working groups and members of the working groups—then I would be happy to provide that to members.

It is very important work. Ms Dundas has, I guess, thrown out the idea that there may be additional expenditure in this area. I have said all along that I cannot answer that either way but, certainly, Vardon's recommendations come with significant costs attached. We will wait to receive advice on priorities and the implementation of the report before the government makes that decision.

I thank members for their overall support. I guess I accept the opposition's politicising of this issue, as they have done since it emerged. Once you take the politics out of it, stop playing the blame game and take out the idea that you want to have people sacked and all the rest of it, I think there is a shared understanding here in the Assembly of the importance of this area and of the need to get it right for the children and young people in the care of the territory. It has not been right in the past. This additional expenditure is part of making it right, but it is also a matter of changing the system. That is what the new office is all about. I thank members for their support at that level. I guess we just keep the politics going on it.

**MR PRATT (12.50):** I want to raise a couple of issues in relation to youth affairs. In budget paper 4 we see an increase in funding for support for young people, but with no increase in the number of youth to be supported. Would it not be a priority for the department to fight not only for an increase in funding for support for young people but also to increase the number of young people being assisted and supported each year?

The child and family centre in Tuggeranong is another welcome funding announcement. I hope that commencement of this project is a priority for the Stanhope government and that the June 2006 completion target is met. I hope that, for the sake of the children and families in Tuggeranong, it will not be delayed like the old Woden Police Station was delayed.

I am concerned that there is not additional funding for more youth centres of the calibre of that at Lanyon. I would like to see that effort replicated in other centres such as Erindale and Calwell, down in the south. Why could we not see an appropriation for funding here to perhaps reinforce the successful operation of the NGOs in Lanyon and also the NGOs working with street kids in Tuggeranong?

If we have non-government organisations already successfully running an activity, and they are doing it out of the goodness of their hearts—which means they are really motivated to do this work—why not add money to their operations by supplementing them? Do not take away from them the independence and the obligation to raise their funding; supplement them to give them a bit of a tickle along. That funding would go a long way towards improving those capabilities.

There are a lot of kids in the Tuggeranong Valley who need that support and somewhere to go to. The Tuggeranong community has been in grave need of such centres for some time. I am well aware that the aid agency I talked about before which is helping out street kids, particularly around the Tuggeranong lake area and around the Hyperdome, needs that extra bit of assistance.

These kids need special care. It is good that there are people of good heart willing to go down, round them up, give them a bowl of soup and perhaps encourage them to go home if they have homes to go to. But those NGOs are doing it extremely tough. It is very hard now for non-government organisations, at both the community and national levels, to raise funds because of donor fatigue. It is one of those characteristics of the times in which we live. I think that \$2.5 million for youth at risk over four years is insufficient. I do not see it being tightly targeted to provide the best outcomes, such as youth centres, and perhaps some additional trained staff to help at those youth centres.

The Messengers program is a good one, which could certainly be better promoted to assist youth at risk, giving them another goal or interest in life. I take the criticism I copped last time when I raised the issue that the Tuggeranong Community Arts Association was the rightful place in which to raise and run that program. I would still like to see the arts centre, for example, run that program but tie it in more closely with the established youth centres.

We should be trying to promote these youth centres to be beacons for these kids. We should try to attract more of our youth to youth centres through programs like the Messengers program, but tie the programs in with the successful youth centres. If we can do that, then I think we will be better focusing assistance programs to help a broader range of kids and give them somewhere to go and something do, rather than having them wandering aimlessly around the place getting themselves into trouble.

**MS DUNDAS (12.55):** I want to thank the minister for providing some detail on how the extra money that is going into the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support will be utilised. It was heartening to hear that one of the main priorities is alternative accommodation options, as I raised under the area of disability, housing and community services. Accommodation for young people at risk is an area that needs greater attention because young people make up the major component of homeless people in the ACT. I am glad to see that that is one of the initial moves being undertaken through the implementation of Vardon.

I would also like to note that there are some very important initiatives in here in relation to the youth and family services or family support area, as the minister has pointed out. This is a great contrast, compared to last year's budget and the budget before, where so much of the focus on young people was about young people in schools. We need to recognise that young people spend a lot of time outside of school and there needs to be support for them across the different aspects of their lives.

Mr Pratt has raised concerns about how our youth centres are operating. There are excellent youth centres operating in every region of the ACT. I think there just needs to be more support for making those youth centres safe places, and we need to ensure that the programs they run can continue to run in concert with the broader community.

Even though I note that the Vardon report, which came down after the delivery of the budget by the Treasurer, has recommended a commissioner for children and young people and that the government has agreed to that recommendation, this is an issue that has been on the agenda for at least the last 2½ years. I feel that this could have been progressed a little bit more quickly by the government. We will not see a youth commissioner until 2005.

I note that the minister said that some of the initial funding for the Vardon implementation will be in relation to increased advocacy for children and young people at risk. I hope that, through the ongoing response to Vardon, we develop a youth commissioner model that supports young people at risk and one that also supports young people who are just trying to have their voices heard in the community.

**MR HARGREAVES** (12.58): This is for Mr Pratt's education, given that this is the portfolio we are discussing. He talked about there possibly being a need for youth centres at Erindale and Calwell. I would like to remind Mr Pratt of the fact there was a review of youth centres not that long ago, which enhanced the Tuggeranong Youth Centre. That was a couple of years ago. I stand to be corrected but I think it was when Mr Corbell was minister, just prior to Ms Gallagher taking over the portfolio.

Mr Smyth would probably remember the dark days of the Tuggeranong Youth Centre and the change brought about by the people who were in it. One of the things they did, which is the sort of thing Mr Pratt was just talking about, was link in with Communities at Work and with the Tuggeranong Community Arts Association. In linking with the youth centre, the TCA conducted such programs as anger management through artistic expression. Those sorts of things were already happening.

**MR SPEAKER:** We could try some of that here!

**MR HARGREAVES:** Yes, I know. Through some artistic expression, the cartoonists here might be able to help us out! I remind Mr Pratt that there is the Police and Citizens Youth Club at Erindale. I would have thought that was some kind of a youth centre. There is also Gugan Gulwan at Erindale. I would have thought that was some sort of youth centre as well, particularly as 75 per cent, or thereabouts, of the indigenous young people in town live in the Tuggeranong Valley and we have specialist services there.

I would like to echo what Mr Pratt was saying about the Murra Centre at Conder. It is a terrific centre. I have expressed in this house my appreciation for the work Mr Stefaniak did in creating that and making sure it came up out of the ground. I think that was great. The one lesson for us all is that that particular centre was a solution into which the problem could grow. It was provided before young people full-on used it.

Now that the demographic of that part of the town has grown—I think the average age is around 14 or 15—the services are sitting there. That is why we do not have the same degree of trouble down there as we do elsewhere in town. I think we should be congratulating the minister for these initiatives for our kids. These are brilliant initiatives, and we should stop pontificating around the place, just get on with it and pass the budget.

Proposed expenditure, as amended, agreed to.

Proposed total appropriated to departments.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (1.01): I move amendment No 4 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 3006*].

Amendment agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Total appropriated to departments, \$1,600,270,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$403,635,000 (capital injection), and \$344,658,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$2,348,563,000, as amended, agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—Part 1.20—Treasurer’s Advance, totalling \$23,400,000 agreed to.

Proposed total appropriations.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (1.02): I move amendment No 5 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 3006*].

Amendment agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—total appropriation, \$1,600,270,000 (net cost of outputs), \$403,635,000 (capital injection) and \$344,658,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$2,371,963,000, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 1 to 5, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 6.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (1.03): I move amendment No 1 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 3006*].

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 12, by leave, taken together, and agreed to.

Schedule 2.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (1.04): I move amendment No 6 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 3006*].

Amendment agreed to.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (1.04): I move amendment No 7 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 3006*].

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 2, as amended, agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

## **Estimates 2004-2005—Select Committee Report—government response**

Debate resumed.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (1.05): I just want to thank members for their participation in the debate.

Motion agreed to.

## **Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 (No 2)**

Debate resumed from 22 June 2004, on motion by **Mr Quinlan**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (1.06): The opposition will be supporting this bill. The Assembly recently agreed to separate the legislation governing our rates system from the legislation governing our land tax. This is an important decision and one that will enhance public administration in the territory. Unfortunately, when this decision was made, a consequential decision was that the rating system would be administered under the Taxation Administration Act, with all its attendant provisions, to protect information relating to individual taxpayers.

The effect of this bill will be to permit relevant information to be released to the public; that is, the information contained in what is called “the schedule”. That will contain information that has previously been readily available from various sources—for instance to compare your rates with those of your neighbours so that you might contest the rates assessment the government has given you for the year. The opposition will support the bill.

**MS DUNDAS** (1.07): The Democrats have no objections to this bill. We are very supportive of strong privacy laws, but this is not an instance where the disclosure identifiable in this information is likely to lead to any unacceptable outcomes. In fact, the only reason I can think of that someone may object to the value of their real property becoming public is if they were wishing to escape a liability for tax or some other payment that relates to assets held. The same information is disclosed to every property owner. As the Treasurer has outlined, there is good reason to make this information publicly available. It would indeed be difficult to dispute a rating decision if you could not compare your assessed value with those of your neighbours.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

## Adjournment

Motion (by Mr **Quinlan**) proposed:

That the house do now adjourn.

## Music awards

**MS DUNDAS** (1.08): At the end of May, I had the pleasure of meeting some ACT songwriters and hearing their great music. Three ACT musicians were top 10 short-listed in the 24th Australian National Songwriting Contest. There were over 2,000 entrants from across Australia in 14 categories. It was indeed great to see ACT songwriters doing so well in that national competition.

Mike Backhouse was awarded 10th place in the “coffee house” category for his song *In the pale moonlight*. The “coffee house” category is for acoustic and folk material suitable for smaller venues, including unplayed compositions. Mike has been writing songs for four years and draws inspiration from a diverse range of artists. He is a regular performer at the Australian Songwriters Association music nights here in Canberra.

Neil Young was awarded 4th place in the “spirit of Australia” category for his song *Balibo boys*—a song in remembrance of the five journalists killed in the town of Balibo, East Timor, in 1975. I have had the pleasure of meeting Neil. He has heard all the jokes possible about a songwriter with the name of Neil Young. He is a lifetime singer-songwriter and performs original music regularly, both solo and as part of a Canberra four-piece rock band called Rain.

Then it was Linda Tinney who scored 6th place in the “spirit of Australia” category for her song *Eternity*. The song celebrates the life of Arthur Stace, who became a legend for writing “eternity” across the streets of Sydney. Linda writes songs, plays the piano and appears regularly at Canberra venues as part of her song and blues trio called ZIP.

As well as recognising those three performers for their great music and their national achievements, I would also like to thank the volunteers who make the Australian Songwriters Association work here in the ACT. That includes regular monthly “open mike” nights, both down south and in the north of Canberra, where artists are invited to perform their original work.

Congratulations to Jason Linney, the current ACT coordinator of the ASA, and Ben Cusack, who is the media and public relations officer and the only ACT entrant to be placed in the top 10 at the 23rd National Songwriting Competition. I would also like to offer thanks for the work of the national president, Kieran Roberts. We have some brilliant talent here in the ACT and it is great that it is being nationally recognised. I hope that the ACT government will move to support live music in the ACT so that we continue to support the talent we have.

**The Assembly adjourned at 1.11 am (Wednesday).**

## Schedules of amendments

### Schedule 1

#### Appropriation Bill 2004-2005

##### Amendments moved by the Treasurer

**1**

**Clause 6 heading**

**Page 2, line 19—**

*omit the heading, substitute*

**6**

**Appropriations of \$2 371 963 000**

**2**

**Schedule 1, part 1.19**

**Page 6—**

*omit part 1.19, substitute*

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**Part 1.19**

Department of Education and Training	Education and Training	415 321 000	33 580 000	135 061 000	583 962 000
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**3**

**Schedule 1, new part 1.19A**

**Page 6—**

*insert*

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**Part 1.19A**

Office for Children, Youth and Family Support	Children, Youth and Family Support	60 972 000	10 485 000		71 457 000
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**4**

**Schedule 1**

**Page 6—**

*omit*

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<i>Total appropriated to departments</i>		1 594 321 000	403 635 000	344 658 000	2 342 614 000
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*substitute*

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<i>Total appropriated to departments</i>		1 600 270 000	403 635 000	344 658 000	2 348 563 000
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**5**

**Schedule 1**

**Page 7—**

*omit*

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<i>Total appropriations</i>		1 594 321 000	403 635 000	344 658 000	2 366 014 000
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*substitute*

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<i>Total appropriations</i>		1 600 270 000	403 635 000	344 658 000	2 371 963 000
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**6**  
**Schedule 2**  
**Page 9—**

*omit*

Education, Youth and Family Services	1	Government school education
	2	Non-government school education
	3	Vocational education and training services
	4	Children's, youth and family services

*insert*

Education and Training	1	Government school education
	2	Non-government school education
	3	Vocational education and training services

**7**  
**Schedule 2**  
**Page 9—**

*insert at the end*

Children, Youth and Family Support	1	Children, youth and family support
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