



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**NINTH ASSEMBLY**

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**Wednesday, 29 March 2017**

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Ms Burch) took the chair at 10 am and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

## **Community inclusion**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (10.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) recognises the importance of inclusion as a core value of the ACT community;
- (2) acknowledges the need to continuously improve our support for inclusion and embrace diversity;
- (3) notes the ongoing focus of the ACT Government to embrace inclusivity in the ACT, and that this past month has unofficially become Canberra's month of community inclusion through many events and government initiatives such as:
  - (a) marriage equality week, which reaffirmed the fact that Canberra is Australia's most LGBTI-inclusive city;
  - (b) the National Multicultural Festival, which saw more than 280 000 people come together in the Capital to embrace and celebrate the many different cultures in Canberra;
  - (c) Canberra Citizen of the Year Awards, which recognises the efforts of community members who strive to make this city a better place;
  - (d) the Connect and Participate Expo, which helps Canberrans of all abilities and ages join groups and build social connections around common interests, with over 100 sport and recreation groups, craft, and music groups, performing arts, hobby, social and "special interest" groups represented;
  - (e) Seniors Week and the Canberra Gold Awards, which highlighted the significant contributions Canberra's senior citizens make to the Canberra community;
  - (f) International Women's Day (IWD), including the IWD Youth Forum hosted at Gungahlin College, in which young women were encouraged by leading experts from our community to "Be Bold for Change" in advancing the progression of gender equality and opportunities for women; and
  - (g) displays at the Enlighten Festival in commemoration of the 1967 Referendum, which celebrated that achievement while recognising we have more to do to ensure our First Peoples enjoy the same quality of life as other Australians;

- (4) also notes that despite our community's overwhelming support for inclusivity:
- (a) the Federal Government is signalling to the Australian community that it condones and supports a small minority's wish to "offend, insult or humiliate" others on the basis of their race, without any repercussions, by seeking to amend section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cwlth); and
  - (b) the concerns flagged by Chinese, Jewish, Arab, Aboriginal, Indian, Greek and Armenian community leaders who in a joint statement warned that the Federal Liberal-National alterations to section 18C could "give a free pass to ugly and damaging forms of racial vilification";
- (5) takes responsibility to ensure Canberra is a place in which everyone belongs, by reaffirming that:
- (a) as a progressive society, differences do not divide us but instead make our community an interesting and vibrant place to live;
  - (b) we do not and will not accept racial discrimination or vilification of community members or visitors; and
  - (c) we seek to embrace, support, advocate, celebrate and encourage those members of our community who may not feel accepted by others; and
- (6) calls on the:
- (a) Assembly to condemn the Federal Liberal-National Government's decision to attempt to dramatically water down fundamental protections from racial vilification as currently set out in section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cwlth); and
  - (b) ACT Government to investigate what further steps may need to be taken to protect Canberrans and visitors from racial offence, insults, or humiliation, if the Commonwealth Parliament passes the proposed 18C amendments.

In my maiden speech I said that I was keen to be a champion of inclusion in the ACT. I am proud to live in a capital city that is inclusive. We embrace diversity and we are strengthened by it. That is why today I am moving this motion to highlight the positive aspects of inclusion here in Canberra.

This motion asks the Assembly to recognise that inclusion is a core value of our community here in the ACT. It has been fantastic to live in Canberra over the past two months and enjoy the diversity of our city of inclusion. Just this month I joined thousands of Canberrans at the Enlighten festival and the night noodle markets. It was fantastic to see the light displays which were clever, interactive and artistic, but many of these displays also had a message.

In commemoration of the 1967 referendum, Old Parliament House was lit up in a dynamic lighting display celebrating our past achievements in tackling discrimination while recognising that we have more to do to ensure that our First Peoples enjoy the same quality of life as other Australians.

I was also delighted to see the sustainable development goals projected on the Questacon building, including goal 5, achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, and goal 10, reducing inequality, including that based on income as well as on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. These are goals that form part of a universal, inclusive and indivisible agenda calling for action by all governments to improve the lives of people everywhere.

Enlighten was closely preceded by our famous National Multicultural Festival where more than 280,000 people celebrated all of the cultural diversity our city and our nation has to offer. The festival was celebrated with 419 stalls with 151 community stalls providing information, selling food and drink to raise money for their community work, and performing cultural and traditional dance.

At the same time in February rainbow flags were flying across our city to celebrate equality and to celebrate our commitment to one Canberra. For a long time we also have known Canberra as Australia's friendliest city for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people. The flags were a bright and colourful statement of our commitment as an inclusive and welcoming city, but also one that is strong and taking leadership based on our values, our inclusive values, and to signal that our government values the inclusion of same sex couples in our nation's laws by supporting marriage equality legislation in the federal parliament.

But it has not been just government that has stood up for equality during these past two months. In our airport, the Canberra Airport, they also chose to make a statement of equality with highly visible signs supporting the marriage equality campaign. We have seen hundreds of businesses here and around the country taking a role in speaking up for inclusion in their community through the marriage equality campaign, because businesses are part of, and have a legitimate stake in, our community and the debate on these issues. As Qantas CEO Alan Joyce said last week:

Qantas' identity is the Spirit of Australia, and one of the most fundamental values in this country is the notion of a fair go. That's why Qantas speaks up on gender equality. And recognising our Indigenous people. And for marriage equality.

This is a great example of a company championing inclusion because it is good for society and it has an economic side as well. There could not be a greater message for us here in the ACT when it comes to our university sector, which is a strength of our Canberra economy.

An open and inclusive society is so important when it comes to building our international reputation on which our education exports rely. We saw what happened in Melbourne with reported crimes and robberies that were allegedly racially

motivated against the Indian community and the effect that that had on the international reputation of Melbourne as an education destination.

We must continue to promote our inclusive city and the people in it. Our values as an inclusive city have also been demonstrated in several other events that have taken place in the past two months. The Canberra Citizen of the Year Award recognises the efforts of community members who strive to make this city a better place. We certainly heard from the Canberra Citizen of the Year, Alex Sloan, a very inclusive message about inclusion and our community.

At the Connect and Participate Expo we saw help for Canberrans of all abilities and ages to join groups and build social connections around common interests, with over 100 sport and recreation groups, craft and music groups, performing arts, hobby, social and special interest groups represented.

It was also great to participate in Seniors Week and the Canberra Gold Award, which highlighted the significant contributions Canberra's senior citizens make to the Canberra community. Of course, International Women's Day was celebrated around our capital, including here in the Assembly.

One of the events supported by the ACT government included the International Women's Day Youth Forum hosted at Gungahlin College at which young women were encouraged by leading experts from our community to "be bold for change" in advancing the progression of gender equality and opportunities for women.

Madam Speaker, the government does a lot to ensure that our community members and our difference and culture are celebrated in our city. But we need to do more continuously to improve our support for inclusion and to embrace diversity because there is always more work to do to tackle discrimination and foster inclusion in the community.

I said in my speech last week, responding to the minister's statement on Harmony Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, that as leaders in our community we must all take leadership in this place to stand up for our values and that we must not accept racial discrimination or vilification of members of the community.

This motion seeks to affirm our support to embrace, support, advocate, celebrate and encourage those members of our community who may not feel accepted by others. This is particularly important in the wake of a failure of leadership and a leadership vacuum from those in the federal government, the sort of leadership failure that has allowed a toxic debate to rage on in the Liberal and National parties about changing section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 which, in extraordinary circumstances last week, coincided with Harmony Day celebrations and the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Concerns have been raised vocally by Chinese, Jewish, Arab, Aboriginal, Indian, Greek and Armenian community leaders. In a joint statement they warned that the

federal Liberal-National parties that alterations to section 18C could give a free pass to ugly and damaging forms of racial vilification.

Our nation's laws do reflect our society's standards and our values, and watering down these laws signals the wrong message about Australia, a message that condones and supports a small minority's wish to offend, insult or humiliate others on the basis of their race, without any repercussions. But that should not be reflective of the inclusive capital that we live in.

As the parliament prepares to debate the changes on 18C later this week, an IPSOS poll of 1,400 voters shows that 78 per cent of Australians believe that it should be unlawful to offend, insult or humiliate someone on the basis of their race or ethnicity. We should rightly condemn the federal government for their leadership failure in attempting to water down the Racial Discrimination Act.

But condemnation is not enough. That is why today's motion calls on the ACT government to act, as we have acted so many times in the past, to stand up for inclusion. I remind the federal parliament that you are not the only parliament that can legislate on racial vilification. If you exit the field or you create a vacuum that sends the wrong message on racial hate, then that must cause us to investigate what steps need to be taken here in the territory to ensure that Canberrans can live without vilification.

That is why this motion calls on the ACT government to investigate what further steps may need to be taken to protect Canberrans and visitors from racial offence, insults or humiliation if the commonwealth parliament passes the proposed 18C amendments. We are an inclusive capital, and we want all people to belong here, regardless of their background, race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability or the disadvantages that they face.

As we reflect on the tremendous two months of inclusion in our capital, celebrating our diversity, awarding those who have strengthened our community, we must also take action to protect the inclusive values of our Canberra community and those who live within it. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (10.12): I thank Mr Steel for bringing this important motion before the Assembly this morning. It is timely, and it is a crucial debate. It is fair to say that our city has long been inclusive, and the ACT government, particularly the government of the past 15 years, has committed Canberra to being the most inclusive city in Australia. We welcome diversity and we work hard to break down barriers in all aspects of society.

We are a refugee welcome zone, we have funded the safe schools program and we have just finished ACT Seniors Week. These three examples are varied, but they demonstrate how the ACT government supports inclusion in all aspects of our community. It is important that government leads the way in community inclusion. People elected into this place have a responsibility to lead the community in inclusivity, to set the tone for debate and to encourage all parts of society to contribute

to their community. 2017 is not quite three months old, but the ACT government has demonstrated that leadership this year in community inclusion.

Earlier this month on the eve of celebrating Canberra's birthday I had the honour of announcing our 2017 Canberra citizen of the year. This award is one of the highest honours this city can bestow. It recognises Canberrans who go above and beyond to build a stronger and more inclusive city. This year's recipient could be said to be the voice of Canberra; Alex Sloan has lent her broadcasting talents to the Canberra community and told the many and varied stories of this city over several decades. Alex's name has been added to a very distinguished list of Canberrans who have given back so much to their community. We are privileged to have citizens like Alex as part of our community. They help make the fabric of our society much stronger, and it is important that this work is recognised across our community.

Also this month we paid tribute to the many Canberrans who have called this city home for more than 50 years, and I presented them with the Chief Minister's Canberra gold award. These people are our everyday heroes, the ones who contribute through their daily lives to our community. In this year's cohort were people who travelled vast distances to make Canberra their home, migrating from the UK, Italy, Macedonia, Greece, Finland and Japan, to name a few. There are people who volunteer for our world-class attractions, including the National Arboretum, the National Gallery and the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, and those who support those less fortunate through work with the Salvos, St Vincent de Paul, the Smith Family and the Red Cross. This year's group contained a few of our high profile Canberrans, including the psephologist Malcolm Mackerras AO and acclaimed local author Marion Halligan.

This engagement within the local community is important, and it was again on show last weekend at the Connect and Participate Expo in Kingston, where 110 community groups and organisations demonstrate how they connect people across Canberra. The expo supports the ACT government's vision of increasing community participation in all aspects of life and complements the work being done in the community services, health, sport and recreation, education and arts portfolios.

Of course, March's month of inclusion also included International Women's Day. It is important that governments across the world support this day. While there have been many advances in equality over the past few decades, there is much work to be done and it is important that Canberra women are supported and recognised for their work in our city, our region and beyond. Marie-Louise Corkhill is the 2017 ACT woman of the year for her outstanding leadership and contribution to Canberra women and their families.

The Minister for Women, the Deputy Chief Minister, Yvette Berry, launched the ACT government's first action plan for women, which details the actions that all ACT government directorates will undertake to promote gender equity, wellbeing and the physical and mental health of women and girls in our community. The plan will involve building on our understanding through research and analysis, undertaking innovative actions for change, evaluation and review.

Change takes leadership; it takes individuals but it also takes the whole community, and that is why we have led the way on LGBTIQ inclusion, recently legislating to automatically allow the recognition of same-sex relationships as a civil union under territory laws where that relationship is formally recognised overseas.

The ACT government continues to support the recognition of same-sex relationships where possible, and we will continue to advocate for the federal parliament to act on marriage equality. We do this because no-one should be made to feel different or lesser because of who they love, and we are committed to ensuring that all Canberrans have the ability to express their love and commitment in the eyes of the law.

Earlier this year we established the office for LGBTIQ affairs. During this year's first sitting week, as Mr Steel indicated, rainbow flags were flown throughout Canberra to reaffirm our support for the LGBTIQ community and for marriage equality. These flags were flown as our city's largest multicultural gathering, the National Multicultural Festival, brought more than 280,000 people to our city centre. This festival is such a fantastic show of diversity and inclusion within our community and continues to be strongly supported by the ACT government.

I have mentioned today but a few of the areas where our government has led the way on inclusion in our community. I believe all governments should show this leadership on inclusion. They should not go out of their way to attack people, so it is incredibly unfortunate that the federal government chose Harmony Day to release details of its plan to wind back protections against racial vilification. These are simply bad amendments, and they will, if passed, give licence to a divisive, racist ugliness that we do not want in our country.

The ACT government will continue to be inclusive. We will continue to stand up for everyone. Australia is the world's most successful multicultural and inclusive society, and you will find the best of this right here in Canberra. I commend Mr Steel's motion to the Assembly.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (10.20): I also, of course, thank Mr Steel for putting this motion forward. The Greens recognise and appreciate the importance of inclusion as a core value of the ACT. Of course, we need to continuously improve the way this is achieved to ensure that diversity is embraced and that nobody is left behind.

The bottom line is that we are all human and equally deserving of love and respect. Diversity and inclusion, justice and equity are core values of the Greens, and we stand together with the ACT government to ensure that this community is one where differences, no matter what they are, are welcomed and celebrated. This is because we know that diversity and inclusion can bring great richness. Diversity and inclusion bring different views. Diversity and inclusion bring varied cultures and ways of thinking. These aspects all combine to make this a stronger, more vibrant, more interesting and more resilient place to live. It is a really key aspect of making Canberra the wonderful place it is to live for all of us.

We note and appreciate the efforts of the ACT government in particular over the last month to proactively promote or participate in events that encourage inclusion such as the ones mentioned by the two previous speakers but, in particular, the Connect and Participate Expo, Seniors Week, International Women's Day, the Multicultural Festival and the marriage equality week. All of these events have been very happily supported by the Greens. These events enable Canberra residents to engage with each other across the divides, to celebrate their unique contributions to our community and to break down stereotypical ideas and myths.

The Greens suggest, however, that it takes more than public events to encourage cohesion and that deliberate attempts to make Canberra more inclusive should include things more on a one-to-one scale, such as ensuring that interpreter services are available for newly arrived migrants and refugees to ensure that they understand what services are available to them, how to access these services and where to go for assistance when they need it. I would also in this instance note the efforts of transition towns which are being championed by SEE-Change. They are building local communities to help us transition to a more environmentally and socially sustainable future.

We also must make sure that interpreter services include services for the hearing impaired. When we think of interpreters, we should not think just of languages; we should think of Auslan interpreters as well. Additionally, we need to make sure that government facilities such as meeting rooms and community halls include hearing loops so that we can genuinely include people with hearing impairments in our events and activities.

When we think and speak about diversity we must not forget those with disabilities who are often more marginalised and suffer disproportionate violence and struggle in a world made primarily for able-bodied people.

And when it comes to refugees, the Greens have always been outspoken against the current regime. We call for the closure of camps on Manus and Nauru, and I am looking forward to joining the Refugee Action Committee next week in their call for a more humane response to those who seek asylum on our shores. I will be joining them at the Palm Sunday rally, as I have done over many previous years. By accepting refugees and asylum seekers into our country and into our region, we become richer, more diverse and more vibrant.

All people, regardless of their ethnicity, culture, religion, language or place of birth have equal rights in our society. The ACT Greens support our multicultural communities to connect with their language and culture, to build relationships with each other and with the broader community.

Public attacks on religious and ethnic groups show the need to continue to educate our community about diversity and the rights of all people to live without being discriminated against or vilified on the basis of their face, race or ethnicity. The Greens are very concerned about the proposed watering down of section 18C of the

Racial Discrimination Act, and we stand in support of this motion. It was encouraging to hear words along those lines from the Labor Party here.

Indeed, the Australian Greens have a petition at this moment calling for a halt to the commonwealth government's aggressive push to change section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, a crucial safeguard against racism and hate speech. It is another attack on multicultural Australia and the latest capitulation by Malcolm Turnbull to his rabid right wing, One Nation and a narrow section of the media.

You need only to look at the politicians pushing to water down section 18C—Malcolm Turnbull, Peter Dutton, Pauline Hanson, and George Brandis—to realise that this is a cultural and ideological war masquerading as a free speech crusade. You really have to ask, what is gained by this amendment? What needs to be said that actually is not already able to be said?

Given that Pauline Hanson has already been able to spread things which, unfortunately, in many instances turn out to be mistruths, rumours and misleading statements, about Muslims in particular, without any negative repercussions, it is hard to see that watering down 18C will make any difference.

The Ipsos poll of 1400 voters released yesterday shows that eight in 10 oppose the proposed changes to 18C. It shows that 78 per cent of all Australians believe it should be unlawful to offend, insult or humiliate someone on the basis of their race or ethnicity. The vast majority of voters—and that, of course, includes coalition supporters—remain unconvinced of the need for change. Seventy-six per cent of respondents who intend to vote for the coalition said they support retaining the words “offend, insult and humiliate”. This compares to 84 per cent of Labor voters and 85 per cent of Greens voters.

The proposal to delete the words “offend, insult and humiliate” from the act and replacing them with something making it unlawful to intimidate or harass someone on the basis of race will do nothing to strengthen protections currently afforded under the act. I am not sure, in fact, what it will do. The words are so confusing; this seems to be a confected debate that is just creating disharmony in our community.

The Greens say no to racism. We will never accept the statements that it should be easier for Australians to be racist. We stand shoulder to shoulder with multicultural Australia against bigotry and hate speech. We have been putting posters around the country to show that, whoever you are and whatever language you speak, we will stand with you against hatred and bigotry. These posters are in a range of different community languages, including Arabic, Hindi and Chinese and they serve to deliver a message to people from various multicultural backgrounds about the support that exists in our parliaments, both nationally and, importantly for today's motion, locally.

In closing, the Greens affirm that we do not and will not accept vilification of any kind against members of our community, regardless of who they are and what their background is. We support the calls of the ACT government to investigate what steps may need to be taken to protect Canberrans and visitors from racial offence, insults,

and humiliation if the commonwealth parliament passes the proposed 18C amendments. Of course, we hope this will not be necessary.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.29): It is another Wednesday and, therefore, another federal motion from the Labor Party. Labor comes to this place every sitting week it seems with another motion on an issue outside the control of the ACT government and outside the control of the ACT Assembly whilst ignoring so many problems which are facing Canberrans.

The proof of this is simple and stark. The next motion today, to be moved by a Liberal member, is about the growing problem of serious dog attacks across this city, which affects hundreds of Canberrans. We have a motion today about integrity in the ACT government agency responsible for land development, a motion about public housing, and we also have a motion about Indigenous people and making sure they are respected, as are the veteran community.

It is one thing for those opposite to preach, but it is another thing to actually govern. If Labor really cared about Canberra and Canberrans, they would be offering solutions to this issue. Instead of a motion which “calls on” action for something which is pretty much a commonwealth issue, perhaps we would have a motion about how we improve English as a second language in our school system, especially the non-government system and particularly the Catholic sector, which is really struggling with regard to kids who do not have a proficient understanding of English.

Perhaps we would also have a “calls on” motion which talks about transport disadvantage for migrants who do not live near public transport corridors and who cannot afford cars. How do we address that? That would be a very important “calls on” motion. Perhaps we could look at what options we could provide for linguistically diverse health services in the ACT and how they can be expanded and improved upon, because we know that language is a very serious barrier when it comes to providing health services.

How can we support ethnic clubs in Canberra that are all struggling at the moment? So many ethnic clubs have closed down as a result of an ongoing burden in the regulatory space of the ACT government. These are all practical things that affect our migrant community but, alas, those opposite are more interested in being the federal opposition than being the ACT government.

One need only review the diversity of members in the opposition to gain an understanding about our belief in diversity and how we celebrate multiculturalism. Be it Italian, Samoan, Hungarian or Korean, we celebrate people of different heritage, and we are all very grateful for the contribution these members and, indeed, the entire migrant community make to Canberra.

**MR RAMSAY** (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for Regulatory Services, Minister for the Arts and Community Events and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (10.32): Madam Speaker, I am most pleased to rise and speak in support of this motion, both as the minister for vets and seniors and the Attorney-General. I thank

Mr Steel for his motion and for his clear commitment and action to work in the area of inclusion.

As I have stated before, and as I will continue to advocate, I believe that we are a strong society where everyone belongs, where everyone is valued and where everyone can participate. As such, we need to ensure that we build a society where people need not fear exclusion on any basis, a society where people of all ages and backgrounds are welcome, valued and included, so that we can benefit from the experience and the ideas of those who bring a different perspective from our own.

In the shadow of this year's Seniors Week, I again affirm that seniors are a significant asset to our community, but they are too often talked about or written about in negative terms: about the increasing costs of care or the burdens of old age or a lack of capacity. However, research proves that, far from being a drain on our community, older people are net contributors to the economy through their engagement with their communities and families. We need to ensure that we are harnessing the rich diversity and the often unacknowledged wealth of experience that seniors bring and contribute to our communities. We must continue to build a city where seniors are an included and integral part of the community or else we will miss the opportunity of fully engaging one of the largest, most educated generations of social innovators in our nation's history.

In recognising the right to dignity of our seniors, I am committed to combating discrimination, neglect, mistreatment and abuse of older people through providing the right support services and creating public awareness. One of the ways this government is acting in this area has been to set up the abuse prevention and information line to help give advice to seniors on issues surrounding elder abuse. We have been educating employers on the benefits of employing older workers. We have been providing grants to community organisations to help increase participation by seniors, as well as the simple things like the flexible bus service and free off-peak travel to help our seniors get around town. By encouraging our seniors to be active participants in society and providing them with the information that they need both on their rights and the services available to them, we are helping to ensure that they remain included, valued and self-sufficient.

I am currently in the process of selecting the next ministerial advisory council on ageing to ensure that we are listening to our seniors as well as designing a city that makes it easier for them to participate. We are building age-friendly suburbs to make daily life easier for seniors in Canberra, and we have an active ageing framework to encourage our seniors to be active and healthy and able to participate.

We as a society cannot afford to miss out on the depth of experience of our seniors, and we must leverage the intellectual capacity, talent, skills and commitment of older residents to help solve issues for people of all ages in our community. But to do this we must ensure that we continue to remove barriers to participation, rather than making it easier to discriminate by removing existing safeguards and protections.

Inclusion is obviously about both intent and action. Each time I speak in public and I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, I also personally commit myself to

acts of reconciliation with our nation's first peoples. Actions must go with words. This government's ongoing action to promote inclusion continues to serve the broader community. Despite people deciding to close their eyes as to what the ACT government is responsible for, it is clear that this is something that is within the responsibility and the power of this government. It is something that we are acting on and we will continue to act on.

On 3 April this year, amendments to the ACT Discrimination Act will commence that will expand and improve this community's protections from discrimination. For the first time anywhere in Australia, because of the actions of this government, it will be unlawful to unreasonably discriminate against someone based on their accommodation status, their employment status or the fact that they are a victim of family violence.

Existing protections will be updated. For example, protection from discrimination on the basis of gender identity will be updated in line with recent law reforms, as will protection from discrimination for a person who has changed their registered sex.

The ACT Discrimination Act amendments were the result of extensive consultation undertaken by the Law Reform Advisory Council, noting the strong mood in this community against exclusion. At law, and in our community, this government is working hard and is acting to build a society where everyone belongs, where everyone is valued and where everyone can participate. I commend the motion.

**MS CODY** (Murrumbidgee) (10.38): I thank Mr Steel for bringing this motion forward. It is very dear to my heart. I rise today to recognise a value which is integral to our community here in the ACT: inclusion. Inclusion means more than just tolerance. Inclusion means more than just acceptance. Inclusion means respecting everyone, welcoming contribution and participation from all Canberrans regardless of gender, race or ability, and celebrating diversity so that everyone can enjoy their full potential and be welcomed by all.

While progress is always ongoing, I would like to celebrate the huge steps our community has made in embracing diversity. As a Labor government, we are committed to recognising and realising the potential of everyone in our community. Social inclusion and equality are always at the forefront of Labor's plans in government.

I understand the importance of an inclusive community in enabling all ACT residents to live a meaningful and enjoyable life. I know the value of work being done every day to improve outcomes for the vulnerable in our society. We have such a diverse and creative community, and we must celebrate that at every possible opportunity.

Today I would like to highlight four particular areas where diversity and inclusion are celebrated in our community. Firstly, I would like to use this opportunity to celebrate the incredible services provided by Sailability ACT. Sailability is a program that assists people of all abilities to enjoy sailing. For a young mother, raising a child with autism, Sailability provided a caring, nurturing and inclusive environment for my son. Through the dedication of skilled volunteers, Sailability allows people of all abilities

to get out on the water and enjoy a day of sailing. Participating in Sailability's activities was an opportunity for my son to feel welcomed and included.

I was honoured to attend the recent launch of Sailability's new boat, *George*, with Minister Stephen-Smith and Ms Lee. At this launch I was taken on a sail around the picturesque Lake Tuggeranong by an Australian paralympian silver medallist. It was incredible watching the skill and experience as she took me for a sail around the lake. There was very little wind on that particular day so it was all due to her skill that we moved seamlessly through the water. The most enjoyable part for me was the enjoyment I saw on her face and the thrill she was getting doing something she loved. I thank all the volunteers who make Sailability possible, for the work they have done to improve the lives of those in my family as well as the entire community.

Secondly, I want to speak briefly on the work our government is doing for women in our community. Canberra stands tall in the space of women's participation. This Assembly is one shining example of that. The employment participation of women in Canberra is a testament to the inclusive nature of our city and recognition that when women are included and empowered, our economy, our city and our community thrive.

I am also proud of the work Labor continues to do in promoting women's inclusion in sport. Participation in sport has always been something that has lifted my confidence and given me a way to meet new people. Being a woman who loves sport, particularly male-dominated sports, is tough. For too long, women's sport has been undervalued and underfunded.

Sport has the ability to build confidence and make women of all ages feel included. Promoting inclusion in this area is so important for our future as a progressive city. Labor will continue to support Canberra's female sporting teams and promote women's representation on sporting boards. We will continue to fight gender inequality in all forms. I am proud of this fact and will always continue to advocate on this issue.

Last night I had the pleasure of being at the launch of the Canberra Multicultural Women's Forum, along with many of my colleagues, including Minister Stephen-Smith. It is events like these that go beyond tolerance and acceptance. These platforms allow open discussion and knowledge sharing. They celebrate diversity, but they also examine the work that is still to be done.

At last night's event I met a lovely young woman who moved to Australia from Iran in 2012 so she could study here. One thing that struck me while I was speaking with her was her resilience and overwhelming positivity, even when detailing to me the many adversities she has faced. She is now married and enjoys calling Canberra her home.

Last night's event was a fantastic opportunity for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to come together. It is opportunities like these that promote inclusivity in our community. I thank the Canberra Multicultural Women's Forum for their fantastic work in our community.

Lastly, I want to draw a contrast between this government and those opposite, and their colleagues across the lake, by discussing section 18C. Last week, we saw Harmony Day shamelessly cast aside so that the Australian government could protect the rights of people to be bigoted, racist and intolerant. Rather than see an opportunity to distance themselves from this debate, those opposite chose to remain silent. Silence is acceptance. I have always believed that the standard you walk past is the standard you accept. I would like to add my voice—

**Mr Coe:** Do you want to talk about the contribution Elizabeth Kikkert made last night?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Coe, please. Ms Cody, please continue.

**MS CODY:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to add my voice to reaffirming Canberra as a place where everyone feels welcome. I would also like to condemn the Liberals across the lake for their attempt to water down protections for those who need them most. I believe, and this government believes, that Canberra is a place where everyone belongs and should be free from all forms of racial vilification. Again, I thank Mr Steel for bringing this motion forward. I commend it.

**MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (10.45):** I would like to thank my colleague Mr Steel for moving this motion. In doing so, he has brought attention to the importance of inclusivity and a reminder that this is a core value of the ACT.

The past month saw some great events. The Multicultural Festival once again lived up to its impressive reputation. Similarly, the Enlighten festival served up plenty of reminders of our inclusive community, most notably this year of the 1967 referendum, and reminds us that we have more to do to ensure Australia's First Peoples enjoy the same quality of life as all Australians.

More recently, we celebrated Harmony Day. This is an important occasion where Australians come together and celebrate the different cultures that make Australia a wonderfully diverse place to live. But against this backdrop of Harmony Day, we saw something very disappointing. The Liberals decided that Harmony Day, of all days, was the appropriate time to relaunch the debate regarding section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

At the current time, the Liberals propose that section 18C of the act will replace "offend, insult and humiliate" with "harass". The federal government intends to introduce a reasonable persons test to see if the act has been breached. It would make racial discrimination about a pub test. But, Madam Speaker, these changes themselves do not pass the pub test. These changes drastically change the intention of the act. They are poorly considered and will likely cause disruption to the lives of people from culturally diverse backgrounds, the people whom this act is meant to protect. It will make it harder for people who are vulnerable to racism to speak out.

It is actually worth considering the history of this act and its importance. It was first introduced in 1975 under the Whitlam government. In introducing the bill,

Mr Whitlam stated that he saw the new law as creating a climate of maturity, of goodwill, of cooperation and understanding at all levels of society. This is the sentiment in which the act exists: that it promotes cooperation and understanding at all levels of society.

But, sadly, racism is all too common in modern Australia. It is all too common in our streets, on our public transport and in our political discourse. How can anyone with a straight face claim that racist speech has been impinged upon when an Australian senator can openly say, “We are in danger of being swamped by Asians. They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate”? Or, “We’re bringing in people from South Africa at the moment. There’s a huge amount coming into Australia who have diseases; they’ve got AIDS.” Or, “If you want to live the traditional way of life, I believe you can do that, but people here, who are as white as I am, and have the blue eyes, whatever, and claim Aboriginality to have all the benefits that go with it—I’m totally opposed to it.”

I am amazed that people can get away with these sorts of remarks and then dare to complain about free speech. I do not think now is an appropriate time to weaken the Racial Discrimination Act. This is a time to strengthen the Racial Discrimination Act. The Racial Discrimination Act—like the Age Discrimination Act, the Disability Discrimination Act and the Sex Discrimination Act—aims to strengthen our society. It says we are all equal before the law. It tells people that racism and hatred are not tolerated in our country. These proposed changes severely weaken existing protections and enable political extremists to spread hate.

A question that has been posed to the supporters of weakening 18C is worth reflecting upon. What is it exactly that you want to be able to say or, more broadly, what remarks do you want other people to be able to say that they are not currently able to do? Proponents claim this is about free speech. That is simply untrue. We have numerous examples in Australia where speech is limited. We have some of the strongest defamation laws in the world, and there are numerous other examples. I find the example of Australian workplaces no longer being allowed to use the word “scab” very telling. If these people cared so much about free speech then why not pursue legislation that enshrines Australia’s right to free speech in all areas of public life? Why does 18C get special treatment? Why do bigots get special treatment?

Some members of this Assembly might try to claim this as being simply a federal issue. We saw Alistair Coe interject on this earlier. We have seen it before. We have seen them try to dodge issues. We know they are embarrassed to state their view. To them I say this: do not underestimate your own voice; do not underestimate the power you have.

One of the main problems with these changes to 18C is not just the legal change, although that is very serious. The main problem is the message it sends. It is a message from our country’s leaders that racism is now acceptable, that bigotry is now acceptable. The only way this can be countered is by standing up and saying that this is not true and by challenging it every step of the way. We cannot change the federal legislation in this chamber, but we can set a standard for what is acceptable and we most definitely can act to toughen up the ACT Discrimination Act.

These issues are especially pertinent to me as the member for Yerrabi. Yerrabi boasts one of the most multicultural societies in Australia. A quick scan of the 2011 census tells us this story. Almost one-third of Yerrabi residents were born overseas and almost one-third speak a language other than English at home. These figures have only become more diverse with the addition of Jacka, Moncrieff and Throsby and their thriving multicultural communities.

Yerrabi is an excellent example of how multiculturalism can unite us rather than divide us. My own community is particularly concerned about these proposed changes. Most recently I had the president of the Canberra Muslim community contact me and other members of the Assembly. He said:

Our Muslim communities across Australia are in a heightened state of fear and anxiety about the proposed changes to Section 18C of the Act. We, the Canberra Muslim Community, urge you to do all that is in your power to oppose the proposed changes to Section 18C of the Act.

And this ACT Labor government will. It is worth considering his words though:

We, the Canberra Muslim Community, urge you to do all that is in your power  
...

I accept, as I noted before, that we cannot affect the federal legislation here. But are we powerless? I think not. We have local powers and we should act. A motion with tripartisan support opposing the changes to 18C will also send a strong message about what this Assembly believes and what Canberra stands for. I support the motion that Mr Steel has moved today.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (10.52): I thank Mr Steel for bringing this motion forward today, for highlighting the fantastic celebrations of inclusivity that have been taking place across the territory this last month and for providing the opportunity to recognise the importance of inclusion as a core value for our community. I have spoken in this place on a number of occasions about the richness and diversity of our community and have boasted of Canberra as one of the most inclusive cities in the country. However, if we are to live up to this claim, this promise, if we are to be the truly inclusive community we aim to be and claim to be, we stand up and speak against the things that threaten and undermine both the inclusivity and diversity of this city.

As Mr Steel's motion states, we must acknowledge the need to continuously improve our support for inclusion and embrace diversity. Our country has long been shaped by difference. The struggle of our Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders to gain recognition and acceptance is the first tale in this story but sadly not the last. Even the British settlers brought old feuds to this new land. While Australians have always prided themselves on a lack of class differences, Irish-Australians were seen as suspect into the 20th century due to the nature of their creed.

Successive waves of migration have changed our nation. Immigrants from east and south Asia came to Australia before we were a nation, important to the bustling communities of traders and shopkeepers that grew up around the goldfields. Australia's migrant story continued after the Second World War with people seeking

solace in Australia from war and strife and helping build the Snowy River scheme. We continued to take those from Indochina searching for refuge in the 1970s and those from wars across Asia and Africa in the 1980s through to the 2000s. And we take them still because of our essential shared humanity. The fact that we learn from them and grow stronger because of them is merely a bonus.

Australia's diversity is broader than this. Like our multicultural communities, many other groups have struggled not simply for acceptance but for basic recognition and for self-determination. People with disability have gone from being shuttered away in residential complexes or in back rooms to individuals capable of speaking with strong voices on their own behalf.

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to strive for equality. From the 1967 referendum, through to the Mabo and Wik decisions, to the reconciliation movement and the apology, our Indigenous Australians have had to navigate a historical and political landscape which too often failed to acknowledge their very existence. I note that, through the closing the gap framework and with discussions about constitutional recognition and the value of treaty ongoing, we are yet to fulfil our promise to Australia's First Peoples. I outline these issues because they remind us of the struggle, of the effort it has taken to get to where we are today, in 2017.

Mr Steel in his motion celebrated the work of the ACT government and the ACT community in making our city more inclusive. The events highlighted in this motion are as diverse as our community. However the significant community support for each of them underscores our genuine support for this diversity.

As a local member for Yerrabi I am lucky enough to have attended a large number of community events, including a number of events highlighted in Mr Steel's motion. I hear stories of struggle and of strength, of perseverance and of determination. At many of these community events I see members opposite. I see them nod their heads at the tales of strife, at the refugee woman who fled an abusive marriage for the sake of her children, at the Aboriginal elder who seeks to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma, at the migrant who has started their own small business.

But rather than just nodding it is time that those opposite spoke up. It is time that those opposite spoke out against plans by their federal Liberal counterparts to undermine the diversity that thrives in our city and the inclusivity that we foster. It is time that they spoke out and opposed the federal Liberal government's plans to dramatically water down fundamental protections from racial vilification as currently set out in section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

It is time for those opposite to stand up for Canberrans, many of whom have made great sacrifice to be here, have shown immense determination and, in some cases, have suffered greatly. Apparently they have not suffered enough! You would think fleeing war or famine, learning a new language, building a home again from scratch, would be proof of their resolve. But, no, now they have got to get called names or have someone mock their accent. The Canberra Liberals time and again fail to condemn these reckless, retrograde changes, to stand up for our diverse communities.

I note that the Minister for Multicultural Affairs has asked them, and they have been silent. But they still keep going to the same events, nodding and speaking the same empty words. At some point, as members of the Canberra community, we have to define what we stand for.

The Canberra Liberals have failed this test. They stand up for no-one and stand for nothing. I feel passionately about this issue not because we are a perfect community but because it is about what sort of community we aspire to be. If we have the right to be a bigot, what next: the right to be a misogynist; the right to be a homophobe? At what point do we recognise that we stand stronger as a community because we stand together, because we draw a line in the sand as a community and say what is not acceptable, because we declare our shared values and say there is no right to be a bigot, not in Canberra, not now and not ever? These changes to the Racial Discrimination Act are unacceptable and they should be rejected by all Canberrans.

For too long we have asked the most vulnerable members of our community to simply be strong and to stand up for themselves. Today I will stand up for them and I hope that the Assembly joins with me.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (10.59): I thank Mr Steel for bringing this important motion to the Assembly today. I note that instead of using his opportunity to speak on this motion to outline his party's commitment to inclusivity, the opposition leader used it to try to give the government a whack. Talk about inclusivity! Instead of talking about what the opposition is doing in this space the opposition leader has tried to pretend that inclusivity is a federal issue exclusively. It defies belief. Perhaps by trying to argue these are federal issues the opposition is merely trying to hide how little they are doing in this space.

Madam Assistant Speaker, the ACT government is doing a lot in this space and despite what the opposition would try to lead you to believe I think it is more likely that they are just not paying attention, particularly given all of the things that you have heard today. And I am happy to remind the opposition for the umpteenth time exactly what else we are doing in this space.

The ACT government understands that culturally and linguistically diverse women have specific needs. The Minister for Women, Yvette Berry, launched the first action plan, the ACT women's plan 2016-2026, at the 2017 ACT women's awards on 7 March. One of the focus areas of the first action plan is that health information services are tailored to the needs of women and girls from diverse backgrounds. Some examples of this work will include working with the community to better understand the health needs of women and girls from diverse backgrounds—and ACT Health will be working with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to develop a program to support migrant and refugee women—improving the information provided to female asylum seekers about health services they are able to access in the ACT and ensuring access to these services; improving cultural competency training for staff in health services; and ensuring access to interpreter services in maternity settings.

In addition the ACT government has continued to play an important and proactive role in assisting refugees and asylum seekers to settle in our city and in promoting social harmony for many years. The ACT community has a proud history of settling refugees and asylum seekers from all over the world, many of whom have gone on to make an enormous contribution to Canberra's economic, social and cultural life. The ACT government and the wider ACT community have been ably assisted in their support and work by the tireless efforts of service providers and community organisations who also share our passion to offer help to enable every person to reach their full potential as a member of our diverse, inclusive and creative community.

The concept of the refugee welcome zone was an initiative of the Refugee Council of Australia and was first created in June 2002 as part of the Refugee Week celebrations. At that time 15 councils and shires in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia declared themselves refugee welcome zones. Today more than 100 local government agencies across Australia have declared themselves refugee welcome zones.

The ACT, need I remind the opposition, was the first state or territory in Australia to declare itself a refugee welcome zone. The process for the ACT becoming a refugee welcome zone involved the ACT government signing the refugee welcome zone declaration in June 2015. By signing the declaration, the ACT government gave a commitment in spirit to welcome refugees into our community, to uphold the human rights of refugees, to demonstrate compassion for refugees and to enhance cultural and religious diversity in our community. By becoming a refugee welcome zone, the ACT has formally continued its proud record and tradition of supporting the settlement of refugees.

The declaration builds on existing ACT government initiatives to support refugees and asylum seekers. In a broader context it has effectively served to demonstrate support for refugees, to take a strong stand against racism and discrimination and, importantly, to serve as a catalyst in raising awareness about the issues affecting refugees. It has also served to foster a culture of mutual respect and to promote a solid appreciation of cultural diversity by our citizens. In a best-practice contest, the ACT's refugee welcome zone status has served to encourage the development of a more coordinated approach to support refugee settlement and to motivate local organisations and support groups to work together more effectively to improve settlement outcomes for refugees.

The ACT government provides a suite of services and programs, including the ACT services access card which enables a smooth access to entitlements for refugees and asylum seekers. I should not need to remind the opposition, but I will, that the suite of entitlements available to refugees and asylum seekers includes, and is not limited to, high quality education services, including a fee waiver provision to cover the costs associated with enrolment in local public schools; access to English language classes through the Canberra Institute of Technology—opposition leader, are you listening?—

**Mr Coe:** For kids?

**MS CHEYNE:** free English classes through ACT public libraries, as well as a range of library services such as book borrowing, internet access and social groups; concessional ACTION bus fares; subsidies on transport costs for eligible individuals through the ACT taxi subsidy scheme—

**Mr Coe:** Talk about ESL in non-government schools.

**MS CHEYNE:** where they are unable to use public transport due to severe or profound activity limitations; a refugee transitional housing program which provides short-term, on-arrival accommodation for newly arrived refugees in the ACT—

*Ms Berry interjecting—*

**MS CHEYNE:** full medical care, including pathology, diagnostic, pharmaceutical and outpatient services in the ACT's public hospitals; and access to public trustee services, including services to prepare a will or enduring power of attorney direction.

As many people in this room should be aware, but again I am happy to remind the room, an arrangement was reached between the ACT and commonwealth governments, with federal immigration and border protection minister, the Hon. Peter Dutton, accepting the ACT's request for the ACT to be included in the safe haven enterprise visa scheme in August last year. The SHEV scheme provides hope and certainty to asylum seekers who currently reside in Canberra and who would otherwise face an uncertain future. The ACT's involvement in the SHEV scheme is a great boost for asylum seekers and underlines the commitment of the ACT government and the broader community to support people seeking asylum and the broader efforts to support refugees and asylum seekers. The ACT government is now working with the commonwealth government to implement the decision.

The citizens of Canberra have a proud record when it comes to promoting social cohesion within our community. The government is keen to continue the task of addressing social exclusion and marginalisation in our community and to create a sense of belonging and wellbeing for all Canberrans. The ACT government has worked tirelessly and has laid the foundation stones in order to achieve these goals and progress a raft of important initiatives. Through the successful implementation of our policies and our practices and the importance of our enduring and valued relationships with our community partners, we are strengthening social inclusion and equality in the ACT community. This process has enabled us to respond more effectively to poverty, deprivation and social disadvantage, as well as cultural and systemic problems that are encountered by migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in our community, including homophobia, sexism, racism and violence against women and children.

I hope this time the opposition was listening.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.07), by leave: Thank you very much Madam Assistant Speaker and the Assembly for your indulgence. I thought it was important to put on the record a discussion that just happened across the chamber

floor between me and Ms Berry. In a disorderly interjection I did mention to Ms Cheyne, “What about ESL in non-government schools?” The interjection was of course pointed towards Ms Cheyne but Ms Berry decided that she would like to respond to this, and her response was, “If it is an independent school, it is up to the parents, because they are paying the bills.”

If that is the attitude that the government has, that because a student who wants to learn English as a second language goes to a non-government school, the ACT government can in effect wash their hands of responsibility for informing kids about the English language, I think that is absolutely disgraceful. If this is the education minister for all students and for all schools, then we would not have a situation whereby the minister for education is washing her hands of the need for all kids to learn English.

It is also worth noting that there are actually many schools in Canberra, especially in the Catholic systemic system, that actually give places to students on a fee waiver basis. In actual fact, I know that there are schools, schools in Ms Berry’s electorate, that take refugee kids at no cost to the family. It is schools like that that desperately need support when it comes to teaching English as a second language.

I very much hope that Ms Berry will stand up in this place following my contribution and either refute what she said or in some way back up what she has said, because I think it was a very unfortunate contribution that she made.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Sport and Recreation): Madam Assistant Speaker, I seek to make a personal explanation under standing order 46. The opposition leader has wrongly represented me in this place.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Ms Cody): The minister may proceed.

**MS BERRY**: Had I known that I was going to get a personal attack from the Leader of the Opposition then I would not have allowed the opportunity to continue the conversation about inclusivity in the ACT. Had he listened to my comments and repeated them verbatim then it would have been okay to have a conversation about it. Public education and public schools do provide ESL as part of a program supporting refugee and migrant children in the ACT.

I understand that independent schools in the ACT have just increased their fees and I understand that a number of those schools provide English language programs as well. But it is up to those independent schools and Catholic schools to decide the programs that they would like to run in their schools, not for the government to direct them. If the independent schools in the ACT would like to be funded by the government and be accountable to and administered by the government then we would be able to direct the schools on the kinds of programs that they could deliver in their schools.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Minister, under standing order 46, could you please stick to where you were personally misrepresented.

**MS BERRY:** Yes. The comments that I made to the Leader of the Opposition were not the comments that he said that I made.

**Mr Coe:** What were they?

**MS BERRY:** I have explained what I said.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Dog management**

**MR DOSZPOT (Kurrajong) (11.13):** I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the number of people treated for dog attacks in emergency departments (EDs) in the ACT last year was 155, around one every three days;
- (b) the second highest injury in dog attacks in ACT EDs was to the patient's head;
- (c) there were 360 officially reported serious dog attacks in Canberra last year;
- (d) as a consequence of these serious attacks, 124 dogs were seized by officials in Canberra last year;
- (e) on average there is a serious attack reported in Canberra every day;
- (f) there is also anecdotal evidence that there are many serious dog attacks that are not officially reported;
- (g) 10 percent of dogs declared dangerous are not controlled and cause even further harm;
- (h) dogs that have been found to have committed vicious attacks on people or other animals are returned to the community;
- (i) the number of dog attacks treated in ACT EDs has increased 50 percent in the past five years;
- (j) in any other field, this rate of increase in crime or injury would be regarded as a crisis; and

- (k) in February 2016 the Government set up a working group to investigate dog attacks and their management that would “give feedback on the process and procedures out at Domestic Animal Services” (Mr Perram, *The Canberra Times*, 22 February 2016), but its findings have not been made public; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) allocate more resources to investigate serious attacks by dogs;
  - (b) allocate more resources for education about obligations and responsibilities of dog ownership;
  - (c) provide better feedback to victims about the progress of complaints about attacks by dogs;
  - (d) immediately report on changes made to dog management processes following feedback from the 2016 working group;
  - (e) review the law that allows a dog that has committed a serious attack to be classified a dangerous dog and report by the last sitting day in June 2017;
  - (f) review the law that allows dogs that have been found responsible for vicious attacks resulting in serious injury to members of the public, to be returned to owners and report by the last sitting day in June 2017;
  - (g) review the law that allows dogs that have been found responsible for vicious attacks resulting in the death of other dogs, to be returned to owners and report by the last sitting day in June 2017;
  - (h) improve the penalties on the owners of dogs that have harmed people or animals to ensure they are held legally responsible for consequential medical, veterinary, legal and related costs;
  - (i) increase penalties imposed on owners where their dog has been found to have been responsible for vicious attacks resulting in serious injury to people and/or the death of other animals; and
  - (j) be proactive in ensuring that dogs that cause serious injury to people and other animals, and the owners of those dogs, are treated under the law with the seriousness that the community expects.

I rise today to address a matter that is becoming a significant concern to Canberrans and which the government and all members can do something about today. I am not going to talk about theoretical plans, artists’ impressions or legislation that may or may not be enacted by lawmakers in other places, other cities or other countries. I am going to talk about something that each member here can do to look after the wellbeing of Canberrans in our city today.

The issue of dangerous dogs, injuries to people from dogs, injuries and death to pets by dogs and the general fear created by poorly managed dogs is something that is of growing concern in our community. A lack of resources, a lack of urgency to address

the existing legislation, a lack of education of dog owners about their responsibilities and obligations and an apparent lack of priority from this government concerning dogs have resulted in a problem that is rapidly running out of control.

On 17 January this year, after the media reported a man losing part of his hand in a dog attack, I called on the Canberra community to share with me their experiences or concerns about dangerous dogs. I have been inundated with messages. I have been inundated with personal stories of dog interactions that have left many in our community feeling vulnerable and fearing for their safety. I have been deeply disturbed by much of what I have discovered.

After reviewing dozens of stories concerning personal dog attack experiences from all over Canberra, it is clear that something needs to be done. From figures given to me by the government, a person presents to hospital emergency departments in Canberra because of dog attack every three days; and this rate is increasing, and it is unacceptable. Last year in the ACT there were 155 presentations at hospital emergency departments. In the past five years there have been over 550 presentations at hospital emergency departments. The number of dog attacks treated in ACT hospital emergency departments has increased by 50 per cent in the past five years, and this increase in injuries is leading us to recognise it for what it is—a crisis in this arena.

Alarmingly, the second highest injury in dog attacks in ACT hospital emergency departments has been to the victim's head. If overseas data can be used as a guide, the highest incidence of dog attacks is to children under 15 years of age, with the highest level of dog attacks on five to nine-year-olds. Even if the injuries are not life threatening, the long-term impact of a physical attack and potential mental scarring of a child can be profound.

There were 360 officially reported serious dog attacks in Canberra last year. This means that there is, on average, a serious attack reported in Canberra every day. It is of great concern that there is also anecdotal evidence that there are many serious dog attacks that are not officially reported. According to some people, the real numbers of dog attacks is significantly higher than the 360 reported in the official figures.

It is galling for owners who lose their beloved pets to vicious dog attacks and go through the trauma of reporting the offending dogs to find that, more often than not, the dogs are returned to their owners or are rehoused with other families. Dogs that have been found to have committed vicious attacks on people or other animals are returned to the community.

The government's own figures show that in the past five years in Canberra there have been over 550 presentations at hospital emergency departments. In the same period, again based on the government's own figures, there have only been two prosecutions of dangerous dogs; only two, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Based on the consultation we have had with the community, there appears to be a glaring anomaly, where innocent victims currently bear the medical, legal, veterinary, cremation and other costs of an attack. The government needs to take action to ensure

that the costs incurred by members of the public as a consequence of a dog attack are given some protection, and dog owners need to understand their legal obligations.

I have been frequently told that many people do not know the basics of responsible dog ownership, such as registration and the use of leads in public. The government needs to urgently look at educating dog owners about the danger that their dogs could pose to the wider community. It is also imperative that the government urgently allocates resources to educate people on their obligations and responsibilities as dog owners.

Most dog owners are conscientious and responsible about their dog ownership and would, I am sure, support stronger action to keep the community safe. The government has obviously lost control on this issue, and something needs to be done before more innocent pets are injured or killed; or, indeed, before a human tragedy occurs from these dog attacks.

The government's neglect of the issue of dangerous dogs has led to pain and anguish within our community. I have been contacted by many constituents, and the following extracts from some of the emails and phone messages I have received highlight the human and animal pain and suffering that has been caused. This was from Graham of Dunlop on 12 January 2017:

I wanted you to know that yesterday there was a vicious dog attack in Dunlop. A big dog killed a small dog and the owner of the small dog had his arm severely mauled and was in hospital yesterday for emergency surgery.

My children have also been terrified by aggressive dogs on a number of occasions when walking past backyards on the way to and from school. Our youngest child is scared to walk to school by himself due to several incidents, and as such we have had to move schools for him to be able to walk home with his older brothers.

In a letter to the *Canberra Times* on 27 March 2017 and copied to me, Bob of Wanniasa said:

I'm actually a federal Labor staffer but I don't see this as a partisan or a federal issue.

Your editorial—

referring to the *Canberra Times* editorial—

“Action Over Dog Attacks Needed” (*Canberra Times* 26 March 2017) asks what it will take before lawmakers and pet owners act to stop vicious dog attacks? Answer: a dead child or a severely beaten dog owner.

Years back, our small dog survived a Rottweiler attack. Fortunately, the attack dog only grabbed our dog's neck. The black and tan had to be prised off. From the Rottweiler owner: no apology. And having been told his dog should be on a lead, he produced an unused leash, waved it airily at my daughter and me, and then continued on his merry way.

Had my daughter's pet been maimed or killed where we stood, I'm unsure what would have followed irrespective of the consequences. But I do know that my first thought was not to calmly petition the ACT Government for yet another self-exculpatory inquiry into dangerous pets. Our dog survived. But I now carry a heavy stick whenever we go for a walk. The stick is not just to ward off magpies.

These stories are shocking: stories of people being forced to witness horrific acts of cruelty on their beloved pets, people frightened to leave their homes, and people justifiably concerned for the safety of themselves and more especially their children and grandchildren.

As an example of how we have lost control of the things that really matter, I would like to refer to an incident that was reported on the front page of last Sunday's *Canberra Times* and which prompted a powerful editorial, which I will come back to later. The incident was a terrible recent event concerning the death of a small dog killed at Yerrabi pond in January. I will read extracts from the impact statement from the owners of the dog, Peter and Maree Toscan. The Toscanes are in the gallery today, along with Dr Paul Crowhurst. They are dog owners, and they are also victims of dangerous dog attacks. I thank them for sharing their experiences with the community and also for coming along here this morning. Some people will find the Toscanes' story that I am about to read distressing. The Toscanes' report reads in part:

At around 7.30 pm on the evening of the 31st of January 2017 I was subjected to the most horrific event that I have had to endure in my 66 years, when "Buzz" our small family pet of 13 years was spontaneously attacked ... whilst I was taking him for a short walk around the western end of Yerrabi pond in Amaroo.

As Buzz and I rounded the small western end of Yerrabi pond and commenced walking across the footbridge I noticed the three large pit bulls who were standing on the bridge with two young men holding them on leads.

... one of the dogs lunged at Buzz taking him in his jaws dragging him away from me as he gave out a small yelp. The other two dogs immediately joined in the fray, ripping and tearing at him. I immediately dropped on top of the dogs, screaming and punching at them in an attempt to break their hold.

When the dogs were finally dragged away Buzz was left lifeless on the ground ripped open from chin to his chest, skin and flesh from his neck missing. I was unashamedly sitting on the path sobbing in anguish having let my mate down and not knowing how I was going to break the news to Maree.

Alan and his daughter Emily who witnessed the attack and also tried to break up the fray stayed to comfort me as did many others who had come across the aftermath. Alan then called the police who arrived a short time later and took statements. It was revealed at this time that the boys walking the dogs were not the owners, but "dog-walkers".

I wonder what would have happened if our 10 year old granddaughter (who grew up with Buzz) had been taking him for a walk. Not only could she have been

physically injured, she would have been mentally scarred for life. I'm still trying to come to terms with it myself.

Whilst we are not seeking revenge, we have grave concerns that having attacked once, these dogs if let out in the public arena again will pose a serious risk to other small animals and children alike if the appropriate action is not taken to ensure that this never happens again to another family.

After two months the Toscans have been sent a letter from domestic animal services to say the dog walkers had received an infringement notice and the dogs will be returned to their owner. The dog walkers were fined \$350 each. The owner was not fined a cent. The owner was sent conditions for the return of the dogs. The dogs have to live at the owner's home and must not attack other animals or people at the owner's home. The owner must inform the authorities if the dogs change address, and the dogs cannot be sold without permission. The home has to have a secure yard with secure gates. They must be on a leash if taken outside the property, and cannot be walked by people under 16 years of age. They must be muzzled when out of the home.

The only real inconvenience imposed on the owner beyond what would be considered good dog management is that three dogs have to be muzzled in public. The dogs were not declared dangerous. In most other states or territories these dogs would at least be declared dangerous, and significant restrictions placed on them. They may have been euthanased. Instead in the ACT they are sent home.

In a public statement on radio yesterday, the owner of the three dogs that killed the Toscans' dog said he, as a result of the killing, would be more careful with his dogs around the young children that live in his house. You would hope he will be very careful, Madam Assistant Speaker.

The issues that I raise here today are not new. In 2010, after having his son attacked at the throat and having his small dog mauled by two dogs, Dr Paul Crowhurst called for action on vicious dogs. Days after the attack, the dogs were still roaming the streets. These dogs had broken into Dr Crowhurst's secure backyard to maul the family pet.

In 2014 Renee had her two small dogs mauled to death in her locked backyard. She established an online petition which called on the government to have an inquiry into domestic animal services. In 2015 dogs broke into a family home in Dunlop and killed pet dogs and injured an owner. The dogs broke down the locked front screen door to get access to the other dogs.

In 2016 there was public pressure about dangerous dogs and dog attacks, calling on the government to set up an independent inquiry into the management of dogs in the ACT. The directorate refused an independent review but convened a working group to advise on improvements that could be made. Despite being told that this group would provide feedback, no information to date has been made publicly available.

This is not just a call from the victims of dog attacks for better management of dangerous dogs in the ACT. This is not just a call from opposition politicians on the government to provide leadership on the dog issue and show resolve in solving

real-world problems faced by many people in our suburbs every day. The *Canberra Times* has now also reflected the deep community concerns. On 6 February 2017 it had an article headed “Wake up call is overdue for capital dog owners”. Of course last weekend the Sunday *Canberra Times* hit home in an editorial headed “Action on dog attacks needed”. It said:

The horrific attack on an elderly dog in Gungahlin is another reminder that the territory has a serious problem with pet ownership and the laws that exist around dangerous dogs.

What will it take before both lawmakers and pet owners take appropriate action to stop the disturbingly regular occurrences of dogs attacking people and other canines?

There might not be an easy solution to be found but it’s an issue that we as a territory need to tackle.

*(Time expired.)*

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Yerrabi—Minister for Health, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (11.28): I thank Mr Doszpot for bringing this motion before the Assembly today, and acknowledge the presence in the gallery of the Toscons and the other gentleman whom Mr Doszpot welcomed. I certainly acknowledge the seriousness of the matters before us today.

This is a serious matter for our territory. Animal issues in the ACT are the subject of considerable community debate, specifically, today, dangerous dogs and how we can best manage them. I am pleased today to have the opportunity to highlight the government’s commitment to animal welfare in Canberra, and focus on some of the work we are doing in this space that relates to dogs, to domestic pets, and to the welfare of other wildlife and livestock.

I would like to make very clear that dog attack issues are serious, complex and distressing, whether a dog is attacking another dog or attacking a person. With so many Canberra families owning dogs, attacks are one issue many people will have an opinion on and an experience with. As I indicated yesterday and during the previous sittings when we passed legislation to enact further changes to our domestic animal legislation, and as I indicated in my ministerial statement last year, animal welfare is a priority for me as the Minister for Transport and City Services.

I will talk more broadly to the draft animal welfare and management strategy that was released today, which I have foreshadowed for some time but, in the first instance, I want to address some of the specifics of the motion today.

Mr Doszpot has highlighted some statistics from 2015-16 that relate to people treated for dog attacks in our hospitals, and the injuries for which they were treated. These are, of course, a cause of concern, but it is difficult to draw specific inference as to where or under what circumstances these incidents took place. They might be related to an incident in someone’s home by their own beloved pet or they could relate to an incident in a public area. Indeed, given the regional nature of our hospitals, they may

also occur outside our borders. I have asked ACT Health for further detail on these figures; they are not currently available, but we can do some more work on that.

I will also note that the number of officially reported dog attacks in Canberra was, as Mr Doszpot mentioned, 360. I do want to correct the record, though: while all dog attacks are serious, they are not reported as serious dog attacks; they are reported as investigations into dog attacks. In some instances, those investigations find a variety of different dog incidents.

Of the 124 dogs seized by domestic animal services in 2015-16, 12 dogs were declared dangerous. Those declarations were undertaken using a rigorous assessment process using a committee structure and then subjected to further independent scrutiny by the registrar of domestic animal services. Other dogs seized also had very stringent conditions placed upon them, one example of which I outlined yesterday in the chamber. What is clear, though, is that the community is concerned, the Assembly is concerned and I am concerned. That is exactly why I asked for a comprehensive piece of work to underpin how the government and community respond to these issues.

Regarding the motion specifically relating to how responses to dog attacks are handled, I note that rangers deal with an extraordinary range of circumstances in their work; their investigations may be subject to legal proceedings and they may involve, in partnership with other organisations, instances of neglect and cruelty, as well as dangerous and often very upsetting attacks. Investigations may be subject to subsequent legal proceedings, which can often be lengthy and are distressing for those involved. I ask all members to consider the complexity of these issues in discussing this motion. Again I say that I acknowledge that these issues are serious and they require further work, but they are not simple and they must be dealt with thoughtfully.

I am pleased to advise that in the past 12 months there has been a renewed focus of domestic animals services staff on customer service and communication, especially the importance of keeping victims of dog attacks informed on the progress and outcomes of investigations. The directorate has also implemented more rigorous, evidence-based decision-making processes that meet high standards of probity and ensure that decisions are consistent with legislation and properly reflect community expectations. The directorate has also made solid progress in building staff capacity and capability through recruitment, staff development and new systems and processes. Building on the progress already made in this space, I am very pleased to reiterate the government's commitment to strengthening the capacity of DAS.

Significant work has been underway, some already mentioned in the motion. Much of it has been brought together in the animal welfare and management strategy released today. One aspect of this process was to ensure that greater scrutiny was given to declarations of dangerous dogs, following work with the community working group referenced in the motion today and subsequent High Court rulings about the requirement of the independence of the decision-maker.

While I accept that we can look further at legislative change, it is not correct for Mr Doszpot to say that there has been no work done. Just in February we passed

legislation in this chamber relating to the rights of victims to have standing at the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and last year significant change was made to domestic animal legislation, most notably to outline very clearly that responsibility for pet ownership rests with the pet owners: they not only have a responsibility to ensure that an animal behaves appropriately in community settings but are responsible for the welfare and care of those animals too.

That work last year, passed by this Assembly, of which Mr Doszpot was a member, also made changes to offence provisions under the Domestic Animals Act. These changes related to allowing a dog to attack a person or animal, causing serious injury; a dog attacking a person or animal causing serious injury when it is not with its keeper or carer; increasing the maximum penalty for the offence of allowing a dangerous dog to attack or harass a person or animal to 500 penalty units, imprisonment for five years, or both; and increasing the infringement notice penalty for the offence of allowing a dog to harass or attack a person or animal from \$200 to \$350.

As the amendment I will move indicates, I am happy to review these penalties and consider how further to improve them. We need to be mindful not to penalise dog owners who, in the majority of situations, try to do the right thing. For example, under the Domestic Animals Act, the offence of allowing a dangerous dog to attack or harass a person or animal has a maximum penalty of 500 penalty units, which equates to \$70,000, imprisonment for five years, or both. By way of comparison, the offence of allowing a dangerous dog to attack could be considered comparable to the offence of assault occasioning actual bodily harm.

Earlier this year, the Assembly passed the amendments I mentioned previously to allow rangers to seize a dog before determining its status, rather than having to declare its status as dangerous and then seizing the animal. The amendments also made it clear that a person who, or whose animal, has been attacked or harassed by a dog is able to seek review of the registrar's decision to issue a dangerous dog licence.

Also, as I mentioned, the changes passed in February enabled victims of dog attacks to have standing at the ACAT and ensure that they will be kept informed of appeals to the issuing of a dangerous dog licence. This directly addressed key concerns of community members who were part of the group mentioned in Mr Doszpot's motion. Under previous legislation, unfortunately, a victim was not able to be a party to the appeal process, so it was important that the Assembly made those changes.

Of course, as we know, a dog does not need to be declared a dangerous dog to be aggressive. All dogs have the capacity to be aggressive. Unfortunately, legislation can only act as a deterrent to a certain extent. I think we can all agree that we also need to boost education and awareness of responsible pet ownership as a key means of preventing such attacks.

It is of concern to me, of course, as minister that there are dogs in our community attacking other dogs. I ask members to consider exactly what the legislation and regulatory framework might look like where a dog who has given no indication of previously being aggressive does, very sadly and distressingly, attack another dog in a

public place. It is a very difficult aspect of this policy area. That is exactly why I think we need to go back to basics.

Let me give some history to that. We have an estimated 60,000 dogs living in the ACT, so there will be incidents. We all have a role to play to ensure that people and other dogs and animals can feel safe in our community. This means that ultimately the control of a dog is the responsibility of its owner, within a robust legislative and regulatory framework. The ACT already has strong legislation governing the management of domestic animals, including dogs involved in attacks, but it is a fact that legislation alone cannot prevent dog attacks. That is why we need action on multiple fronts to reduce the propensity and opportunity for these attacks. A holistic and coordinated approach to initiatives, which might include strengthening requirements for desexing, registration, microchipping, compliance and education, is the best means of reducing the likelihood of dog attacks.

That is exactly the sort of issue that is raised in the draft animal welfare and management strategy, which I have released today. It is available for comment from the community; it has been developed in close consultation with the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, RSPCA ACT, ACT Veterinary Surgeons Board and other stakeholders, notably the Rural Landholders Association.

My intention for this strategy is that it will guide animal management and welfare into the future for our pets, wildlife and livestock. Already this input from this range of stakeholders has proved extremely valuable. I am very confident that this is a comprehensive starting point for us to further investigate how we can continue to improve our policy, legislative and regulatory environment. It outlines a clear vision and objectives to better manage all animals in the ACT and will highlight the actions that, when delivered, will represent best-practice animal management in the country.

These examples include improved communication and education programs for the community and animal professionals; the promotion of responsible pet ownership as a key approach to managing domestic pets and prevent the occurrence of a range of undesirable outcomes, notably including dog attacks; improved facilities and services that are tailored to meet community expectations regarding domestic animal management; ongoing review of the ACT's animal management regulatory framework to address emerging trends and issues; and management plans for introduced species.

The strategy will be a broad umbrella under which a range of practical measures will be pursued. I look forward to hearing the views of the community and members of this place over the next six weeks as we have this strategy out for public comment and then implementing a robust animal welfare and management strategy for the ACT.

I thank Mr Doszpot for his motion today. I am confident that the work we have done and will continue to do as a result of this strategy will strengthen our ability to further investigate our policy, legislative and regulatory framework. I note the distress of many people in our community at the moment whose dogs have been attacked, and the owners of dogs who have attacked others. I note that it is a complex issue, one that

we are dealing with. The draft animal welfare and management strategy is a good place to start. I look forward to further work by the Assembly on this matter. I move:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the number of people treated for dog attacks in emergency departments (EDs) in the ACT last year was 155, however, it is unknown how many presentations are ACT residents;
- (b) the second highest injury in dog attacks in ACT EDs was to the patient’s head;
- (c) there were 360 officially reported dog attacks in Canberra last year;
- (d) as a consequence of these attacks, 124 dogs were seized by officials in Canberra last year;
- (e) on average there is an attack reported in Canberra every day;
- (f) dogs that have been found to have committed attacks on people or other animals are returned to the community, often with stringent conditions;
- (g) the number of dog attacks treated in ACT EDs has increased 50 percent in the past five years;
- (h) penalties for dangerous dog attacks were increased in 2014;
- (i) in February 2016, the Government set up a working group to investigate dog management processes; and
- (j) the ACT Government has today released the draft Animal Welfare and Management Strategy for public comment; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) consider allocating more resources to investigate attacks by dogs;
- (b) consider allocating more resources for education about obligations and responsibilities of dog ownership;
- (c) report on changes made to dog management processes following feedback from the 2016 working group;
- (d) review relevant laws and internal procedures that govern the management of dangerous dogs and report by the end of September 2017; and
- (e) review the penalties associated with the management of dangerous dogs.”.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (11.41): This issue is one that the Greens take seriously, as I am sure every member of the Assembly does. As a number of people

have said, this is not so much a political, ideological issue but an issue which requires resolution for the community.

I have read that there are 60,000 dogs in the ACT, so nearly a quarter of us have dogs. It is an important issue, and it is one where we have to balance the rights of everybody and the likely actions of dogs. It is particularly complicated, because, of course, dogs do not actually read legislation and it is complicated to ensure that what we do is going to make a positive impact.

When my colleague Mr Rattenbury was Minister for Territory and Municipal Services in 2014, a major set of changes in penalties for dog attacks was brought in. These changes substantially increased the penalties that applied. After these 2014 changes, the maximum penalty for repeat offences was up to \$75,000 and five years jail.

Mr Doszpot's motion suggests that dog attacks have continued to increase. If this is, in fact, the case, I guess you could say that this highlights a major concern with Mr Doszpot's motion. I am not convinced that even higher penalties will work, and I am reluctant to commit to even higher penalties without substantial community consultation.

Do we really think that if a dog is mauling another dog it is going to stop because its owner might end up in jail? Clearly, that is nonsense. Equally, do we even think that the owners of dogs, if their dog is mauling someone, are going to stop because they think, "For \$1,000, it is not a problem, but for a larger amount of money, yes, I will make sure that this does not happen." We are not convinced that the major solution to this problem is increasing penalties.

We are also concerned that increasing penalties may potentially have a disproportionate impact on low income families. We have spoken to the RSPCA about this and they are concerned particularly that for low income dog owners who are having difficulties financially, imposing a large fine is not going to have any positive impacts and, I understand, may in fact end up in someone potentially even being in jail because they cannot pay the fine. What is going to be the real-world impact on a family whose dog escapes their yard and attacks someone? What happens to them if they are suddenly hit with a \$20,000 or \$40,000 fine? Are they going to lose their home? What is the actual impact?

I have general concerns about the amendment. I think that the focus should be on education and enforcement by domestic animal services. Yet the ALP's amendment is backing out of the best part of Mr Doszpot's motion, which is the call for additional funding so that domestic animal services can do this work.

My biggest concern is that this is an area where I know that I am not an expert and I know that I do not have the knowledge to really say what the solution to the problem is. I do note that today Minister Fitzharris has introduced an animal welfare strategy, and it is open for public consultation for the next six weeks. It would seem to me that the logical response for this Assembly is to look at that strategy and, if members or parties are concerned about the strategy, make submissions, make comments on it.

I am not making any comments on it, because I have not read it. It was released this morning. I think that is the logical way for us to proceed at this stage.

I do not feel that it is acceptable for us to pass a motion on this issue that binds the government to doing something without having had the benefit of community and stakeholder input, particularly as today the methodology for this has just been announced. The government's amendment is better than the original motion in this regard because it will give us all time to consult with stakeholders and the community before we make any binding decisions. Therefore, I will be supporting Minister Fitzharris's amendment.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.46): I too rise to support the motion that has been put forward by Mr Doszpot. It is a timely motion for the Assembly to be discussing, given the litany of issues that have been canvassed in the paper and online in recent weeks. Of course, they are just the reported ones. How many others are there where people are either too traumatised or have simply given up on the process, given up on any hope whatsoever that there will be any recourse whatsoever in the case of either a dog attack on another dog or, indeed, an attack on a person?

The Canberra Liberals are concentrating on the things that really matter to Canberrans. We are concentrating on things that actually are within the jurisdiction of this place. Unlike those opposite, who are determined to save the world, we are far more interested in saving Canberrans. We are far more interested in actually ensuring that Canberrans are safe. That is one of the principal responsibilities of a government, to ensure that its citizens are safe. Quite frankly, the laws as they stand at the moment with regard to dangerous dog ownership are not working. They are simply not working. We have soft laws and that means that people are taking advantage of them.

Of course, there are tens of thousands of dog owners who do the right thing. But there are some, or indeed many, that are not. We do need tougher laws. But it is one thing to have tougher laws, one thing to have higher penalty units; it is another to make sure that the laws are actually being enforced. So often we see rules, laws, regulations, instruments put in place that are not enforced. All that ends up happening is that the good guys comply and the bad guys continue to disregard them. That is generally the way it happens with laws or rules that are not enforced. The good guys comply and the bad guys flout them. I believe that is exactly what we are seeing with regard to the dog laws that we have in place at the moment.

We have all got stories. I am sure each member of this place has a story about themselves, someone in their family or a constituent who has come up to them and told them a horrific story about a dangerous dog attack in one form or another. It would be fascinating to know, if you actually did list all these incidents, if you actually listed all these cases, how many of those actually would have had some form of recourse following. I imagine it is very few.

The stories are a dime a dozen. I know myself that when I was walking my whippet in Kaleen there was a dog off its leash. It bolted up to my dog and got it in a headlock. We had to run up to it and physically take this other dog's jaw off our whippet's neck.

To add to it, as this dangerous dog, whether it was deemed so or not, was running towards my whippet, the owner shouted out, “Be careful, it’s dangerous.” And it was off a leash. It was absolutely extraordinary. It was not even an off-leash area. It just goes to show the absolute disregard that some people in the community have for the safety of other people and other dogs.

I have another story. My mother-in-law was walking their golden retriever. A dog came out the front door of a person’s house, bolted up to the golden retriever and did exactly the same thing. It had the golden retriever in a headlock. The dog was taken to the vet, it was on antibiotics for the following fortnight and it was pretty traumatised, as were my parents-in-law who were walking the dog at the time. To add to that situation, despite this dangerous dog running when the door opened to this house, there were also infants in the house. It just makes you wonder about the mindset of some people.

I am not saying that this is purely a government responsibility. It is obviously not exclusively a government responsibility. Everyone has obligations with regard to dog ownership. But it is incumbent upon the government to make sure that the rules and regulations are working and that they are being enforced properly.

Whilst we welcome the fact that as a result of Mr Doszpot’s advocacy and numerous other people telling their stories we are actually getting some progress on this matter, there are still some worrying signs, not the least of which is actually in paragraph 1(a) of the amendment. It is quite a perplexing amendment that Ms Fitzharris has put forward. It says:

the number of people treated for dog attacks in emergency departments (EDs) in the ACT last year was 155, however, it is unknown how many presentations are ACT residents ...

As if it matters. It is as if somehow they want to know whether you are a foreigner or you come from New South Wales. Does it really matter where a person comes from? Next time someone calls 000 to report a dog attack, are they going to be asked, “Are you an ACT resident?” It is a little perplexing that somebody would amend this motion and put in, “However, it is unknown how many presentations are ACT residents.” It is a bit odd.

Of course, what we do not support are paragraphs 2(a) and 2(b). They seek to add the words “consider allocating”. I think is problematic. In effect, we do need more resources allocated to the enforcement and the investigation of serious dog attacks in the ACT. That does not necessarily mean more money. It might well mean shuffling the money that currently exists within domestic animal services or shuffling responsibilities that exist within domestic animal services to ensure that there are more resources put towards investigating and ensuring that owners are aware of their obligations with regard to dog ownership.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the stories about dangerous dogs in our community are a dime a dozen; so I am very pleased that Mr Doszpot has taken up this issue on behalf of hundreds or thousands of Canberrans that have been affected by dangerous dogs. I am

pleased that it seems the government is going to go some way to supporting Mr Doszpot's motion. But we would rather they actually commit to allocating more resources to this very important issue.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (11.54): I want to make a few comments on this matter. Having a pet involved in a violent incident, suffering an incident or anything that is likely to impair their quality of life are really difficult issues for families. I would like to take a moment to reflect on how much harder that might be if you are homeless, living in housing stress or at risk of homelessness.

We already know that families who are living near or below the poverty line will make tough decisions about their own health due to the cost of seeking health advice. So having the ability to access, or being able to afford to pay for, veterinary services for your animal family members is probably the last thing on your mind.

Your pet is an important part of your family. If you are homeless, sometimes a companion pet can be the difference between wellness and illness. We know that these much-loved pets offer unconditional love, companionship and emotional support and security. Although these pets greatly enrich lives, like my pets do for my family, they come at a significant financial cost, with annual vaccinations, flea treatments, worming and de-sexing, as well as microchipping. These can cost hundreds of dollars.

Pets in the Park is a new service that is being established by the Early Morning Centre. They will partner with a group of vets to help Canberra people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Pets in the Park aims to support, build relationships with and improve the wellbeing of homeless people who are living with animal companions.

Pets in the Park will open its clinic this Sunday at the back of the Early Morning Centre. I know that it will be a great success. Users of the service will need a referral letter from the Early Morning Centre. They are able to turn up for the service and get free access to a vet. I know that Pets in the Park will provide a great addition to the already well-regarded suite of services that the Early Morning Centre offers.

I also want to make some comments on the amendment that has been moved by Ms Fitzharris, and particularly the first point about the number of people treated for pet attacks in emergency departments in the ACT. Mr Coe commented that the information about where people came from was irrelevant. But what is relevant is that the dogs would have been residents of the ACT and perhaps owned by residents of the ACT. So having that point in there is important because it gives us the chance to have that knowledge about the situations and the issues that Transport and City Services, through the domestic animal services, have to deal with in investigating dog attacks in the ACT.

I also note that whilst Mr Coe recognised there are many owners of dogs in the ACT that are responsible, I contend that there are many more than he assumes. As

responsible dog owners, those people who have dogs with challenging behaviour who want support can go to different sorts of organisations, including the dog obedience clubs, to get support in how to manage their pet.

I note the presence in the chamber of representatives of Dogs On The Run. They provide not only a dog walking service, but expert advice to families with animals who might present challenging or aggressive behaviour. They work with families about how they can address that issue rather than going into a big stick punishment kind of zone. Responsible dog owners do want to do the right thing, but they want the chance to be able to do that.

Ms Fitzharris's amendment to the motion moved by Mr Doszpot goes to actually looking at allocating resources for education about the obligations and responsibilities of dog ownership, which I think would have a far better impact on the ability of owners to do the right thing and lessen dog attacks in our community. I support and commend Ms Fitzharris's amendment to the motion.

**MS CODY** (Murrumbidgee) (11.59): I rise in support of the amendment put forward by my colleague Minister Fitzharris. Similar to many Canberrans, I have a great love of dogs. My dog Ben and I walk every day, although he is 16 years old now. Like anyone nearing 100, he is a little bit slower than he used to be. But that does not take away the fact that he deserves, like many other dogs in Canberra, to be out and about in the community, on a leash protected by me. His safety and my family's safety when walking Ben or at the dog park are of paramount importance. This is why I am proud to be part of a government that has today released the animal welfare and management strategy for consultation.

Firstly, I would like to clarify what is meant by a dangerous dog in the ACT. A dangerous dog is a dog declared to be dangerous, usually because of attacking-harassing behaviour, by the domestic animals registrar or by a magistrate; a dog declared dangerous in another state or territory; or a dog that has been trained as a guard dog or that is kept as a guard dog for guarding premises other than residential premises.

The ACT government is committed to promoting responsible pet ownership. It has among the strongest laws in the country in relation to managing dogs and ensuring that owners of attacking dogs are held responsible. Here in Canberra, we have a number of protocols in place to manage dangerous dogs.

To cite a few of those requirements, a special licence is required to keep a dangerous dog. An application for a dangerous dog licence must be lodged in writing by an adult to the registrar. The decision to declare a dangerous dog, grant a special licence, or refuse a special licence are all appealable in the Australian Capital Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal, which has been amended in legislation, as Minister Fitzharris has already mentioned, and the premises at which the dog is to be kept must be able to securely contain the dog.

As we have all stated, all dog harassment and attack matters are heart wrenching for owners, particularly for the owners of the dogs that have been attacked. As such, they

are treated very seriously and investigated thoroughly by domestic animal services here in Canberra.

With our amendments, the ACT government is releasing the animal welfare and management strategy. This strategy will guide animal management and welfare into the future for our pets, wildlife and livestock. It will provide a clear guide for the delivery of improved services and future investment in animal welfare and management activities. It will be an essential tool to direct continuous improvement in the lives of animals and people in the ACT, our lifestyles and the safety of our city.

The draft strategy has had input from a range of stakeholders, including the animal welfare advisory group, as Minister Fitzharris mentioned, the RSPCA ACT, rural leaseholders and various government directorates that have responsibility for animal management, including the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. I, like Ms Le Couteur, encourage people to have their say on this strategy. I direct people to the website [yoursay.gov.au/draft-animal-welfare-and-management-strategy](http://yoursay.gov.au/draft-animal-welfare-and-management-strategy) to provide their comments over the period for which it is open for comment, that is, for approximately the next six weeks.

While the ACT has strong legislation governing the management of domestic animals, including dogs involved in attacks, it is a fact that legislation alone cannot prevent dog attacks. What is needed is action on multiple fronts to reduce the propensity and opportunity for attacks. This is precisely what the animal welfare and management strategy provides for.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I support this amendment that highlights the steps that the ACT government has taken in managing dangerous dogs by increasing penalties for dangerous dog attacks, setting up a working group to investigate dog management and releasing today the animal welfare and management strategy.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Yerrabi—Minister for Health, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (12.04), by leave: I thank members for their contributions today. I want to reiterate some comments I made and reflect on some of the comments made by other members. Certainly some of them go to the role that we in this place can play, the role that the government can play, and the role that the community can play.

Responsible pet ownership is key here, and significant work has been underway for the past 12 to 18 months to determine the best way as a government we can encourage that in our community, acknowledging again the seriousness of attacks, acknowledging and agreeing to further explore opportunities to strengthen our legislation. The draft animal welfare and management strategy outlines a comprehensive and holistic approach to all animal welfare and management in the territory, including pet ownership and animal industries, as well as our native wildlife.

It is really important in a city that values both our open space and our animals that we take a nation-leading approach, and this draft that has been contributed to heavily by key stakeholders outlines that. It also outlines some of the issues we have been speaking about today around responsible pet ownership, what the government can do

to better understand how many people own pets in the ACT and to better understand how we can support them to make themselves aware and to educate themselves on what it really means to own a pet.

Owning a pet comes with significant care responsibilities and making sure its behaviour is appropriate, not just in your own home but out in the community as well. There are opportunities for us through the strategy to explore better ways to do that. Certainly the instances reflected upon here today relate to what happens if and when a dog or a person is attacked by another dog. I reiterate that I am very happy—and I have indicated this to Mr Doszpot on many occasions—to agree to look at how we can further strengthen this legislation.

The really hard bit is preventing a dog that has never shown any instance of being aggressive before from attacking people or other dogs. That is the most important point—how we prevent these terrible attacks from happening. We can only do that through education and awareness and by encouraging people to really appreciate what it means to own a dog before they take that big step in purchasing what is often a really cute little puppy that can grow into a very big dog that can be difficult for people to control in public places if its behaviour has not been appropriately managed.

The motion refers to anecdotal evidence of attacks that are not reported. I encourage members who talk to members of the community—that includes me—to encourage people to report incidents. If your dog has been attacked or has attacked another dog, it is a really difficult situation to find yourself in to figure out a way of how you have that conversation on the spot at a very distressing time. We will certainly look at ways to strengthen that.

I understand the opposition will not be supporting my amendment today. For the record, I will read what my amendment says and what the opposition are going to oppose today:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the number of people treated for dog attacks in EDs in the ACT last year was 155; however, it is unknown how many presentations are ACT residents.

Unlike Mr Coe, I do not find that too odd to include because I want to make clear to the community as a whole that when they go out walking they are not to be highly alarmed about any dog coming near them. There is an element of alarmism in some of Mr Doszpot's motion.

I have acknowledged the seriousness of these issues on many occasions, but I recognise that out in the community today, we do not yet know the details of these 155 incidents that have presented to the hospital. As I indicated, some of those may be from New South Wales. In my discussions with Mr Doszpot, he sought to make clear there is a connection between presentations in EDs and the number of investigations that DAS do. He was specifically making that connection, so I want the amendment to

reflect that we need to do some more work to understand those presentations to EDs.

The amendment continues that this Assembly notes that:

- (b) the second highest injury in dog attacks in ACT EDs was to the patient's head;
- (c) there were 360 officially reported dog attacks in Canberra last year;
- (d) as a consequence of these attacks, 124 dogs were seized by officials in Canberra last year;
- (e) on average, there is an attack reported in Canberra every day;
- (f) dogs that have been found to have committed attacks on people or other animals can be returned to the community, often with stringent conditions;
- (g) the number of dog attacks treated in ACT EDs has increased 50 per cent in the past 50 years;
- (h) that penalties for dangerous dog attacks were increased in 2014; and
- (i) in February 2016 the government set up a working group to investigate dog management process; and
- (j) the ACT government has today released the draft Animal Welfare and Management Strategy for public comment.

That this Assembly:

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) consider allocating more resources to investigate attacks by dogs;
- (b) consider allocating more resources for education about obligations and responsibilities of dog ownership;
- (c) report on changes made to dog management processes following feedback from the 2016 working group;
- (d) review relevant laws and internal procedures that govern the management of dangerous dogs and report by the end of September 2017; and
- (e) review the penalties associated with the management of dangerous dogs.

This is my own amendment. I understand that the opposition leader may wish for the Assembly to pass motions to call on the government to allocate more resources, but I believe it is highly unprecedented to have the Assembly calling on the executive to allocate more resources to a specific area. I have been very willing to amend the motion to say that the ACT government can consider allocating more resources to investigate attacks by dogs and consider allocating more resources for education but, again, the opposition are not going to support this amendment. I am not entirely sure

why and I am very disappointed. Nevertheless, if it is not supported I will continue the work that I have already outlined today and in previous sittings. We will see some changes in this space, but I am very disappointed that the opposition will be voting against this amendment.

**MR DOSZPOT** (Kurrajong) (12.11): I am speaking to the amendment. In response to the minister's comments, last night my office received representations from the minister's office about the likelihood of the government supporting our motion, and a number of issues were brought up that we were asked to consider. We accepted every one of those issues we were asked to consider. We considered and accepted them. Last night we rang the minister's office telling them what we had done, and we did that in good faith based on the information that we had last night. In case the minister is wondering why we are so surprised, it is that a number of changes have been made.

Some of the information on dog attacks that you are querying is information that has come from your office or government offices. This whole issue about addressing what needs to be done is that we are reflecting not only our views but the community views. We have here today people who are dog owners and also victims of dog attacks. They are very much aware of the issues that confront them and the rest of our community.

The *Canberra Times*, has looked into this in depth, and it is probably a good time to remind ourselves of this. A *Canberra Times* editorial states:

Pet owners need to take responsibility for registering their dogs, their dogs' behaviour and knowing where they are at all times.

But the ACT government also needs to ensure that appropriate legislation is in place and that deterrents are strong enough to force a change of behaviour.

The harrowing story the Toscani have shared about the attack on their dog is certainly confronting and was upsetting to all who witnessed it. But imagine if instead of a dog the victim was a young child?

That is why this is not an issue to be taken lightly and the opposition is taking the right step in pushing for action in the ACT Legislative Assembly. Laws are not the silver bullet but they are part of what could be the solution for the city.

Minister, you stated in your address that you referred to the amendments that have already been made and how this is helping us address the real issues. I remind you of the amendments you refer to where the victims are given more opportunities to address the situation. What is happening in the Toscani case where a dog was killed by three dogs belonging to the same owner? Those dogs destroyed a pet in the most horrendous of circumstances, yet a few months later these very same dogs are not even declared to be dangerous dogs. No, they are given back to the owner and the owner receives absolutely no penalty whatsoever but—and this is quite incredible—the walkers who actually took the dogs for a walk are fined \$360 each. The owner, the person who should be responsible, the person who should be aware of his or her obligations, was not fined. These are the issues we are trying to bring to your attention, minister.

In question time yesterday we referred to the Toscan situation and the fact that the dogs were returned to the owner and not declared dangerous and that the owner received no penalty but the walkers did. The minister herself admitted that, yes, the penalties are not tough enough.

Minister, we have called on you to do this in response to a request. Originally, my motion stated that “we demand”. We demand on behalf of the community that you—the government—acts to lessen the pain inflicted by dangerous dogs and some irresponsible dog owners across Canberra. I am demanding now—seeing as how you did not accept the motion that we in good faith changed—that this government listen to the growing body of evidence on this issue.

I do not want to sit in this chamber and hear the minister give platitudes and sympathy to the hundreds of Canberrans who have had to endure the pain like that experienced by the Toscan and our other friends in the chamber today. They do not want your sympathy; they want your action. This is why we will not accept your amendments about “considering”. We are asking you, on behalf of the community—this is reflected in community wishes and by the *Canberra Times* editorial, which is on behalf of the whole community—to actually allocate more resources. As Mr Coe said, we are not necessarily asking you to put more money into it; we are asking you to use money from other areas within that section and to prioritise this need.

It is certainly within our right to ask that this allocation be made. How you allocate that is your responsibility and your call. The number of changes you have made in this amendment waters down my original motion. I cannot in all fairness to the people I am representing here today accept your amendment.

We were very hopeful that the motion I moved today would be accepted. We accepted the changes in good faith in discussions with your office. We were very happy that we could do something together. I was hopeful that for once we were looking at something not as a partisan issue. We are not trying to make politics out of this; we are simply trying to focus the attention of this government on the needs in the community at the moment. On that basis, we cannot accept your amendment.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12

Noes 10

Mr Barr	Mr Gentleman	Mr Coe	Ms Lee
Ms Berry	Ms Le Couteur	Mr Doszpot	Mr Milligan
Ms Burch	Ms Orr	Mrs Dunne	Mr Parton
Ms Cheyne	Mr Pettersson	Mr Hanson	Mr Wall
Ms Cody	Mr Ramsay	Mrs Jones	
Ms Fitzharris	Mr Steel	Mrs Kikkert	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

**Sitting suspended from 12.23 to 2.30 pm.**

## **Ministerial arrangements**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (2.30): Minister Rattenbury will be absent from question time today and tomorrow. Questions for Minister Rattenbury's portfolio on climate change and sustainability will be taken by Minister Gentleman; questions in Minister Rattenbury's portfolios of justice, consumer affairs, road safety and corrections will be taken by the Attorney-General, Mr Ramsay; and questions in the mental health portfolio will be taken by the Minister for Health, Ms Fitzharris.

## **Questions without notice**

### **Public housing—relocations**

**MR COE:** I have a question for the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. In addition to the public housing sites announced on 15 March this year, minister, what other sites are under consideration or actually earmarked for public housing in the next 18 months?

**MS BERRY:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I can provide some information about some of the public housing that is occurring to date and the suburbs that it is being developed in. We have the most recent announcement where public housing is being discussed for sites at Monash, Mawson, Chapman and Holder.

I might have to come back to the Assembly, because we have been developing, building and purchasing public housing all across the city, which is important because we want to make sure that residents in public housing have a good choice about where in the city they want to live. I think it is important that the Assembly is aware of where new public housing is being developed, so I will take some of that on notice and I will provide some more information to the Assembly on that.

**MR COE:** Minister, when purchasing properties off the plan from developers, what criteria do you use, given that there are, presumably, hundreds in the pipeline that might be suitable?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Coe for the supplementary question. There are a number of different criteria that are used through the expressions of interest that are put forward by the public housing renewal task force. I will get that detail and bring it back to the Assembly, for the information of members.

**MR PARTON:** Can I ask the minister: how many units or apartments have been purchased by the ACT government outside the light rail corridor?

**MS BERRY:** I will get some detail and bring that back to the Assembly.

### **Public housing—Wright**

**MR PARTON:** My question is directed to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, you have proposed to establish a public housing development in Wright on a block zoned for community facilities. Minister, why are you taking the only section assigned for community facilities in Wright and allocating it for public housing?

**MS BERRY:** I thank the member for the question. The government thought very carefully before considering community facilities land for this phase of public housing renewal. When Wright was identified as a place where public housing might be suitable, the government took into account that this is community facilities land that is zoned for community facilities use, which includes supported accommodation.

If you look at Wright, there is quite a lot of park infrastructure developed right near the site where public housing is being proposed. So it was very carefully considered that there would be plenty of room for recreation around the public housing site.

Indeed, only a couple of blocks away there is the recreational facility at Stromlo Park where there is considerable work going on to provide sporting and recreational facilities for all of Canberra. But, of course, they are right next door to Wright for those existing residents and future residents to use.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, why is the government not just using RZ land—that is, residential zoned land—for public housing there to allow that community facility zone to be filled by something that genuinely benefits the wider community?

**MS BERRY:** Public housing does benefit the broader community. It provides opportunities for people in our community who would not have the same chances as everyone else to get a hand up and to get a chance of a decent life. I would not agree with the premise that public housing is not a benefit for the entire community. I would also say that public housing is not being developed just on community facilities land. Land in the ACT is finite, so careful consideration is made when the government decides where—

**Mrs Dunne:** On a point of order—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A point of order, Mrs Dunne.

**Mrs Dunne:** on relevance under standing order 118. The minister is supposed to be directly relevant. This is an issue about the use of RZ land rather than community facilities land and is specifically in relation to the site in Wright. The minister should be directly relevant.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs Dunne. The minister has responded to questions on public housing on community services land and other land and, in earlier answers, in relation to purchasing property. Minister?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thought I was being as clear as possible when I said that public housing development and renewal are occurring on all land across the city in all different suburbs. We are looking at community facilities land as well.

I think it is important to note that over 85 per cent of the ACT community supports public housing being built in the ACT. Most members of the Canberra community want to make sure that if people in our community need a hand up, they get it, and that they get some choice about where they live in our city, the same as you and I.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, will you select another block of land if the result of the consultation is that the community is overwhelmingly not supportive of that proposed location?

**MS BERRY:** I think we would have to have the conversation first before talking about situations that could or might occur. If there are suggestions about other sites that would be available that we could include in conversation about more public housing in addition to the public housing that we are renewing right now then I would be absolutely open to a conversation about more opportunities to build public housing and renew public housing on community facilities land across the city.

### **Australian public service—impact of relocations**

**MR STEEL:** The federal Liberal government's latest attack on Canberra involves actively removing agencies like the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority from this city and calling for bids to rip other agencies out of their traditional home in the capital. My question is to the Chief Minister: how significant is the contribution made by commonwealth agencies to the Canberra economy?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Steel for the question. It is very clear that the commonwealth is a significant contributor to economic activity in the territory. In fact over the past five years around 60 per cent of the territory's state final demand has come from commonwealth contributions. This comes most significantly through the employment of tens of thousands of Canberrans. But it also comes through spending engaged in by commonwealth agencies on things like rent, equipment, supplies and professional services. This is spending that these agencies do here in Canberra because they are based here in Canberra. If you relocate those agencies out of our city then of course that activity will be relocated with it.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** What that means for the 26,000 small, medium and large businesses that operate in the territory, that employ local people and that provide a very diverse range of goods and services for the community and to the commonwealth government is that they will suffer. And that is something that I would have thought would be of concern to everyone in this place. But, judging by the interjections of those opposite, they are unconcerned about this. That reflects very poorly on them.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** We can all do without the interjections and the sound effects, thank you.

**MR STEEL:** Chief Minister, how many Canberrans currently work in commonwealth agencies and what would be the impact on employment if more agencies were relocated out of our city?

**MR BARR:** There are approximately 57,900 Canberrans currently working in Australian public service agencies across the territory. That represents around a quarter of all employment in this city. So if you start relocating entire agencies from Canberra, the most obvious impact is that the jobs based here will go with them. And we are seeing that with the APVMA move, with just under 200 jobs being shifted out of the ACT. But, according to the Deputy Prime Minister, that is just the beginning.

Taking these public sector jobs out of our economy hurts the private sector as well, because of the fall in consumption for local businesses. This will be particularly sharply felt in the sector that provides services directly to the Australian public service, such as our professional services and consulting businesses, as well as those that provide non-exportable goods and services like child care, retail and hospitality.

One need only look at what has happened in the Woden town centre, with the mass exodus of commonwealth employees from that area. We have responded by shifting thousands of our own employees into the Woden town centre in order to respond to the policy approach of the friends on the hill of those opposite—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** Your parliamentary party colleagues on Capital Hill have continued this approach of relocating jobs out of Canberra. It has an impact. They are your colleagues, and you are accountable for their actions.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Supplementary, Ms Cheyne.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS CHEYNE:** Chief Minister—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Cheyne, please sit down. Can we let Ms Cheyne ask her question with some level of silence, thank you.

**MS CHEYNE:** When federal Liberal governments have previously cut jobs in Canberra, what was the impact on key economic indicators like consumption, confidence and the housing market?

**MR BARR:** If we go back to the Howard government—we could go back further, but we will go back 20 years, to the Howard government—when they sacked around 3,300 public service staff in 1996-97, there was a significant fall in house prices, our economy went into recession, confidence was shattered across the city and many small businesses directly felt the hit as Canberrans pulled back on their spending.

Fast-forward to the election of the Abbott government and the cut of 6,000 jobs across Canberra in 2014-15.

**Mr Doszpot:** What about the Rudd government?

**MR BARR:** Public sector employment in this city grew by 10,000 under the Rudd and Gillard governments. It was cut back by 6,000 under Tony Abbott. They are the facts. All one needs to do is go and look at the *APS Statistical Bulletin* to see how much public sector employment grew under the Rudd and Gillard governments and how much it was cut, initially under Howard and then under the Abbott government.

The ACT government, during this period, stepped up to stimulate the territory economy. Although our growth rate reduced significantly during this 2014-15 period, we kept the territory economy out of recession, and since that time growth in the territory has tripled.

### **Planning—waste facility**

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management in relation to the FOY Group's proposal to develop a plastic to fuel processing facility, about which the Greens have had long-standing concerns. Minister, in recent days an additional 39 documents were provided by the FOY Group and published on the EPSDD website. I note that you have in the past, I think, 20 minutes put out a media release extending consultation to allow community members to respond to this additional information. Will the government alert all community members and, in particular, people who have made submissions about this additional information, to the extended time frame?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Thanks very much to Ms Le Couteur for the question. It is an important question as we deal with this proposal from the FOY Group. Members would be aware that the group submitted an EIS for the proposed plastic to fuel facility earlier on. The process, of course, for an EIS is not an approvals process; it is an information-gathering exercise about the potential impacts of the proposal. That draft EIS was publicly notified between 26 August and 2 November last year, and we had 63 representations at that point.

Some of the main issues raised in the public consultation process included air quality impacts, pollution and risk of fire. A revised EIS was submitted to the Planning and Land Authority, which considered that that sufficiently addressed the scoping document. Although the EIS was accepted by the authority, there were some residual concerns about the extent of those impacts and a panel was established to consider those impacts further.

I am very pleased to see that the community has engaged with the panel at a number of the drop-in sessions plus, of course, the electronic engagement via email on the proposal itself and the EIS.

As Ms Le Couteur mentioned, some extra documents were provided by the FOY Group to the panel recently and they are titled a consolidation EIS. We saw some additional information within that package. I have asked the panel to extend their consultation period with the community and that now will close on 10 April. So we are looking for the public to consider that extra information that has been provided by the FOY Group in that EIS. (*Time expired.*)

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Minister, I asked and was told in February last year that the government was not aware of the reasons why the FOY Group did not receive approval to operate in New South Wales from the New South Wales EPA. Have you now asked why and what did you find out?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I have left that with the directorate to look at and, of course, the panel to look at as well. I have not had feedback on the operation in New South Wales. My understanding is that a development application did not go forward. So it will be interesting to receive the information back from the directorate on the proposal that they had in New South Wales and the difference here.

Of course, we do see proposals go forward in other jurisdictions that are not successful and that then come forward in the territory, and vice versa as well. There are particular areas that could affect whether or not a proposal is approved in the jurisdiction. It could be the location. It could be any number of things. As soon as I get more information on that I will be happy to come back and provide that to the Assembly.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, did you receive notice of Ms Le Couteur's question and, if so, when?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No, not specifically of Ms Le Couteur's question. I was prepared for the question, though, because notice of the extra work that the FOY Group had put forward to the panel was given to me yesterday.

### **Public housing—Holder**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development—she might have been able to guess it was coming—and relates to the government housing project in Stapyhton Street in Holder. Minister, on 27 March it was reported that “the quiet area did not have the appropriate services, public transport or infrastructure that would benefit vulnerable public housing tenants”, that “there are a whole lot of safety issues” and that “the community will not accept the destruction of the heart of our community”. There are all quotes.

Minister, could you explain the differences in the services between the new site proposed in Holder and the services, transport and infrastructure that would have been available on Northbourne Avenue?

**MS BERRY:** I can confirm that I was prepared for questions from the opposition on this issue. I have heard from the Holder action group and residents from Holder about some of the concerns that they have with this particular development and I am particularly pleased that they are concerned about ensuring that public housing residents in the ACT are supported as much as we possibly can. It has been really good for the government to hear that the residents in Holder are keen to see the best possible outcome for residents in public housing.

As regards the issues that Mr Hanson has raised around services and public transport, of course public housing residents, just like the rest of us, have different needs. Some of them will require public transport options.

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, on relevance, the question was specifically about a comparison between what would be available in Holder and what is available on Northbourne Avenue, the existing site. If the minister could explain what difference there will be in amenity, infrastructure and transport, which was the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Hanson. The minister was getting to services for client needs.

**MS BERRY:** That is right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, public housing tenants have different needs.

Of course it should be noted that it was this government that was elected on a transport reform election commitment around light rail. The opposition wanted to tear up the contract for light rail which would have put the public housing renewal program, the biggest renewal program in ACT government history, in jeopardy. It would not have happened. All of the new housing that the ACT government has been developing, which is intrinsically linked— *(Time expired.)*

**MR HANSON:** Minister, what studies have been done on the safety issues, especially increased traffic, and will you table those studies?

**MS BERRY:** There has been a lot of investigation of the sites, including Holder, to ensure that they meet the needs of public housing tenants. Of course, we want to make sure that the existing community is involved in those communications. We are very happy to meet with, and I have offered to meet with, the Holder action group as well. I spoke with a member of the group yesterday, and I will be making time in the very near future to meet with them. We will listen to the concerns of the Holder action group and the broader community. We want to make sure that public housing tenants are welcomed and that their safety is not put at risk, or that of the existing community. So all of that will be taken into consideration in the conversations that we have with the Holder community.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, how will the development impact the community amenity, including green spaces, which is the heart of this community and which residents feel will be completely changed?

**MS BERRY:** We want to absolutely make sure that the Holder community is part of these conversations and, importantly, that any development on that site is sympathetic and amenable to the existing community. On that site in Holder, which I have been to on a number of occasions, there is a lot of green space available on the existing oval right next to the space where we are considering public housing development as part of the public housing renewal. I am sure that Holder residents will have lots of ideas about how we can make sure that any development on that site will be sympathetic to the existing community.

### **Public housing—Holder**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on 17 March 2016 I wrote to you about the post and antenatal depression support and information team, PANDSI. In that letter you were informed that a surveyor had attended their block at Stapylton Street, Holder and told them that the land was to be redeveloped. Chief Minister, in your letter in reply dated 13 May 2016, and a follow up dated 2 September 2016, you stated, “the government has no intention to redevelop. If the government ever considers this in the future, all tenants will be consulted.” Chief Minister, when did the government start surveying the site? When were plans first drawn up for the redevelopment of this block?

**MR BARR:** I will take those questions on notice.

**MRS JONES:** Chief Minister, how and where were tenants fully consulted before a decision was reached about the redevelopment of the PANDSI site?

**MR BARR:** Again I will take that question on notice.

**MR HANSON:** Chief Minister, is the letterbox drop that was conducted two weeks ago—which every resident in Holder did not receive—the entirety of the consultation that you promised?

**MR BARR:** No.

### **Australian public service—impact of relocations**

**MS CHEYNE:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, what impact does the movement of the commonwealth public service have on ACT government planning strategies for our town centres?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Cheyne for her question and, of course, her interest in this particular area. Canberra’s town centres are a critically important part of our city. The ACT government is committed to the renewal and revitalisation of Canberra’s centres.

Any potential movement of the commonwealth public service out of our town centres will have an impact, particularly in relation to the local economy. The dispersal of employment and the creation of mixed-use centres connected by quick and convenient

transport must remain a fundamental planning objective as they provide the opportunity to live close to work, increase the number of people taking up more active travel—that is, walking and cycling—and combine work and shopping.

The ACT government is working to boost the employment base in the Woden town centre with the movement of approximately 1,100 staff to the Access Canberra shopfront in the Cosmopolitan Building and ACT Health staff into the office accommodation in Bowes Street. In addition, the opening of Winyu House in the Gungahlin town centre in 2015 provided accommodation for more than 650 ACT public servants, providing an added boost to local businesses.

A key aim of the Belconnen town centre master plan was to diversify its employment base and reduce the reliance on the Australian government to provide jobs by strengthening Belconnen's existing advantages. The proximity of the centre to the University of Canberra, Calvary hospital and the AIS, along with the new University of Canberra public hospital, provides Belconnen with strong potential for employment growth.

It is important for the ACT government to focus on the future of our town centres. The government is keen to ensure that the centres realise their full potential, and to bring to the centres a mix of residents, employment, retail, community facilities and open space that is working in other centres. The actions of the commonwealth government will and do have an impact and they can either work for us to ensure a fair go or they can continue to disregard the Canberra community. (*Time expired.*)

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, what planning actions is the government taking to support the renewal and sustainability of Canberra's town centres?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The government's master plan program, delivered through the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, also delivers long-term planning guidance for our town centres, our group centres and our transport corridors. The studies address key actions and strategies identified in the ACT planning strategy of 2012 for a more compact and efficient city by focusing urban intensification in these areas. That was reiterated through the statement of planning intent workshops last year.

The ACT planning strategy of 2012 calls for master plans to be done, responding to place specific needs for Canberra to be a city where everybody can take advantage of its network of centres, open spaces and modes of travel to enjoy a sense of wellbeing and participate in a vibrant civic and cultural life. Each master plan sets out a vision, planning principles and strategies to support growth and development over time.

Master plans also provide the opportunity to address important issues such as urban renewal for our major areas to create vibrant, connected town and group centres that support active, healthy lifestyles and stimulate economic activity for livable, sustainable and prosperous places.

**MS CODY:** Minister, can you further outline how the planning changes for the Woden town centre, currently out for community consultation, will support local businesses by encouraging new residential, retail and commercial uses?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Cody for her question and interest in the Woden area. Earlier this month I was pleased to announce the start of community consultation on an important draft Territory Plan variation for the Woden town centre. The draft variation to the Territory Plan implements the recommendations of the master plan for the Woden town centre. The proposed changes will guide development and encourage renewal within the Woden town centre. The variation builds on extensive community consultation with residents and businesses on the draft master plan so that the centre could become a better place for residents and more attractive to employers and employees.

These proposed changes to the Territory Plan will implement the planning elements of the master plan, clarify the rules around building heights and open the way for new investment proposals to come forward. After the release of the master plan and the subsequent draft variation, we have already seen several new development proposals come forward to take advantage of these proposed planning changes.

The variation makes zone changes and updates the precinct codes to encourage development. Among other things, the zone changes will allow more residences to be built, including medium and high density housing that gives residents more housing choice and will meet the needs of older people wishing to downsize but remain in their area, as well as younger people seeking an urban lifestyle.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the government is working on the renewal of the Woden town centre. We are keen to continue to work with the private sector to create a bustling, very busy centre where people want to spend their time.

### **Public housing—Mawson**

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development and relates to government housing in Mawson. A spokesperson for residents in Mawson has stated that: the development does not appear consistent with the zoning regulations; the site is zoned suitable for community facility, not public housing; there has been no consultation regarding the selection of the sites; the community became aware of the government's suburb and site selection via an article in the *Canberra Times*; and it appears that the approach taken is underhanded and one without an evidence base to the decision-making process. Minister, what evidence base was used to select this site, and will you make that evidence available to residents?

**MS BERRY:** For the record, in no way has the government attempted to be underhanded or disguise public housing renewal. We have been talking about it for years. We have been talking about how we are going to be developing public housing all across the ACT. Supported housing is permitted under community facilities land zoning and that is why these sites have been selected as places where public housing would be suitable and would meet the needs of our public housing residents.

This part of the consultation, I should remind members, is the first part of a conversation with the community. I do not know how else you start that but to start it.

That is what we are doing. No development application has been lodged at the moment. This is pre-development application conversation. I am keen to hear from the community about ways that we can provide public housing that meets the needs of residents and can be welcomed and supported into the existing community.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, how can you say that the development is consistent with the territory plan when the territory plan clearly excludes residential, whether private or public?

**MS BERRY:** The land is zoned community facilities land which is able to provide supported accommodation which includes public, community and affordable housing. I do not know how many more times we need to explain the definition of supported housing.

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, can we have just the minister talking in the chamber in response to a question. Minister.

**MS BERRY:** The suggestion that we could not develop public housing across the community because of a definition that the opposition are trying to confuse the community around is just not on. It is public housing to support some of the most vulnerable in our community, it is supported housing and it is applicable under community facilities zoned land.

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, what has been the response from tenants with regard to new public housing that we are building or purchasing?

*Mrs Jones interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones, you had your chance to take a supplementary and you didn't. I call the minister for housing.

**MS BERRY:** The response from public housing residents has been heart-warming. We heard stories in the past couple of weeks from residents who previously lived along the Northbourne Avenue corridor about what a difference it has made to move into new housing that better meets their needs.

One of the residents, Nick, was talking about how he was trying to get used to how quiet it was not having to live along Northbourne Avenue. Anybody who has spent some time on Northbourne Avenue around those public housing dwellings that were there previously, which I know Ms Lawder did—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** Ms Lawder took the time to come down to the Owen flats and actually meet with residents and talk to them about their needs. Nick's life has changed as a result of housing renewal.

Then we had Laurel who told her story: 30 years in public housing in Owen flats and what a difference the new housing she is in now in Ainslie has made to her life. She gets to spend her retirement years in a place that better suits her needs.

Other tenants that I have been speaking to have been moving into new housing all across the city, but including in the city. They have talked about what a difference new homes that better suit their needs and those of their families have made and how they have some hope that they will be able to meet their life aims and aspirations, and those of their families, as the rest of us would want to.

### **ACT Health—data integrity**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, on 3 August 2016, ACT Health engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers to work on data assurance services. PwC started work on a second contract on 17 August 2016 regarding data integrity services. PwC was again engaged on 1 September 2016 to prepare a data governance framework. Minister, were you or Minister Corbell briefed that PwC had been engaged to work on ACT Health data integrity issues during August and September 2016? If so, how were you briefed and was any part of that brief given to you in writing?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. As I have indicated already in this place, I certainly was aware that PwC had been engaged to look into data issues as they related to the 2015-16 quarterly reports. I have also indicated in this place, in answer to a question asked by the opposition as to who was present at briefings on these issues, that there was a member of PwC who had been engaged by ACT Health who briefed the Minister for Health on that work, and I was present at that briefing.

**MRS DUNNE:** When you were briefed about the PwC work on data assurance and integrity issues in ACT Health, was any of that briefing given to you in writing? Did you receive anything from PwC about the work that they were doing?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I was not the Minister for Health at the time. I believe the Minister for Health did receive written briefing as well as verbal briefing, but I will check the record, noting that I was not Minister for Health and responsible for this work at the time.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what efforts did you or the previous health minister make to assure yourself—or the previous health minister—in August and September 2016 that the issues with ACT Health data integrity and assurance were being fixed?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I welcome the opportunity to reiterate—again—that we have undertaken, as a government, significant effort to ensure that data integrity issues are looked at. Principally in relation to the 2015-16 quarterly report, the previous Minister for Health, as he indicated both in this place and in public, was advised by ACT Health that there were some issues with the 2015-16 quarterly reports. On the back of that, the previous Minister for Health made significant effort, which involved

a number of ACT Health staff as well as external input from PwC, to address those issues.

Subsequent to that, when it was brought to my attention that those issues went beyond those raised in the 2015-16 quarterly report, I ordered a comprehensive system-wide review into all ACT Health data. The terms of reference for that review I tabled in this place yesterday.

### **ACT Health—data submission**

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Were you advised that the Health Directorate had failed to meet deadlines for submission of health data sets to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare before you went on leave in January?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** As I have indicated previously in this place, upon the government's return I was advised that there were a number of issues with some of the reports, with some of the data sets, that were being provided to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, but that ACT Health was doing everything they could to ensure that those deadlines were met. Subsequent to that, some of those deadlines were not met; but I note, of course, a number of areas within the ROGS report where ACT Health data was provided.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Was a minister selected as acting minister while you were away for three weeks on holiday and was she or he briefed on the problems with health data?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I will take that question on notice. I am not sure how I respond to a question as the Minister for Health when another minister was acting, but I will take the question on notice.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS FITZHARRIS:** You can ask me. You didn't ask me who it was.

*Mrs Jones interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones and Ms Fitzharris, Mrs Dunne is on her feet and has the floor for a question.

**MRS DUNNE:** The previous question was about who was the acting minister. Minister, has the directorate kept you and other people acting in your stead fully informed about the problems with health data since the problems became apparent last year?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I can certainly speak for myself. Yes, they have. I believe that ministers Gentleman and Berry were acting in my role for the period that I was away.

**Sport—community participation**

**MS CODY:** My question is to the minister for sport and rec. What role do local families play in community sport in Canberra and how does the ACT government support their work with local sporting clubs?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Cody for her question. As we know, playing sport is a part of life for many people in our community. I have previously shared with the Assembly some recent statistics telling us that Canberrans' sport participation rate of at least once per week is 85 per cent, which is the highest in the nation. As with many areas of our community, there are plenty of heroes around behind the scenes who make our sporting clubs thrive; local communities volunteering their time to give others the chance to do what they love.

Most volunteers are family members of participants, and they do a huge amount of work—committee members, officials, coaches, managers, team transporters and pitch-side physios—all local volunteers and families who make community sport happen. Indeed, many elite athletes will tell us that their sporting success can be attributed to the support of their family and the essential role their parents played in contributing to the sporting environment to nurture their development.

The ACT government understands and values the role these volunteers play and our work around infrastructure, maintenance and support of individual sports all works hand in hand with the contributions of these community champions. In particular, ACT sportsgrounds are fully maintained and operated by government at an 86 per cent subsidy rate to assist affordability of sporting participation for families. Our sport and recreation grant program provides over \$2.3 million in direct support to sporting organisations to assist operational delivery, program development, large equipment purchases and technological improvements to lessen the load on volunteers. The inaugural CBR sport awards last year included an outstanding contribution to sport award, providing an avenue for due recognition of those supporting local clubs in various capacities. This will be an annual award going forward.

**MS CODY:** Minister, what is the risk to community participation in sport and active recreation if families are forced to move out of Canberra?

**MS BERRY:** There are many risks and problems created when a federal government goes about forcing families out of our city. Community sport is just one of the areas affected. As I have said, local Canberra families support almost every part of the sports club community and the development of young athletes, everything from coaching, sitting on boards, preparing food and marshalling big events to running with a whistle up and down a sideline. From grassroots participation to high performance sport, volunteers make an enormous contribution.

One final key area is in fundraising. I am lucky as sports minister to see many great examples of community sports clubs fundraising for new equipment, to subsidise player fees or perhaps to send promising juniors away to big tournaments. So the risks

to individual sporting clubs by forcing people out of our city are significant. When our city loses jobs, loses families and loses volunteers, our sporting community and its youngest participants suffer. That is why the ACT government will keep standing up against federal government job cuts and ridiculous decisions to force federal public servants out of town.

Members, including me, often make adjournment speeches in here about having been to great community events, often sporting events. Every one of those events comes together thanks to the efforts of local people who care about our city, people such as those public servants who have resisted a forced move away. The ACT government wants to grow this aspect of our community, not shrink it, so we will continue to fight for all Canberrans to be able to live in our welcoming community, participate and contribute to local sport as they do.

**MR PARTON:** Would those negatives still apply to people who are forced out of town because of housing affordability issues?

**MS BERRY:** Housing affordability is a national issue. I am very happy for Mr Parton ask that supplementary question because, while the ACT government continues to provide the most public housing per capita in the country—it is something that we are proud of and we will continue to do so—we will be providing the highest number of renewals that the ACT government has ever embarked on. That would have been completely stopped had the Liberals been able to form government in this place because they would have cancelled the light rail contract. It is intrinsically linked to public housing renewal in the ACT. They would have much preferred that public housing residents continue to live in housing that is not suitable for their needs and not sustainable into the future whereas the ACT government is committed to supporting public housing residents in the ACT and renewing over 10 per cent of our public housing stock.

### **SHOUT—government support**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the minister for disability. Minister, today on ABC radio, the acting chair of SHOUT, Rebecca Davey, referred to a telephone conversation with you as to promised transitional funding for the next 12 months. Can you please outline for the Assembly what the nature of that funding is, the amount, and any conditions attached to that funding.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Lee for her question. We have spent the past couple of weeks seeking to reassure SHOUT member organisations and associates that they would continue to get the support they needed. I have been saying for some time—I have been making many public statements, which have constantly been undermined by members of the opposition—that we are working with SHOUT and its member organisations to work through the transition period to ensure that SHOUT and its member organisations continue to get the support that they need in the transition to a new arrangement.

Ms Davey was on the radio today talking about a conversation that we have had. There is a process underway. Again, if you refer to the *Hansard* report of last week's

question time, when I responded to a question from Ms Le Couteur, you will see that I did actually talk about the process that we had underway with SHOUT and its member organisations—we have also talked to ACTCOSS about being involved in these discussions—to work through with a way forward and a transition for SHOUT and its member organisations to a new arrangement. What Ms Davey said then is exactly consistent with what I said last week. And as I said last week, we are not yet in a position to talk about the details, because those discussions are ongoing.

**MS LEE:** Minister, is the transition funding that you are talking about going to be provided by the ACT government and, also, given your repeated insistence that SHOUT has previously received transition funding, will this make a difference?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Lee for her supplementary question. I have said that SHOUT did previously receive \$20,000 of sector development funding in 2014 to work through some of the implications of NDIS. Sometimes organisations need some time to work through a range of matters around new funding arrangements that come into place.

I think it is important to recognise that the national disability insurance scheme is a massive reform. It is a very complex reform. Things have moved over time. As I said in this place last week and have said repeatedly publicly, SHOUT was assessed as being absolutely in the right space to receive information linked to the capacity building funding under the NDIS. In fact that is how they are currently funded. They are currently funded through a transition arrangement. They receive that funding because they were assessed as being 100 per cent in the bucket for that information linkage to capacity building funding.

They assessed that they would not be successful in applying for funding under the ILC grants process this time around. A combination of factors has gone into that decision. As I have been saying for well over a month now, Minister Fitzharris and I were already looking at and talking about alternative or additional sources of funding for SHOUT, recognising that they support a range of community organisations. This is the process we are currently working through.

**MR WALL:** Minister, have you had discussions with any other community organisations in regard to taking over the management of SHOUT or to replace the functions of SHOUT? If so, which organisations?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Wall for his supplementary question. I mentioned that we have had a conversation with ACTCOSS about being involved in facilitating a process with SHOUT and its members, and with other interested community organisations. Again, I think Ms Fitzharris made the point in a debate last week that there is potentially an opportunity here for a new arrangement to support these organisations, to provide the support they need. Government agencies, ministers and their offices have been encouraging SHOUT for some time to have conversations with organisations that would be complementary, and would provide complementary skills and services in the same sector. In fact those conversations have been had before, and those conversations are ongoing.

### **Australian public service—impact of relocations**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations. Minister, how will Canberra workers' health and wellbeing be affected by the commonwealth government's plans to move agencies out of Canberra?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Orr for her question and for her interest in this matter. Of course, we are all aware of the forced relocation of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority. This is having a significant impact on the authority's staff and on other staff across the federal public service and across the ACT community.

**Mr Wall:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Point of order, Mr Wall.

**Mr Wall:** Madam Speaker, the minister for industrial relations is not responsible for the health and wellbeing of commonwealth public servants, to which the question actually specifically related.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** As Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, she has a minute and 20 seconds to respond to the question, but I think she is talking broadly in terms of the workforce within Canberra.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** We have all heard the stories about staff members who chose to relocate to Armidale being forced to work at McDonalds in order to access the free wi-fi because they do not have suitable accommodation. In light of that story and some other stories I have heard, I have serious concerns about the work health and safety measures that are in place for those staff who have relocated and the wellbeing of others who are facing the pressure to move.

Of course, we know that Canberra public servants are now anxiously waiting to find out which agency will be next to be arbitrarily uprooted and relocated. This uncertainty and anxiety have had a serious negative effect on staff health and wellbeing.

Meanwhile, those who are left in the APVMA are being asked to do more with less as some of their colleagues leave for other opportunities, which is having a significant impact on their health and safety as well.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what sorts of effects would these relocations have on the health and wellbeing of the families of the staff impacted?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question. These relocations will place considerable stress and strain on the partners and families of those staff who are impacted, partners who are faced with having to leave their own jobs—

**Mrs Dunne:** On a point of order—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mrs Dunne.

**Mrs Dunne:** Could I seek your guidance, Madam Speaker. In what way is the relocation of commonwealth officials to Armidale or anywhere else within the ministerial responsibility of a minister in this government? Standing order 114 says that questions may be put to a minister relating to the public affairs with which that minister is officially connected.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I do not believe there is a point of order. As minister for industrial relations, these matters impact on our public service and some of these families may be connected to these decisions.

**Mrs Dunne:** On the point of order, Madam Speaker, can you please explain to me how the relocation of people to Armidale in the commonwealth public service is related to the official duties of any minister in this place, including the minister for industrial relations?

**Mr Gentleman:** On the point of order, Madam Speaker, if it helps, the minister in her answer was referring to the partners of those commonwealth public servants, many of whom are ACT public servants—

*Members interjecting—*

**Mrs Jones:** On the point of order—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Yes, Mrs Jones.

**Mrs Jones:** On the point of order, Madam Speaker, the relevance of ACT public servants: is that not within the ambit of the Chief Minister's portfolio and not the minister for industrial relations?

**Mr Hanson:** Further to the point of order, Madam Speaker, if the test now is that they might be a partner of somebody, it really means that any question about any issue could be asked of any minister because it might be the partner of somebody. That is the most nonsensical response to a point of order I have ever heard.

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Have you completed your answer?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Madam Speaker— *(Time expired.)*

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how have Canberran workers and their families been affected by previous job cuts to the commonwealth public service, and how does this contrast with ACT government approach.

**Mrs Jones:** A point of order—again.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones, before you go to the point of order, can I ask Mr Pettersson to repeat the question because I think many were not able to hear it.

**MR PETTERSSON:** It would be my pleasure, Madam Speaker. Minister, how have Canberra workers and their families been affected by previous job cuts to the commonwealth public service and how does this contrast with ACT government's approach?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Minister.

**Mrs Jones:** Point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones.

**Mrs Jones:** My point of order is about whether the question is in order, because this is a question about the removal of some federal public servants. How does that relate directly to the portfolio of the minister being asked to answer the question when she has no jurisdiction over the ACT public service as a whole?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs Jones. I heard in that answer it was comparing the policy framework to the ACT's policy framework for ACT public servants, and I think—

**Mrs Jones:** But how does she have relevance to that?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** She has policy arrangements for industrial relations here in the ACT.

**Mr Barr:** The executive can determine who answers a question. It is up to us to determine who answers the question.

**Mrs Jones:** Based on the document—

**Mr Barr:** No, it is up to us to determine who answers the question.

**Mrs Jones:** at the time, is that correct?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I have called the Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations to answer this question, and I have ruled it in order. Minister.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Pettersson for his additional question. Canberra, of course, is no stranger to job cuts thanks to federal Liberal governments. In 1996-97 in the first Howard budget their first priority was to slash the Australian public service by more than 30,000 jobs. Following the 2013 election the federal Liberals pursued a draconian policy of job cuts coupled with strict controls on wage growth and removal of work conditions. This contrasts with the ACT government

position where we have committed to maintaining the size of the ACT public service and maintaining real wages through the current enterprise bargaining process. By contrast, commonwealth public sector workers have this week passed the dubious milestone of more than 1,200 days without an enterprise bargaining agreement, due to the hard-line approach to bargaining the federal Liberal government has taken. Thousands of Canberra workers have been stuck without a pay rise for years.

Of course, the ACT government also responded through its agencies to the job cuts that were made after the 2013 election. For example, the CBR Innovation Network worked with redundant commonwealth public servants, including through its public sector launch pad, and other steps were taken as well, to ensure that public servants were in a position to move to entrepreneurship and small business. Many former public servants, of course are in a good position to develop social enterprises and the ACT government's social procurement strategy supports purchasing from social enterprises where the businesses are not for profit. The ACT government is actually taking proactive steps to support commonwealth public servants being made redundant under the federal Liberals.

**Mrs Jones:** Can I ask a question of clarification from the Speaker, please? I do not necessarily expect an answer right this minute but, based on the administrative orders, we normally try to work out whom to ask which questions of. The Chief Minister has asserted in his responses across the chamber today that the executive can decide—presumably the inference is at any point in time—who can answer which question. Can you provide the Assembly with some clarification as to whether we are meant to follow the administrative orders or the decisions of the Chief Minister in the chamber each question time?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** It is my understanding that the administrative orders allow that, and there have been questions that you have put to a minister that actually belong in another minister's portfolio area. In this case the question was around workplace safety and industrial relations. While the Chief Minister, as Chief Minister, has responsibility, it is with the naming of the executive, the Chief Minister and the relevant minister to answer the question.

**Mrs Jones:** Yes, just for clarification, though, can that decision, based on the administrative orders, be changed in the chamber by the Chief Minister, and do the administrative orders hold any weight? This is what I am trying to understand.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The administrative orders are that: administrative orders. The practice of question time is determined here. If the Chief Minister allows another minister to answer the question, it is acceptable.

**Mrs Jones:** Could I please ask that at some stage, when you have got the chance, you give us some sort of background as to where that is covered in the standing orders so we can fully understand it.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I am happy to, Mrs Jones.

**Mrs Jones:** Thank you.

## **Education—policy**

**MR WALL:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, when you announced your future of education discussion paper on 16 February, you said: “I have also written directly to important stakeholders.” Minister, yesterday you said that you had not written to the non-government sector. Why do you not consider the non-government school sector worthy of being one of the first stakeholders that you consult with?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Wall for the question. I am not sure why you are trying to start a war here because we are working very closely with all schools, the entire school system, around a conversation on the future of education.

**Mr Coe:** Your inconsistency.

**MS BERRY:** No, not at all. After I made my statement around the future of education, a copy of the statement was sent to all stakeholders. I do not think we missed anybody out, and we did include the independent and Catholic school systems. Earlier this week, on Monday, my office had a conversation with the independent schools to assure them that they would be involved in the conversation. At this stage we have not started the process of what that conversation would look like. We have been making sure that stakeholders know about it and we have been talking about the way we would be having those conversations and how we would involve the broader community, and that it would not just involve the ordinary stakeholders within the education community. So I am not sure why there is some confusion around this or why the opposition is trying to have an argument about something that there is not an argument about. It is very unusual.

**MR WALL:** Minister, when will you include the non-government sector in this discussion since they feel as though they have been excluded thus far?

**MS BERRY:** Again I am very surprised that there has been an allegation from the opposition that my office and the government are not including independent schools in—

**Mrs Jones:** It is not what we said; it is what they said.

**MS BERRY:** No. They have been provided with a copy of the statement. This week we have had a conversation with them. My office has met with them and gone to functions. I have been to functions with the Catholic Education Office. I have absolutely welcomed and encourage them to be part of this conversation.

I am not sure where the opposition’s confusion is around this because certainly as early as this week we have had a conversation with the independent schools. I do not know why there is confusion about them not being involved when they are very much involved.

**MS LEE:** Minister, will you reassure the Canberra public of your commitment to maintaining a diverse range of education options for Canberra families to access now and into the future by ensuring open conversation with the entire education sector, including non-government schools?

**MS BERRY:** Madam Speaker, I am not sure how many more times I have to reassure the members opposite. I have certainly reassured the independent schools, the Catholic schools, the public education schools and any other stakeholders who want to be involved in this conversation that they are absolutely more than welcome to talk about how we improve equity in our schools, how we make sure that children who are disadvantaged or from families who might be disconnected in lots of different ways get the best education outcomes, whether that is in a public education system, whether it is in the independent system or whether it is in the Catholic schools.

I would also reiterate the ACT government's absolute support for the Gonski funding principles, which are something where the independent, Catholic and public education systems have all linked arms together and fought fiercely for, to continue into the ACT. These guys opposite and their friends up on the hill are the ones walking away from needs-based funding, which is exactly what the conversation is about. I know that the independent and Catholic schools are keen to be part of that conversation. They are absolutely part of it already. We are already talking to them. Whatever war these guys are trying to start here, it does not exist.

### **Health—colonoscopy waiting times**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Health and it relates to waiting times for colonoscopies in ACT public hospitals. Minister, in your answer to question on notice No 71, you said:

In the 2016-17 financial year to date to 21 February 2017, 651 category one patients received a colonoscopy within 30 days and 582 waited longer than 80 days.

Your answer also stated that it was recommended that category 1 patients received treatment within 30 days. Bowel Cancer Australia says only 17 per cent of people with a positive test for bowel cancer are seen within the recommended 30 days. Minister, why did almost half of category 1 patients wait nearly three times the recommended time in which to receive the procedure?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mr Milligan for the question. I do not have the benefit of having with me my reply to that question on notice, but I did note at the time—and I think my reply also indicated this—that it was of concern to ACT Health, and they are looking very hard at improving those waiting times. I am not familiar with whether Bowel Cancer Australia's 17 per cent figure refers to nationally or whether it relates to the ACT. If Mr Milligan can provide further information on that, I would welcome it.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, when colonoscopies are so vital in the early detection of bowel cancer, why must so many patients wait nearly three months to learn whether or not they have a serious illness?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I note, as Mr Milligan said, that 651 patients received treatment within the recommended waiting time. I will take the question on notice and provide further information.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, what are the clinical indications that point to a less than 30-day waiting time for a colonoscopy? What is the impact on the community of not receiving the procedure within the clinically approved time?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** In response to Mrs Dunne's question, one of the things that I indicated upon first becoming Minister for Health, as I believe all ministers for health do, is that I would not provide clinical advice but I will take clinical advice on her question and provide the answer back to the Assembly.

### **Australian public service—impact of relocations**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research. What are the potential impacts on the territory's higher education, research and training institutions arising from commonwealth agencies moving out of the nation's capital?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I certainly thank Mr Pettersson for his question and the opportunity to reiterate the impact of the commonwealth's decisions on our community, on residents in our community, on job prospects for our community and notably on the impacts for our higher education, research and training institutions. As members know, our world-class higher education and research sector thrives on close collaboration with a number of partners, including the commonwealth government.

Members have mentioned the impact of relocating the APVMA from Canberra to Barnaby Joyce's electorate of New England. As members would know, the APVMA is a regulatory authority that draws on specialist expertise to advise the federal government. The *Canberra Times* correctly stated on 27 December last year that the authority's most important stakeholders are here in Canberra. Some of those stakeholders are in our higher education sector. Our higher education facilities undertake research into the safe use of new chemicals. The ANU has hosted academics who have published on ways to improve the regulatory regime for the safe use of chemicals on farms.

Having these institutions here working hand in hand with counterpart commonwealth agencies can only improve public policy outcomes. Regulation, like the work the APVMA does, is not just about science; it is about crafting the right laws to ensure that we can properly enforce our regulatory regimes. Here in Canberra we have some of the best regulatory lawyers in Australia.

Without opportunities to work with counterpart commonwealth agencies in areas of common specialist interest, our higher education institutions may start to lose some relevance. If commonwealth agencies are moved out of Canberra it adversely affects our institutions and the thousands of students we attract to Canberra each year.

We educate around 44,000 higher education students and over 20,000 vocational students each year, including more than 14½ thousand international students and a similar number from interstate. These students come here because we have great higher education and training facilities but also because we have career opportunities in government agencies. *(Time expired.)*

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how important is it to maintain close linkages between research agencies located in the territory and counterpart commonwealth agencies also located here?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** It is vitally important to maintain close linkages between research agencies located in the territory and counterpart commonwealth agencies. I have already outlined the impacts of the move of the APVMA, as have other members. Members opposite may not fully appreciate the breadth of the collaboration between our higher education sector and the commonwealth government. For example, let me focus on one area: climate change.

The ANU Climate Change Institute works closely with a number of commonwealth agencies based here, including the Climate Change Authority and the CSIRO. For example, the Climate Change Institute and the CSIRO have worked closely on the impact of climate change on agricultural systems. This is crucial work that requires sustained interaction between research scientists based here in the capital.

The value of having these key institutions based in Canberra has long been recognised. It is the reason the Chifley government moved the CSIRO headquarters to Canberra from Melbourne nearly 70 years ago. That decision was right then and it is right now.

Research, with national application, undertaken in concert with our great universities and commonwealth departments and agencies should rightly be conducted here and the agencies that undertake that work should remain here. We should be proud of the excellent research capabilities we have here in Canberra and do more to support them and the work they do to support commonwealth government agencies.

Relocating the CSIRO or any other capital-based commonwealth agency purely for political purposes undermines the city, our research sector and the Canberrans who work with these organisations.

Some of the research that comes out of Canberra is possible because of the links from our higher education sector, and the ability of our city to attract and retain leading thinkers and scientists. I am proud to support our research sector here in Canberra. I know that our government agencies benefit greatly from having scientific and research expertise so close by. Risking that by moving government agencies out of our city is foolish, and we condemn it.

**MR STEEL:** Minister, what risks are there to recruiting the world's best researchers and academics when the federal government moves agencies out of the national capital?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Our city, as we know, has a great reputation for higher education and research. Canberra is known as a—

**Mr Hanson:** Spend more time checking your health data, Meegan.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Sit down, please, minister. Mr Hanson, that interjection was really out of order. If you want to address the minister, you address her as “minister”.

**Mr Hanson:** I have tried, Madam Speaker. I have tried every time to get a supplementary. You have never given me one.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, you are warned.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** As we know, Canberra is known as a knowledge hub, a centre of excellence in higher education and, as the capital city, the home of many commonwealth departments and agencies. But our research sector is not just about the buildings on our campuses, hospitals and other academic precincts; it is much more about the researchers who choose to make Canberra their home.

They make that choice because they see opportunities to collaborate with commonwealth agencies. Whether these researchers work in the agriculture sector, the defence and space industries or climate change, for example, these are very compelling reasons to work in the capital city alongside commonwealth agencies that deal with these issues. The ACT government plays an important role in facilitating this collaboration.

If you were a young, aspiring researcher, for example, in the cyber security sector, you would want to work here alongside our national security institutions. In 1988, the Hawke government relocated the Australian Signals Directorate from Melbourne to Canberra because there was a compelling national interest argument to centralise the critical aspects of our defence capacity in the capital. Again, that decision was right then and it is right now.

Around this critical infrastructure, we have been able to build a complementary research sector providing jobs to hundreds of Canberrans. As Australia's capital, we are at the forefront of decision-making and policymaking and we are home to a variety of world-class cultural institutions.

All of these reasons are why a growing number of students, and indeed the world's best researchers, are choosing Canberra as a place to live and study.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** Madam Speaker, I know that there is not a lot of interjection going on, but with all the muttering and murmuring over there I was finding it very hard to hear Ms Fitzharris.

**Mr Doszpot:** This has got to be the most irrelevant session we have ever had.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, this is the level of noise I expect, and that is silence, thank you. Minister, you have only a few seconds left.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I note Mr Doszpot's reference that it is irrelevant to the chamber that the commonwealth agencies are moving. (*Time expired.*)

**Mr Barr:** I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

### **Supplementary answers to questions without notice Access Canberra—rental bonds**

**MR RAMSAY:** I would like to respond to Ms Lee's question in the Assembly yesterday in relation to the delays experienced in relation to rental bonds. I thank Ms Lee for her interest in rental bonds. I think it is important to share some insights into this important function.

There are about 75,000 residential rental bond transactions processed each year in the ACT. We expect that that number will increase as our population grows, as we renew urban areas and build in greenfield sites. It is worth noting that lessors and managing agents are not required by law to take a bond from a residential agent. However, if they do receive a bond they are required to lodge it. Last financial year there were approximately \$64 million worth of residential bonds held by the territory.

A bond is money paid by a tenant as a security for the performance of the tenant's obligations under the residential tenancy agreement. Bond money can be used by the landlord to recoup costs as a result of damage by a tenant, besides normal wear and tear, or any outstanding payable rent. The territory's role is to ensure that moneys are held in trust and that, at the time of the refund, the territory is confident that the entitlements are able to be disbursed.

The peaks and troughs of the city's economy and lifestyle are very much reflected in the seasonal swings for the rental bond lodgements and refunds. It is no surprise that Christmas and New Year are one of the busiest times of processing, as there is a high turnover of students, diplomats, defence personnel and the like. I am advised that there was an extended waiting time for refunds of four to five weeks during the most recent Christmas and New Year period, mainly due to the increased demand and preparation for the movement of this function from the Fyshwick shopfront to the new Woden centre. I am pleased to advise that for February and March 2017, the processing times for refunds averaged eight working days, within the 10 working day service standard.

I would also like to respond to Ms Lee's supplementary question about the acceptability of delays. I do not believe that the delays and the return of rental bonds beyond the regulated time period are acceptable. At the present time, uncontested refunds, where there are no disputed issues between the parties, are resolved by Access Canberra staff within an average of six working days. Banks may then take up

to 72 hours to pay the moneys into a person's account, though large banks will often process these within 24 hours.

Over the past six months, significant work has been underway to streamline rental bond processing and to provide a more modern service. Cash payments for bond lodgements are no longer accepted. They have been replaced by cheque or electronic fund transfer. The EFT payment option is already being used by nine managing agents, and Access Canberra continues to work with the Real Estate Institute of the ACT to encourage a higher uptake of direct payment. Other reforms are already being planned to automate much of the processing.

Delays of the refunds can be experienced for a range of reasons, many of which can be solved through clear communication between real estate agents and tenants, and attention to detail. Of particular importance is the timing when real estate agents lodge the forms. The day a tenant completes the refund form may not necessarily be the same day that the real estate agent lodges that form with Access Canberra. I am advised that some agencies have a standard practice of holding on to the refund forms for two to four weeks before lodging them. This has been recognised as an issue, and the previous Assembly agreed to changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 which will commence on 24 August this year. These amendments will mandate specific time frames for the tenants to be provided with bond refund forms from the property owner, providing tenants with greater certainty around the time frames in which they can expect a refund of the rental bond.

Another reason that the refunds can be delayed is incomplete or inaccurate information being provided on the refund form. This includes providing incorrect tenant details or incomplete authorisations confirming that the bond amount can be released. Delays can also occur if there is a dispute between the agent and the tenant. There is a process that needs to be followed. It starts with the negotiation of a mutually agreeable outcome between both the parties, and that may include mediation. If this does not resolve the issue, parties are able to have their matter settled by ACAT.

Finally, I would like to respond to Ms Le Couteur's supplementary question in relation to joint tenancies and the return of rental bonds. When multiple tenants are to receive the refund of a rental bond, it is processed in the same way as other types of tenancies. The territory needs to be confident of the entitlements between the tenants, which is done by ensuring that all tenants agree to the disbursement amounts and checking that the appropriate authorisation has been given by the tenants. If the funds are to be deposited by EFT into a third-party account, the third-party account details must be noted next to the tenant's or lessor's name, and the tenant or lessor must sign, authorising the funds to be refunded into that third-party account.

Bond money is divided equally among the tenants noted on the bond lodgement form upon receipt of a validly completed refund of bond form. If the tenants do not wish the bond to be refunded in equal amounts, a written signed statement, including photo identification such as a passport or driver's licence, by all tenants must accompany the refund of the bond form, indicating the amount to be refunded to each tenant.

Madam Speaker, rest assured that Access Canberra is working proactively with all parties in rental bonds. Tenants, landlords and agents can contact Access Canberra by phone or by email at any time to discuss the status of a rental bond transaction. I hope that this information has helped the Assembly with this important function.

### **Australian public service—impact of relocations**

**MR BARR:** Madam Speaker, during question time, Mrs Jones asked you a series of questions based on statements I made. Without wanting to steal your thunder, Madam Speaker, I thought it would be best if I enlighten the Assembly as to the rationale behind my statements. I refer Mrs Jones to *House of Representatives Practice*, which is what we defer to when our standing orders are silent in relation to questions to ministers. I quote:

Questions may not be put to one Minister, other than the Prime Minister, about the ministerial responsibilities of another except that questions may be put to Ministers acting in another portfolio. Where a question may involve the responsibility of more than one Minister, it should be directed to the Minister most responsible.

A Minister may refuse to answer a question. He or she may also transfer a question to another Minister and it is not in order to question the reason for doing so. If a question has been addressed to the incorrect Minister, the responsible Minister may answer, but if necessary the Member can be given an opportunity to redirect it. In many instances the responsibilities referred to in a question may be shared by two or more Ministers and it is only the Ministers concerned who are in a position to determine authoritatively which of them is more responsible. It is not unusual for the Prime Minister to refer questions addressed to him—

it should be him or her in this instance—

to the Minister directly responsible. No direct statement, request or overt action by the Prime Minister is required to indicate that another Minister will answer a question addressed to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister may also choose to answer a question addressed to another Minister.

I hope that clarifies for Mrs Jones the reason for my comments.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Chief Minister. I will see if I can value-add to that and come back to the Assembly tomorrow. *House of Representatives Practice* is a very good bit of reading material for members.

### **Paper**

**Madam Speaker** presented the following paper:

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act, pursuant to subsection 20(1)—Independent Reviewer—Report for the period 9 September to 31 December 2016, dated March 2017, prepared by Professor Dennis Pearce.

## Public housing

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.56): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT Government plans to relocate all public housing tenants from Northbourne Avenue to suburban sites;
- (b) the sites designated by the Government are not near public facilities, employment opportunities and the community support services that many public housing tenants rely on; and
- (c) in particular, the planned public housing developments in Wright, Holder and Chapman are inappropriate in size and location; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) cancel the planned public housing developments in Chapman, Wright and Holder;
- (b) consider more suitable locations including Northbourne Avenue itself; and
- (c) adopt a genuine salt and pepper approach to public housing.

I am dismayed by some aspects of the government's approach to public housing. The housing minister, Yvette Berry, has a history of talking the talk but not walking the walk. As I pointed out in the chamber last week, the minister has made a complete turnaround on her public comments from several years ago regarding public housing tenants on Northbourne Avenue. We reminded the housing minister that as a backbencher in 2014 she vowed to keep public housing on Northbourne Avenue and that in 2015 the current housing minister publicly shared her fears that without public housing along Northbourne Avenue, the strip may be just about posh apartments for the rich.

Wind the clock forward to 2017 and, indeed, despite the noise issues potentially on Northbourne Avenue, that is exactly the case. Northbourne Avenue is going to become a lane of posh apartments for the rich. The utopian Andrew Barr vision of light rail in our city, it seems, is not available for everyone. Indeed, if you live in public housing you are not invited to the party.

Madam Speaker, it almost reminds me of the lead-up to the Rio Olympics during which the Brazilian government made decisions on who was desirable to have in the Olympic precinct and who was not. They just moved people on. They confronted people under severe housing stress and said to them, "We do not want you within a bull's roar of our showcase, so we are going to move you as far away from here as we possibly can."

As a former public housing resident, I am appalled. Appalled, but not surprised. I am appalled that the tenants who built a life around their community in the inner north do not get a chance to continue that. They built a life around proximity of services, and now they are going to find themselves way over on the south side and away from those services that they relied upon.

We know that the impact on some of those Northbourne Avenue residents is enormous. I note that the minister spoke earlier about some where it had positive impacts, but we have certainly heard about negative impacts. We have had conversations with quite a number who have raised concerns. On a broader level, we have spoken to a pharmacist from close to the city centre who is extremely concerned about the stress and anxiety that Northbourne public housing residents are facing. This pharmacist has seen an increase in prescriptions for medications designed to deal with stress and anxiety, the stress and anxiety caused in this instance by being ripped out of your own community. It has also been reported to us that a number of residents who have been moved away from Northbourne Avenue to a location further away are consistently catching buses back to the inner north in an attempt to sustain that link to their community; that community that includes trusted pharmacists, trusted doctors and trusted friends. Has there been—I do not think there has been—enough thought given to the massive impacts on the day-to-day lives of individuals who have been swept away with the stroke of a pen to clear the way for this project?

When the Chief Minister and others were busy selling the light rail vision to us over the past few years, they spoke of opportunity and, in particular, of employment opportunities. I would have thought that those who could most benefit from these opportunities are living right now in those Northbourne flats, particularly if they cannot afford to run a car. The employment options available to them in Wright, Holder and Chapman are much fewer and further between. The community services that were available to these tenants close by Northbourne Avenue are much more difficult to access in Wright, Holder and Chapman.

Alistair Coe and other Canberra Liberals have spoken at great length of the two-speed city that Labor has created. They are right. Canberra is a wonderful place to live if you are making a good quid. If you are on public service wages or equivalent, you can enjoy the fruits of this city. If you are unemployed, if you are on a pension or even if you are just working in a job that does not see you earning anywhere near \$100,000 a year, you can look forward to joining the underclass. We have created a city that is too expensive for many of its residents to live in.

I just wonder if we are going to see a copy of what goes down in Washington DC here in Canberra. In DC, the workers cannot afford to live in the city. They just cannot afford to. They commute in from over the river. They are the teachers, the nurses, the police officers, the very same people who are leaving in droves to go to Googong, Fairley and Queanbeyan because the policies of this Labor government do not allow them the privilege of actually living in this privileged city.

The developments at Wright, Chapman and Holder are not just inappropriate in location; I believe they are inappropriate in size. The government talk about salt and

peppering public housing in the suburbs, but they are not doing it. Thirty apartments in a leafy suburban street is not salt and peppering. These are big clumps of pepper in areas that seem unsuitable.

And they seem unsuitable for many reasons. We know that an aged care facility was mooted for the site at Chapman and that it was knocked back because of bushfire risk. It was too dangerous for an aged care facility but not too dangerous for public housing. We know that the three developments at Wright, Chapman and Holder, and additionally the development on Shackleton at Mawson, have been announced for community facility zoned land. I know there has already been some discussion in the chamber on this today, but we seriously question the validity of the planned developments on this front.

A community facility zone is supposed to facilitate social sustainability and inclusion through providing accessible sites for key government facilities and services for individuals, families and communities. The government's own planning guidelines suggest that land zoned for community facilities use should provide accessible sites for civic life, allow community organisations to meet the needs of the territory's various forms of community, and safeguard the amenity of surrounding residential areas against unacceptable adverse impacts, including from traffic, parking, noise or loss of privacy. This land is supposed to be used, according to the guidelines, for things like childcare centres, community theatres or cultural facilities—wouldn't that be wonderful in Wright?—or for an emergency services facility, a health facility, an indoor sports centre, an outdoor recreation facility, parkland or a place of worship.

Interestingly, the territory guidelines suggest that the only exempt developments for this zone which would involve residential use—the only two exempt developments which involve people actually living there—are for a retirement village or for supportive housing. What is supportive housing?

**Ms Berry:** It is public housing.

**MR PARTON:** The ACT planning and land authority, minister, does not define it simply as public housing. The ACT planning and land authority defines supportive housing in this fashion:

Supportive housing means the use of land for residential accommodation for persons in need of support, which is managed by a Territory approved organisation that provides a range of support services such as counselling, domestic assistance and personal care for residents as required.

Certainly, those that I have spoken to within this sector suggest that what has been mooted for these sites is not supportive housing. So we are all wondering which territory approved organisation is going to be providing the support services for the new residents at Holder, Chapman, Mawson and Wright, and what those specific services will be. Based on what we know about the government's plans for these public housing developments in Chapman, Holder, Mawson and Wright, they are just going to be standard-issue public housing and they will not be within the guidelines of supportive housing; thus they would fall outside the planning guidelines. Are the

residents of Northbourne Avenue at the moment living in supportive housing? If so, which services are being provided to them?

The planning guidelines specifically indicate that multi-unit housing is a prohibited development on the sites, and the government intends to build standard-issue multi-unit housing in Wright, Chapman, Mawson and Holder. The site at Wright is the only block of land of reasonable size specifically set aside for community facilities in this new and developing suburb, and it certainly looks as though it was never designed for public housing.

We know that there were many other sites considered for public housing renewal. We would like to know exactly where. I would also like to know about the public consultation process involved here, because the residents of Wright, Chapman and Holder feel as though they have been left in the dark again, as this government attempts to push through its agenda without enough thought being given to those who are impacted. Residents groups have been quickly assembled in those three suburbs and they are systematically doing what the government has failed to do at this point: inform the community of what is going on, how they are going to be impacted and what they can do about it.

I call upon the government to cancel the planned public housing developments in Chapman, Wright and Holder and to consider more suitable locations, including on Northbourne Avenue itself.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.06): I want to clarify a few things with respect to the comments Mr Parton has made. Mr Parton repeatedly referred to some comments I made when I was a backbencher, and I did make those comments back in 2014. I want to ensure that the member understands why public housing could not be built on those sites.

The asset recycling initiative prevented replacement housing being built within the time frame required under the agreement. What I have been able to do as minister for housing is ensure that housing that is built as part of this renewal program continues to occur within the corridor. It has occurred in Lyneham, O'Connor and Ainslie, and in the future the government has made a commitment to additional housing in Dickson through Common Ground.

Reference was made by the member opposite to a pharmacist being concerned about tenants. I encourage Mr Parton to get in touch with that pharmacist and recommend that those tenants engage with Housing ACT and the support services that are being wrapped around tenants who are moving into new homes so that they can be properly supported within the community.

Again Mr Parton is also making assumptions about the needs of public housing residents. The government actually respects public housing residents much more and, instead of assuming what their needs are, we are asking them. I am personally

offended, as, I am sure, are residents who are moving into new housing that is being built as a replacement for old, unsustainable, inappropriate housing; it is not standard issue, it is about people's homes and they mean much more to them than standard-issue housing.

Madam Speaker, I move the following amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes:

- (a) the important contribution that public housing tenants make to communities right across the ACT;
- (b) Canberra's ageing public housing stock, in some cases, no longer provides appropriate accommodation for many tenants;
- (c) dispersing public housing and reducing concentrations of disadvantage contributes to a diverse and inclusive community;
- (d) the ACT Government's commitment through the Parliamentary Agreement to completing a \$550 million program of renewal to replace 1288 of the ACT's oldest public housing dwellings;
- (e) the work of the Linking into New Communities Taskforce which works closely with, and provides support to, tenants to maintain community linkages before, during and after their move to their new location;
- (f) the Asset Recycling Initiative (ARI) agreement which the ACT Government has signed with the Commonwealth Government requires infrastructure assets to be marketed, sold and settled, with replacement public housing dwellings completed by 30 June 2019;
- (g) the process of relocating public housing tenants from Northbourne Avenue, into temporary accommodation, constructing new housing on the site, and moving public housing tenants back into the new developments could not have been completed within the specified ARI timeframe; and
- (h) the Government has been proactively purchasing alternative replacement properties in North Canberra and, to date, the number of properties in contract exceeds 170, and that 77 public housing tenants have so far been allocated new properties in North Canberra;

(2) further notes:

- (a) that public consultation has now commenced on a number of new housing sites in Tuggeranong, Molonglo Valley, Weston Creek and Woden Valley;
- (b) the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development has extended the period for people to comment, provide feedback, or request additional information by a further two weeks to a total of five weeks from the date of lodgement of a development application (DA); and

- (c) that consultation will include face-to-face discussions, online media, community council meetings, mainstream media, flyers and drop-in sessions; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) continue its commitment to ‘salt and peppering’ public housing properties across the ACT;
  - (b) continue to ensure the designs for all new public housing are sympathetic to the look and feel of the surrounding community;
  - (c) continue to work closely, through Housing ACT and the Public Housing Renewal Taskforce, to identify the most appropriate replacement housing for each tenant being relocated;
  - (d) continue to prepare and offer Individual Support Plans to help guide tenant relocation and support individuals in their new communities;
  - (e) continue to consult with local communities before the DA stage and take into consideration feedback received;
  - (f) ensure that there is an appropriate level of community land remaining in each suburb where new public housing developments are constructed; and
  - (g) provide an update on progress under the Public Housing Renewal Program to the ACT Assembly during the May sittings.”.

My amendment seeks to put some balance into a motion that fails to address the significance of the work that the government has already achieved through the public housing renewal program and the careful consideration that has been given to the work currently underway.

The story of public housing renewal in Canberra and its significance to the community today is something we should celebrate and something we should continue to build on. The government established this unprecedented program in the last term—the largest renewal of public housing in the territory’s history. Both Labor and the Greens committed to the continuation of this program in the parliamentary agreement and the government is continuing to meet that commitment.

Unfortunately, the Canberra Liberals did not make this same commitment, and I am concerned by the lack of support for public housing in Mr Parton’s motion. For several years now, the ACT Liberals have failed to indicate any genuine support for Canberra’s social housing system. Going into the last election they refused to tell the community whether they would sell off stock or outsource public housing. All that we are sure of is that if they had terminated the contract for light rail, which they promised to do, they would also have terminated the public housing renewal program, the asset recycling initiative and the federal government funding which was tied to it.

I am happy to lay out the approach and values of our government, and our actions, through the public housing renewal program to give people who are doing it tougher than we are a decent go. I think that all members agree on the importance of safe and secure housing. These shared values are reflected in the parliamentary agreement, which also includes initiatives to address affordable housing and homelessness in this city.

With respect to the size of our city, the ACT government maintains the highest proportion of public and community housing stock in Australia, with about 30 dwellings per 1,000 people against a national average of 17. Let us remember the history. This housing provided homes to the people who built Canberra. It gave an equal chance at life to so many families who just wanted to contribute and be part of a welcoming community, my own family included. It does these things today.

I would like to remind the Assembly of what housing renewal means for tenants moving out of old, outdated homes. A number of public housing dwellings which served many families and individuals for generations have now become outdated, environmentally inefficient and expensive to maintain. It means more comfortable and modern homes, better suited to ageing in place, and in smaller developments where community safety is built into the design.

The government's renewal program is seeing families and individuals moving into more energy efficient homes with better security and modern amenities, which have already begun to make a significant difference to their lives. The public housing renewal program is seeking to address that problem and spread housing more evenly across the city.

Some of the existing older multi-unit sites have up to 400 units clustered in a single location, and we are seeking to reduce this concentration. The renewal program has been following, and continues to and will follow, the principles of the salt and pepper approach. We are including public housing in as many suburbs as possible. We are developing lower density public housing in a mix of stand-alone houses, compact homes and smaller groups of townhouses and apartments. The government is delivering this through both construction and purchase, in both newer suburbs and established areas.

I have been lucky to see a number of the newly built and refurbished dwellings, and I would be happy to extend the opportunity to show other members some of the new projects as they are completed. They are top-rated for accessibility and are being built to a standard often exceeding the quality of private developments. Indeed I have heard people say, when they have heard of public housing being built in their suburb, that they went looking for the new public housing and they could not find it. So I welcome a discussion around the planning and environmental aspects of this program. I want to assure the Assembly and the community that the government is listening to all the input that we receive.

Yesterday, as I said earlier, I spoke to one of the community representatives in relation to a proposed renewal site, and I will continue to engage with them. I also

want to be clear on a decision I made some weeks ago to extend the DA consultation period. In relation to these new proposals, the DA consultation period has not yet commenced. We are talking with communities before we have lodged a DA, listening to and considering their views. The proposals which have recently been announced for sites in Wright, Holder, Chapman, Mawson and Monash are in line with the government's aims and this process.

The land that has been identified is zoned as "community facility". Under the ACT's planning arrangements, this land can be used for a range of facilities, including health care, child care and cultural facilities. In particular, this land use zone permits supportive housing, which is housing for those in need of support. Supportive housing means using the land for residential accommodation, including self-contained dwellings, which is managed by a territory-approved organisation.

While not all of the public housing renewal program is using community facilities land, we do have some great examples where local communities and community councils have worked with the government on shaping a good development and embracing new families in their local area.

I was chatting with a number of public housing tenants last week, both in the tenants consultative group, the joint champions, and neighbours in my own suburb. These people are diverse in the views, goals and aspirations that they have for themselves and their families, just like the rest of us, and just like residents in the suburbs in which we are attempting to build public housing.

That is why public housing residents get to have a say in where they move, as part of the renewal program. Each resident is asked about what their needs are and is provided with support to relocate. This government works closely with all tenants to find the most appropriate housing for each of them. Some tenants have chosen to stay in their current community; in fact, we have more than 170 replacement dwellings located in the inner north to support this choice. Other tenants have chosen to move to an area which better meets their needs and preferences. They may have family or friends living in another part of the city, or they may want to be closer to their work or their child's school.

I am aware that some concerns have been raised about the Chapman site, as it is located in a bushfire-prone area. Fifty per cent of Canberra is a bushfire-prone area, and the environment in Chapman has changed significantly since the fires in 2003. The government is considering any and all risks associated with this site, as part of the design process. The public housing renewal task force undertook due diligence to make sure it was suitable for public housing, and this included a bushfire risk assessment. The proposed development will be required to use appropriate materials and landscaping, have suitable access points and locate servicing underground, with extra hydrant connections. This is not unusual for buildings on the urban edge of our city, and the design and construction requirements will be addressed as part of the development application and building approval stages. As with each renewal development, tenants for this location will be carefully selected by Housing ACT, with assistance from community service organisations, on the basis of their suitability for the particular type of development in this area.

While the new public housing is mainly intended to provide an option for tenants who are moving from the current multi-unit properties, it will not be limited to these tenants. Ageing tenants or those with a disability might, for example, get the chance to transfer to a much better home for their needs. I know of tenants living with disability who are now much happier in an appropriately designed home. I also know about young families who feel safer and more secure living in a newer property close to the services they need. We need to make sure that we continue to build an inclusive and supportive community, valuing all members of our society and understanding the different needs of the people who rely on our public housing to provide a safe and secure foundation for life.

The government is engaging with the community's views on the design of the proposed developments. The five-week DA consultation period, which has not begun yet, that I have put in place makes sure the community has time to give formal feedback after the development application is lodged, as well as the time before that takes place when the government is also talking with local residents.

I understand the community concerns that Mr Parton wants to put forward today, and I have also spoken with community members in these areas. It is fair to say that there are also residents who are strongly supportive of these proposed developments. They just want to be sure that they fit in with the amenity of the existing suburb, and we are very happy to talk with residents about how this could occur.

Members of the public housing renewal task force will be available to answer questions and listen to feedback at drop-in information sessions scheduled for 7 and 8 April 2017. Again I welcome the chance to have this wideranging discussion today. I encourage all members to engage constructively with policy debates about public housing, and I hope we can all support this amendment, which paints the full picture of the government's approach to this vital renewal program.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (4.19): The current public housing renewal program debate is a fine example of the intersection of different public policy ideals. The Greens and I unambiguously support increased public housing. There is no possibility that we are going to support a motion that calls on the government to cancel the planned public housing renewal program in any way. For instance, the first parliamentary agreement in 2008 had an aspirational goal of 10 per cent public housing. I understand that we currently have only about six per cent public housing. The bottom line is that ACT Housing has a program to provide 1,288 new homes. The issue is where they should be and the process for replacing them.

The Greens, of course, also support the community. Indeed, our campaign slogan at the last election was "community first". However it is clear that there is some community disquiet about the housing proposals for Chapman, Holder and Wright, and my inbox makes that abundantly clear. I am sure other Murrumbidgee members would be having exactly the same experience or more so.

But governing, as distinct from opposing, means balancing different aims and recognising there are many public policy goals. You cannot always achieve them all,

but you should try, and in this instance I think the government can and should try harder.

First let us look at the public housing part of the issues. As I said, I and the Greens support public housing. Some of the public housing along Northbourne Avenue is indeed ageing, as has been well described. It is hard to maintain and hard to heat and cool in Canberra's extreme climate. The Greens have been calling for substantial public housing investment and renewal for many years now and for a real and genuine salt and pepper approach.

For the Greens, this approach means that we have a range of social and public housing properties across the territory, not just in the inner north and the inner south. It means that we have a diversity of socioeconomic status in all areas of Canberra and that we accept that housing tenants are people first and tenants second. These tenants, like all tenants, may have connections to certain areas in Canberra dictated by schooling for their children, proximity to family, access to employment, study et cetera.

The idea of the salt and pepper approach is that we will not have the concentrations of disadvantage as we have had with the older, larger multi-unit housing developments which have tended to become concentrations of disadvantage. This is what has unfortunately happened along Northbourne Avenue. We will have diverse communities, as we see in our older suburbs where public housing was an integral part of the suburban community. Narrabundah, I understand, is still 30 per cent public housing.

The reason historically we have had such a diverse community in Canberra and such good provision of public housing is that, when Canberra was developed, basically there was no housing. If you moved to Canberra it was accepted that your employer normally would provide housing. My father worked for the university; so we lived in university housing. Of course the majority of people worked for the public service and their housing has provided the foundation for the public housing which has been well provided throughout the older, inner areas of Canberra. The issue now is looking at renewal of that housing and how we ensure that all of Canberra continues to have public housing.

I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to a media release of 30 June 2014 in which the then Chief Minister and Shane Rattenbury, who was then the Minister for Housing, stated quite clearly that cabinet had just endorsed accelerating renewal and redevelopment of ageing public housing stock, responding to the needs and preferences of tenants along the proposed Northbourne Avenue redevelopment sites by providing accommodation within the 800-metre corridor including Flemington Road in the inner north and the city where possible; growing social housing through new partnerships, innovation, intelligent design, public and private partnerships and specific project budget initiatives that align with government priorities; and maintaining the salt and pepper approach to public housing in existing suburbs and expanding this approach to public housing in new and developing areas.

We really do not need to debate the rationale for redeveloping the ageing flats on Northbourne Avenue but equally we should not ignore the fact that there is still public

housing, and there will continue to be public housing, along that corridor. As the minister said, it is currently being built and rebuilt.

Public housing tenants who have lived along the Northbourne Avenue corridor have in fact been supported to relocate to properties that suit their needs, including properties with access to transport, schools, health services. Sixty-five per cent of those who have moved have chosen to relocate to suburbs in Woden, Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin. It is an indication that, as people move on with their lives and their circumstances change, they are often happy to change the suburb they live in. They may, for instance, wish to be closer to grandchildren or closer to the University of Canberra or CIT campus, or be closer to other family members. Whatever their reasons, their move out of the inner north has occurred with their participation and consent, as is their right.

I think it is very important to maintain and, of course, extend the spread of public housing in Canberra, and the Greens support the salt and pepper approach. Historically much public housing has been single residences or scattered units within other multi-unit developments. In these cases, most tenants are simply members of their community, as they should be. They are not identified by their housing status.

I think the current program of ACT Housing spot-purchasing suitable residences from the private market is a good one and I of course support having public housing in all suburbs. Possibly not as strongly as Mr Parton, I am concerned that the salt and pepper approach is becoming diluted. The proposed developments are in the order of 30 units in each estate. Previously I understand that ACT Housing was concentrating on smaller multi-unit blocks where it is likely that residents will be better integrated into the broader community. I am aware some of the developments in the Northbourne Avenue corridor have been smaller than 30 units.

This brings me to the issue which I think may possibly be the elephant in the room: money. We all know from our own lives there are trade-offs between amenity, location, size and cost in real estate. This, I am sure, goes for ACT Housing as well. I assume that some of the decisions they have made are financially driven, as their budget is clearly not limitless. I mention this issue because I assume that this is one of the hidden, not discussed motivations behind some of ACT Housing's decisions. Of course, this has got to be an issue in part in all ACT government budget decisions. The government has a finite budget and its task is to ensure that it is best spent within the realities of the finite budget.

Turning now to community concerns, I and the Greens have a strong record of supporting community consultations. I point to Mr Rattenbury's intervention in the previous term in relation to Red Hill and Yarralumla and my efforts in the term before that to ensure that all major developments have pre-DA consultation and that all developments are in fact notified to their neighbours.

As a strong advocate for genuine community consultation, good urban planning and high quality urban open space, I can understand the local community's issues in this. The government of the day should treat public housing developments as requiring the best possible start if they are to be successfully integrated into the social fabric of the

community that they will, hopefully, become part of. Local communities deserve to be made aware of the government's considerations at the earliest possible opportunity and then given the chance to have meaningful input into the proposed development, be it about size, orientation, traffic issues, open space, bushfires, design et cetera.

In this, the urban renewal task force have failed. I attended a meeting of the Weston Creek Community Council last week where they were scheduled to attend. The task force chose not to send to the meeting a senior officer who could answer questions. They did not bother informing the Weston Creek Community Council this was going to be the case. They sent a PR person whose only message was that the task force was not in a position to answer questions at that point in time. I have been told there was another meeting at which nobody from the task force came, despite the Weston Creek Community Council believing that they would be coming. This is the sort of thing that makes the local community feel from the beginning that the consultation is not genuine. I think this is an area where clearly the government can, should and must do better.

I have had considerable discussions with Ms Berry's office about this motion and I am pleased that she has taken on much of what I put in a proposed amendment dealing with genuine consultation and ensuring that any new developments are sympathetic with the look and feel of the existing surrounding community. Given the numeric situation in the Assembly today, I will not be moving my amendment only to have it defeated. Instead, I am very pleased that the government has agreed to do better as far as consultation is concerned. I will be voting for Ms Berry's amendment.

All community concerns need to be heard and responded to as best as possible. Many of these concerns are, I believe, based on planning issues, and that would be the case for any development on that site. For instance, I think both Ms Berry and Mr Parton, although I may be wrong, mentioned Chapman. I understand that residential development was blocked there previously because of bushfire concerns. That is a legitimate concern which the government will have to address. I am confident they will address that. The last thing they would want is a bushfire destroying ACT government assets or in any way negatively impacting on tenants. I am sure this will be looked at but it is very important to avoid resentments on the basis of early poor consultation, souring the relationships in the future. It is important that feedback is taken seriously and designs amended where appropriate.

In summary, the Greens support this positive housing renewal program. To be successful, it actually needs to be an exemplar of community engagement. While the Greens do not support Mr Parton's motion, the Greens and I very much understand the community concerns that led to it, and I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion to the Assembly with the aim of ensuring that we do public housing better.

I very much hope and, indeed, expect that as a result of this debate today the urban renewal task force will lift its game as far as consultation goes. This will be in the best interests of public housing tenants, the surrounding communities and, indeed, Canberra as a whole.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.31): Well, there you have it, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is very clear, from the words spoken by the minister and Ms Le Couteur, that this is going ahead. They both made it clear in their speeches that this is about the money. Ms Berry in her speech talked about asset recycling and the fact that they could not put anyone on Northbourne because it would interfere with asset recycling. For people who may be unaware, asset recycling is all about the money from the federal government for light rail. It is all about the dollars. Ms Le Couteur made it very clear when she said, “There are budget constraints. This is all about the money. This is a big factor, and that’s fair enough.” This is all about the money. This is all about moving people from Northbourne out to areas where the government essentially owns the land, because it is zoned community facilities where, free of charge, they can build these facilities rather than on Northbourne. It is unambiguous.

If Mr Steel or Ms Cody were in the chamber as local members for Murrumbidgee, I would remind them, as I remind Ms Le Couteur, that it seems that if she gives this the green light, there is no doubt they will give it the green light. We will work with the community. If this is built—and it should not be built, as Mr Parton has made it very clear—we will remind every member of the affected community between now and the next election that this is thanks to Ms Le Couteur, Mr Steel and Ms Cody. These are bad plans.

I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion before the Assembly today, because we have been listening to the community. It is not just about what is going to happen in Chapman, Wright, Holder and Mawson; it is about the effect on public housing tenants. As much as we are hearing words like, “I’m concerned,” it is very clear from what we have heard today, and it is very disappointing to see, that Ms Le Couteur is supporting this amendment—and it is a very bad amendment from the government—because it is just a bunch of weasel words. It is very clear that they are going to push ahead with this. To be honest, it was very clear in question time today when we found out that there have been plans to relocate PANDSI from Holder for a long time. This has been in the pipeline clearly for a long time.

**Mr Parton:** Secret plans.

**MR HANSON:** Secret plans; indeed, Mr Parton. I make the point as well—in response to what Ms Berry said—that this is not about the quality of public housing; it is about the location. Yes, it is very important that the public housing stock be renewed and that we make sure that people are in good accommodation. And it is fair enough to say that some of that stock on Northbourne is not. But that is not the point. This is about relocating people from where they live, close to amenity, out to the outer suburbs in inappropriate locations.

I speak on this motion as a local member, as Mrs Jones will shortly. Let me be very clear: I do not support any of these developments in my electorate. They are wrong, and I will go to that point. Firstly, the broader point is that this is not salt and pepper. These are big developments; they are not salt and pepper. I have heard Mr Parton call them clumps of pepper. I think that is an appropriate point. This is not a genuine salt and pepper approach. Ms Berry said:

I think many years ago people remember when we weren't as good with the salt and peppering and there were pockets of disadvantage created as a result of that. We don't want that to happen again.

The government is repeating mistakes of old. There are a number of developments, as has been highlighted. I will turn firstly to Holder. I live in Holder. I have spoken to many residents. Many residents did not get any notification from the government. They only got notification from the Holder residents action group that this was actually happening. Let me quote from a Holder resident:

We only bought our place a year ago and we bought it because of access to the green space as we have two young children.

And:

There are also a lot of safety issues. It's a very large development, especially compared to the other public housing proposals. There will be a whole lot more traffic and as there are a lot of children around here we just wonder if the government has taken these things into consideration.

I openly admit I live there. The park that this is being built adjacent to is the park where I take my kids. I know that space very well. It is devastating for the local residents that this is going to be ripped away to make way for light rail. That is what this is about. The location in Chapman is just as bad. I quote again from a local resident:

This proposal to use 15,000 sqm of land for public housing on block 1 section 45 in Chapman is lunacy. It's completely inappropriate to put public housing on the literal edge of Canberra as far as they can possibly be located away from services and amenities.

This block is about as far away as you can get from—

a whole bunch of amenities. Another resident has said:

This proposal, if implemented, will have definite serious social consequences.

The ACTION bus service to the site runs only hourly outside peak hours and travel time to Civic via Woden Interchange is about one hour. The socially disadvantaged residents will thus be isolated and this will have a great impact on those needing medical/social services ...

There are also fire issues that are being canvassed that are of great concern in Chapman—Mr Parton went to that—that actually led to another development being knocked back. In relation to Wright—Mr Parton talked about this as well—a constituent has said to me about the development in Wright:

I and many fellow Wright residents are most disturbed to hear that Minister Yvette Berry has just announced the Public Housing Renewal Taskforce decision that more than half of the Community Facilities area in Wright is to be subdivided and used for medium density housing.

Undeveloped land (zoned for housing) does exist in Wright that could be used for this purpose, but this option has not been adopted. Instead, much of the precious Community Facilities block of land has been abruptly seized. This will severely reduce the range of future options for this land for its original planned purpose. This is deeply disappointing to us and to many other Wright residents. There has been no consultation at all—just an announcement that blatantly flouts the planning of this suburb.

Indeed, the announcement is an affront to those who take pride in living in a well planned suburb.

Turning to constituents in Mawson, although it is not specified in Mr Parton's motion, we have been talking to the community and we have been engaging with the community. It is becoming increasingly clear that the problems that exist in Holder, Chapman and Wright also exist in Mawson. The community is very concerned about what is happening. It is clear to me, based on the consultations that I have been having, that this is the wrong development in the wrong place and for the wrong reasons. As I said, it is not about public housing. This is all about the money. By Ms Berry saying in her speech today that this is about asset recycling and Ms Le Couteur saying in her speech that this is a consequence of budget constraints in part, they are admitting—and she is nodding now—that this is all about the money.

There are no winners out of this. There are no winners among the public housing tenants because they are being sent out to locations that are not supportable, if this is supportive housing. That is the point. On the one hand, the government can only justify this in the community facility zone if it is supportive housing. On the other hand, it is the wrong place to send these people if it is to be for people that need access to amenity and support. It is all about the money. They are not doing this on residential blocks in Wright because the government do not want to spend the money. They would much rather use the community's land to do it on because it is free for the government to do that.

I am very disappointed, I must say, that the Labor members from Murrumbidgee are not here. It is extraordinary that they would not be. This is an issue that really affects them. I note that they were here all morning talking at length about federal issues. They were very happy to do that.

At least Ms Le Couteur has turned up. Let us give her credit for that but, in doing so, also acknowledge that what she has said will be of no comfort at all to residents in Chapman, Wright, Holder and Mawson who have heard her words. As much as she is saying, "I'm concerned," it is very clear from her actions and other elements of her speech that she is supporting these proposals and she will work with the Labor Party, as the Greens always do, to put light rail as a priority and ride roughshod over the rest of the community. That is what this is all about.

**MRS JONES** (Murrumbidgee) (4.41): I am pleased to stand today to speak to this motion on the notice paper regarding relocation of public housing tenants from Northbourne Avenue to Weston Creek and Woden and the new Molonglo suburbs. Good on Mr Parton for coming in here and talking about something which matters a

great deal to members of our community and which is causing voters in my area a whole new wave of stress and distress. This is what this place is for, it is what we are here for: to represent local matters.

What this government is proposing stinks, and it stinks on two levels. It stinks that the vulnerable who have lived in difficult circumstances in these barely habitable Northbourne Avenue properties with all their personal issues for years, near the city centre, are being moved to places where they do not necessarily want to go. I know the minister constantly says people will have a choice but they will only have a choice between different suburbs of Weston Creek and Woden. It also stinks because, with the usual zero consultation, the government is moving one great wall of public housing from Civic and recreating it in sections in Weston Creek and Woden.

I do not need to remind the minister that the definition of consultation includes the following: discussion, dialogue, disclosure, discourse, debate, conference and deliberation. None of that is going to occur because the minister has made it very clear that she is immovable on this issue and will not be changing the scope or the size of these developments.

**Ms Berry:** I have not said that at all.

**MRS JONES:** I hope that that is not true but that is what we can take from what has been said in this place even today. These people are being removed from their homes, their friendships, their communities, their doctors, their chemists, and are being relocated to areas that are not within walking distance of most public amenities let alone jobs. They will not be able to get to public transport as easily.

Weston Creek residents are constantly complaining about the fact that they only have an hourly bus service all day, except in peak hours. It makes it almost impossible for people without a car, who want to have a life that brings them in and out of Woden, in and out of the city, to do shopping and to have appointments. Already we have a problem there and we are putting these people out there without additional services.

I have recently been approached by people being moved and approached by, as Mr Parton said, one chemist who cares for a number of these people who says that they are under increasing stress because they actually do not know where they are going yet. They are on increasing levels of anxiety medications and antidepressants and are fearing what is being done to them. Some tenants at least are certainly stressed, and that is the feedback we have from both them and the local service delivery. But the tenants are only the beginning.

I represent the electorate of Murrumbidgee. Our electorate is planned to take the vast majority of Northbourne Avenue flat residents. What does the government have against Weston Creek residents not to start a conversation with them before a decision is made? This reminds me quite a lot of something that happened last term in my electorate as well. Is the electorate of Murrumbidgee not poor enough for the minister to be worried about? Is it not rich enough for the Chief Minister to worry about and think fondly of because they do not dine with people in this electorate?

There are plenty of people just surviving in Weston Creek, people who still live in the houses they first moved into as the first owners in the 1970s, people who have lost a husband or a wife or are struggling to cope, people who have had their Mr Fluffy house bought from them and have lost so many memories and security with that change. There are people with young babies who walk to the shops and find the graffiti on Hindmarsh Drive stressful; graffiti the government will not lift a finger to deal with. There are still defunct petrol station sites covered in debris and long grass where snakes breed; this gives locals the feeling that they have been forgotten.

The people of Weston Creek and Woden have been forgotten. They are stuck in the middle. They have worked hard enough to be able to buy or rent their own place but they do not live in luxury. They make ends meet and they have done so by the hard work of their own hands. I respect the people of my electorate and I respect what each of them has built. This government does not respect the people in Weston Creek and Woden. It thinks it is okay to totally change an area without regard to the hard work and choices of those who have worked so hard for their little piece of land and their own home and their quiet spaces.

I respect the people of Rivett but the government does not. In the last term Rivett residents woke to a newspaper article—the same form of consultation that we are seeing now—telling them that a mosque was going to be built at Rivett shops. There is barely enough parking as it is, with the pre-existing religious facility at those shops. Apparently it is okay to just tell people there is a mosque coming, never mind that even for the Ahmadiyya Muslims, who were meant to be going into this site, the site was hopeless. It was not nearly big enough for what they needed to build. Muslims have already suffered plenty of persecution in their countries of origin, and the government insulted them over and over again by offering them unsuitable block after unsuitable block.

Now, some four years later, it seems they have a near enough solution. They are buying, but it is not ideal, from a government that claims to cater for ethnic and religious minorities and that likes to bang on about it quite a lot. But their actions speak louder than words. They have not been taking proper care of these groups. ACT Labor is good at talking the talk but when it comes to walking the walk there is some hopelessness here. Fortunately for the Ahmadiyya Muslims and the local community, the government did not succeed in putting this facility in the wrong location. The problem for now has disappeared. However, what is happening now just goes to show that it was not a one-off moment of carelessness from government, a government that has given up on local consultation and open conversation with local people.

Let us talk about these proposed public housing developments. In Holder the plan is for 30 or so units of one and two stories, all together on green space, backing onto private housing on Staplyton Street. Residents will have to drive out on a blind corner. The housing is prominently for elderly or retired couples living in that area and some young families. The middle of Holder is green. The centre of this beloved suburb is its green grass. Kids play there. It needs upgrading. The playground needs an upgrade anyway. I have mentioned this before in letters to the government but that has not

been a high priority. Grandparents, child carers and parents spend time there. People choose to live in Holder because of this space. It brings the whole community together.

To one side of this grassed area is a little cottage-like building that has hosted PANDSI for many years. PANDSI, a not-for-profit organisation, is the only non-acute post and ante natal depression service which serves many mums and also dads who find the experience of starting a family is not as straightforward as they had hoped. Despite the stigma, these brave parents are seeking help, and the best thing about this facility that hosts the service is that it has been in a really private location. A mum could park right near the door and no-one knew she was there other than the other mums in her support group. It was a low cost rental from the government for this service, and it was perfect for their needs.

But the board of PANDSI heard mid-last year that there were plans afoot to build public housing on the site. As a local member I said to them, "I'll write to the government and I'll find out." Before the last election I wrote to the government asking them for information. I thought a straight-out letter about what plans for the site were being developed might get a straight-out answer, but no. The letter was responded to with a claim that there was nothing planned for the site. But people in the building are not stupid. They knew that someone had been there measuring up the ground to do surveying work, and they have been proved to be right. There have been pegs marked in the ground since the middle of last year where this site was going to be, and people in Holder are not so stupid as to think that they were not being lied to.

The letters I sent and received were way before the election, and the surprise decision to suddenly move PANDSI out of their little cottage came within a few weeks after the election. The benefit of PANDSI being where they are on the grassland in Holder is that it is tranquil and private. In the Chief Minister's letter he said that they would not be moved unless a more suitable site was found for them and for the community. It is a very broad stretch—and false too—to suggest that an organisation which operates on very small funds will be better off in a facility in a big former school site, paying a higher rent, with a lot less privacy for their vulnerable patients. Given the lies that had been told about the plans for this site before the election in the letters to me, Holder residents have no reason to believe anything that the government says.

Let us turn to Chapman. Chapman residents have lived through a lot, especially the residents of the western fringe of Chapman. Yet the government thinks it would be a great idea to build a development of 30 or so public housing dwellings right on a fire path in Chapman. Everywhere I go in Chapman and Duffy, and to some extent Holder, there are people who lived through the 2003 bushfires. It was a traumatic affair and robbed many of them of their peace, and they still have trauma today. One lady in her 70s whom I spoke to told me she packs her bags every single summer in case they have to leave their house. And yet this is a place where we should put 30 public housing dwellings all in a clump together, and all because it would cost too much to do the proper salt and peppering which people of this place have come to expect.

We have all had great public housing neighbours, and some of us have had public housing neighbours who have needed our support. The reason we could give them our support was that we knew what was going on, because they were one house next door

to our house. I have lived in a house with government housing tenants on both sides, and we have done a lot for those people. I have called the police when one of the women was being abused by her partner. I have reached out to a sickly elderly couple on the other side. Even in my present house I have such neighbours, and we work very closely with them so that their lives might be improved by their proximity to other people who have more to offer and are able to reach out to them. I condemn the placement and the size of these developments.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Disability, Children and Youth, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations) (4.51): I rise to support Ms Berry's amendment and am pleased to have an opportunity to speak about public housing in our city and the current public housing renewal program that is being delivered by the government. It seems timely for us to be discussing public housing this afternoon following the discussion that took place in the Assembly this morning about the importance of inclusion in our city. Appropriate and affordable housing, including public housing, is of course an integral part of any social inclusion agenda. I certainly welcome the public housing that is in my neighbourhood and in my electorate, and I welcome the relocation of public housing tenants within my neighbourhood and my electorate.

Those of us on this side of the chamber understand this and work to ensure that Canberra has appropriate public housing stock. Of course we know we can always do better, and that is why the ACT government is committed to renewing our stock of public housing. We take our responsibility to our community very seriously. This responsibility is all the more crucial as the federal Liberals continue to cut back services, whether this is social housing, community legal centres and other measures to support the broader community.

It seems clear that those on the other side of the chamber have no real understanding of the issues around public housing and a salt and pepper approach. A salt and pepper approach means the public housing tenants will have the choice to be part of various suburbs throughout the city. It is about ensuring that we replace old concentrations of housing, some comprising more than 200 units—and some of those are near my house, and I am happy to have, as I said, public housing tenants near where I live, and I support them—with a mixture of detached houses, compact homes and smaller groups of townhouses and apartments.

As the amendment moved by Minister Berry states, the current designs for new public housing do in fact consider the look and feel of the surrounding community. Renewing our public housing will better tenants' needs now and into the future, creating a more sustainable public housing system. It also contributes to the development and regeneration of urban areas.

I note that the original motion by Mr Parton calls on the ACT government to cancel certain planned housing developments in Chapman, Wright and Holder. I would reiterate, as the Deputy Chief Minister has said, that it is hard to have a consultation process on a proposal if you do not tell people what the proposal is. You have got to

start the consultation process somewhere. Renewal of public housing in the ACT, including these proposed developments, is based on some key principles.

The approach the ACT government is undertaking in renewing public housing is outlined clearly in Minister Berry's amendment. The linking into new communities task force works closely with and provides support to tenants to maintain their links with community before, during and after their move to their new home. Where a tenant moves to is determined on a case-by-case basis in consultation with each household. The aim is to have each household move to another public housing property in a single relocation. Housing ACT and its community partners are keeping tenants informed about what is happening. The provision of timely and useful information is guided by a comprehensive tenant relocation strategy that incorporates targeted consultation activities.

As noted, my colleague Minister Berry is leading this work. Housing and community services, as the responsible division in CSD, continues to work in partnership with the community sector to support tenants to find accommodation in advance of the planned redevelopment. Fundamentally, this is about choice. It is about offering and allowing Canberrans—often, as Mrs Jones pointed out, some of our most vulnerable Canberrans—a real choice about where they want to live. The approach we are implementing is working.

I would note that some tenants have chosen to stay in their current community, and the fact that we have more than 170 replacement dwellings located in the inner north supports this choice. Some tenants who were previously living in the inner north have moved out, and we are also supporting them to do that.

As a member for Kurrajong, in February this year I was lucky enough to attend with Minister Berry a public housing handover of 14 new apartments in Lyneham which were transferred to Housing ACT. At the handover of the units I had the opportunity to meet and talk with members of the TAMS consultative group, and I heard very clearly from them about how our approach to public housing renewal is changing lives. The ACT government has a focus on revitalising part of Canberra through the transformation of public housing.

There have been a number of media reports about how our public housing program is working for Canberrans. In December 2016 the *Canberra Times* reported on the experience of seven-year-old Diamond Sanuoubane and his mother, Sonrudee Phonkett, who moved out of public housing in Red Hill into a new public housing development at Coombs. Ms Phonkett was very pleased with the landscaping and modern features and the convenience offered by the nearby suburban centre, primary schools and bus routes.

The ABC reported on 13 March on those tenants in the public housing complex on Northbourne Avenue who had relocated. Of the approximately 400 households on Northbourne Avenue, 70 have moved, with the rest to be relocated by mid-2019. It was great to hear about Peter's move to Braddon, Laurel's move to Ainslie and Nick's move to a quiet street in O'Connor. As I said, I welcome the relocation of these public housing tenants in my electorate and I hope they will continue to enjoy living in the

inner north. Other tenants, however, have moved and chosen to move to suburbs in Belconnen, Woden, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin, and we believe that public housing tenants, just like every other resident of Canberra, should have the choice to stay in the inner suburbs or move to another part of Canberra.

*Mrs Jones interjecting—*

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones, you had your chance.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** We are supporting our public housing tenants, we are supporting the renewal of our town and we are ensuring that the heart of Canberra stays strong. I commend the amendment moved by Minister Berry to the Assembly.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (4.58): I just want to note that there are 18 sections in the amendment, and not a single one of them refers to the planning aspect in terms of supportive housing. Not one of them actually mentions supportive housing. Supportive housing means the use of land for residential accommodation for persons in need of support, managed by a territory-approved organisation that provides a range of support services such as counselling, domestic assistance and personal care for residents as required.

I sought a clarification on the current Northbourne Avenue public housing and the fact that it does not, as far as public housing advocates are aware, qualify as supportive housing. We would love to know which organisation is going to provide this range of support services and what they are for, these mooted developments in Mawson, Holder, Wright and Chapman. It appears as though we are going to ignore that aspect of territory planning because it does not fit in with this whole scenario of moving these people from Northbourne Avenue. It is “show me the money”.

That is what I wanted to say in regard to the amendment. There is no mention whatsoever of the fact that this is supposed to be supportive housing to fit in with the planning guidelines.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.59): Madam Speaker, I have already spoken on the amendment, but I seek leave to briefly speak again.

Leave granted.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to clarify, for the information of members, about the renewal program and the relocation of tenants in this city. There are a number of phases which Ms Stephen-Smith has touched on about how we are supporting residents in their current homes as they transition and move into their new homes. There are a number of phases over a period of time, but we make sure that we engage residents about the relocation program.

The first phase is about reflecting on the program's scope and looking at any kind of lessons that we have learned from prior site relocations.

The second part of that involves speaking with the tenants about where they want to live, their relocation needs and their location preferences, whereabouts in Canberra they want to live. I am curious that Mr Hanson describes the outer suburbs as inappropriate. Inappropriate for whom? Is it inappropriate for me? Is it inappropriate for my neighbours? We quite like living in the outer suburbs, and all of my neighbours are public housing tenants. Fifty per cent of people in my street are public housing residents, and we all quite enjoy living in the outer suburbs of west Belconnen. I am not sure whom it is inappropriate for, because we all think it is appropriate.

The second phase is a conversation, speaking with tenants about their needs. We have tenant relocation officers and members of the transforming communities partnership who actively engage with the tenants and raise awareness of relocation activities such as barbecues or information sessions and go door to door to make sure that every tenant gets to have a conversation. The transforming communities partnership comprises representatives from housing and community services and key community sector organisations, including Northside Community Service, One Door Mental Health, EveryMan Australia, Oasis youth service, Companion House, Australian Red Cross and Woden Community Service.

Phase 3 of the program commences when the stock is being acquired by the task force and is transferred to Housing ACT. Once the stock is available, the logistics of the tenant moves can be planned. Phase 3 includes the processing of transfer applications, viewing properties, arranging removalists and signing tenants to new tenancy agreements for their new homes. Phase 4 is the support of moving tenants, cost reimbursements and the reconnection of utilities.

Phase 5 includes follow-up engagement with tenants and client service visits post the relocation. That includes making sure that the arrangements for the tenants in the new public housing that is redeveloped are renewed all across the city, in suburbs all over the city, including in Gungahlin, Belconnen, Weston Creek and newer suburbs in Gungahlin, as well as in the city, making sure that tenants are connected up with support agencies within that area.

In Woden and Weston Creek, they would be connected up with the Woden Community Service to make sure that they are supported there. If they are over on the north side, they would be connected up to Northside Community Service. If they were moving into Belconnen, it would be Belconnen Community Service and any other organisation that they would need support from. If they need that support, they would be connected up with those support services.

There are considerable support services engaged through this entire program, including conversations with organisations like ACT Shelter and ACTCOSS, to ensure that our program is meeting the needs of our public housing residents in the ACT.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (5.04), by leave: I will quickly respond to the comments by Ms Berry. The point was very much specifically not about average people who are not in supportive housing needing to live close to amenities. The reality is that most Canberrans can access motor vehicles; they do not need supportive housing. The specific requirement of the zoning is supportive housing. That often means that the sort of people that we are looking to support are people who do not own motor vehicles, who often need access to medical facilities and to employment. This is the very reason that, in many cases, they are on Northbourne, which is a very good transport corridor and close to amenities.

The point I am making—and it is a valid one that is trying to be skewed by Ms Berry—is that if you are going to put people into locations that are a long way away from those amenities, that is a problem. I would suggest to you that in Chapman, and particularly in Wright and Holder, you are going to be a long way from the supermarket. Just try walking down to Cooleman Court from Chapman, Wright or Holder. It is a long way.

These are the sorts of issues. It is not going to be helpful if you are just trying to spin it. The people that are going to be provided with this accommodation by very definition are in need of support. The locations they are going to be put in are not ones where they will receive adequate support. It is an inappropriate location.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (5.06), in reply: In closing, I would like to say that there are many reasons why these proposed developments should not go ahead. There are many indicators that those opposite have again taken the community for granted and treated us all with disdain, many indicators that those opposite, although they are happy to construct an overabundance of rules and regulations, have a belief that those rules do not apply to them. Again, in responding on the amendments, the minister did not mention supportive housing and how this is going to fit in. There are many indicators that suggest that those opposite believe they can run the territory almost as a dictatorship: they can do what they like because they have got a mandate; if the rules do not suit them, they can just ignore the rules.

There is not going to be any supportive housing on these sites at Mawson, Holder, Wright and Chapman. They are not going to comply with their own guidelines. And who is going to stop them? They are a law unto themselves. There is no house of review here. Do we seriously call this a crossbench? Mr Rattenbury is a major cog in the machine. He is off saving the world at the moment. Ms Le Couteur just gets dragged along for the ride.

I thought that we may have seen some amendments from the so-called crossbench, but, again, we see the Greens toeing the government line. If only there was a risk of shadows falling upon an open space or a KFC outlet—maybe if there had been a KFC outlet proposed for one of these sites—maybe we would have seen some backbone from the Greens. But, as is the case with pretty much everything in this place, they are just going to roll over and support the government.

I have had many conversations with the residents of Mawson, Holder, Chapman and Wright. Let me give some of the quotes from their emails. One is: “We feel very disrespected and disenfranchised by all involved from the Chief Minister down.” Another: “Firstly, we are deeply disappointed that the planning process has not engaged with all the stakeholders, including the local residents before the plans have been at what we understand from Weston Community Council to be at an advanced stage.” Another: “No amount of spin by the government can hide the truth that up to 30 townhouses will be built for ‘the most vulnerable residents in Canberra’ at the front of the ember zone in a bushfire prone zone.” And another: “We have serious concerns about traffic flow and also pedestrian safety from the Stapylton Street site.”

I have dozens of emails from residents who are dismayed by the original decision and even more dismayed by the lack of consultation. They are writing to us, and I understand that some of them are writing to those on the other side, because they can see that there is no point in engaging with the government. There is no point. They have identified that this government believes it is above its own processes and that community consultation will result in absolutely nothing. They know that the only way they can achieve a just result is to make enough noise in this space that it embarrasses and shames those opposite to the point where they cannot look at themselves in the mirror without changing it.

For me, it still goes back to the people who are being affected most by this shemozzle, the people who are seemingly not good enough for the Chief Minister’s light rail utopia, the people who are not invited to the coolest little capital party, the people who are reportedly suffering increased levels of stress and anxiety because of the way they are being treated by this government, a government that is prepared to waste a lot of time in this place by spruiking about federal issues and that does not have the decency to look after its most vulnerable residents.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12

Noes 9

Mr Barr	Mr Gentleman	Mr Coe	Ms Lee
Ms Berry	Ms Le Couteur	Mr Doszpot	Mr Parton
Ms Burch	Ms Orr	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Cheyne	Mr Pettersson	Mr Hanson	
Ms Cody	Mr Ramsay	Mrs Jones	
Ms Fitzharris	Ms Stephen-Smith	Mrs Kikkert	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## Australian public service

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call Ms Orr, I ask members to be mindful of the level of volume in the chamber because Ms Orr's voice does not travel as far as some others.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (5.16): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that, over the years, federal governments and major agencies have seen the significant benefits of moving their offices to Canberra, including the:
  - (a) Chifley Government's relocation of the CSIRO headquarters from Melbourne to Canberra in 1949;
  - (b) Fraser Government's relocation of the High Court of Australia from Sydney to Canberra in 1980;
  - (c) Hawke Government's relocation of the Defence Signals Directorate, now known as the Australian Signals Directorate, from Melbourne to Canberra from 1988; and
  - (d) Turnbull Government's relocation of the Climate Change Authority from Melbourne to Canberra in 2016;
- (2) notes the Australian Public Service has been crucial to the growth and development of Canberra as a world-leading city by:
  - (a) investing significantly in the city's people and infrastructure over many decades; and
  - (b) growing strong links across the Canberra economy, from small business to higher education;
- (3) further notes that the role of the Australian Public Service in Canberra has enjoyed tri-partisan support until February 2017; and
- (4) calls on the Federal Government and its elected representatives to support a strong Australian Public Service in Canberra and to utilise the significant intellectual capacity of Canberrans to its advantage.

As the nation's capital, Canberra plays a key role in the efficient operation of the federal government. Our city is home to the Australian public service, and it has been this way for decades. The work of public service staff is invaluable, and with over 57,000 employees based in the ACT, it is important that their jobs are retained here and protected from brutal cuts and relocations. The Turnbull government's recent pork-barrelling decision to relocate the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority—or the APVMA—to Armidale exemplifies the inefficiencies associated with forced relocations and the decentralisation of the public service.

Successive coalition and Labor governments have understood the economic value and efficiency of a centralised public service. The Chifley, Fraser and Hawke governments moved the CSIRO headquarters, the High Court of Australia and the Defence Signals Directorate respectively to Canberra. Even last year we saw the Turnbull government make the same consolidating move with the relocation of the Climate Change Authority.

Both major parties agree that it makes sense for the public service to be close to the people and the stakeholders they work to support. It has been proven time and time again that the establishment of public service agencies in the capital city eliminates the transaction costs associated with decentralised services. The relocation of public service departments and agencies from Canberra to other cities does not carry an economic benefit to either the commonwealth or the ACT.

The 2016 Australian Senate estimates hearings heard that the federal government committed \$25.6 million alone to pay for the expenses associated with moving the APVMA from Canberra to Armidale. This figure includes the cost of office fit-outs, flights between Armidale and Canberra for workers and a 15 per cent salary increase for the workers who agreed to move to Armidale to keep their jobs.

The federal government's own cost-benefit analysis of the relocation determined that relocating the APVMA would deliver a \$157 million hit to the local Canberra economy. A cost of \$157 million to the ACT is outrageous, and the government will continue to oppose this negative hit on our city.

The continued diversification of the ACT economy places Canberra and the local region in a sound economic position. The public, private and small business sectors all contribute to the health of our economy, and it is vital that each of these sectors is adequately supported by government, both locally and federally.

Unfortunately, the Turnbull government does not see the public service as an asset to the commonwealth; rather, the Turnbull government is determined to make as many cuts to jobs and resources, regardless of the negative economic and social impacts.

The APVMA's movement has been opposed in many ways, including by the staff at the APVMA, local industry stakeholders and industry groups saying that their capacity will be diminished. This advice all went to the minister at the time, and it continued with the now minister for agriculture, Barnaby Joyce. The minister was advised by Ms Arthy, the CEO of the APVMA, that the number of staff who did not want to transfer would mean that they would be left with so few existing staff it would be very difficult for the organisation to meet its statutory obligations. The CEO was not alone in her concerns. The Veterinary Association, the National Farmers Federation, and CropLife Australia all made statements that a move would post a significant disruption to industry.

In May 2016, just before the government entered caretaker period, a cost-benefit analysis of the move was commissioned from Ernst & Young. On 10 June 2016, in the midst of the federal election campaign, it was announced that the APVMA was to

be relocated to Armidale. In addition to the announcement being part of a tightly fought election campaign, it was also made six weeks before the government even received the final cost-benefit analysis. In fact, the cost-benefit analysis was not publically released until 25 November 2016, almost six months after the decision to move the APVMA was announced. And the cost-benefit analysis was made public only after the finance minister met the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability (Location of Corporate Commonwealth Entities) Order 2016.

The process leading to the order brought greater insight into the evidence and advice provided as part of the minister's decision-making process. Along with Ms Arthy's concerns on staffing and industry opposition to the move, advice provided to the minister also warned of a likely loss of stakeholder confidence.

The cost-benefit analysis further cemented that this move was a bad idea. Ernst & Young found that the move could not be justified and that the strategic and operational benefits of having the APVMA operate out of Armidale appeared to be limited. But the evidence and advice contained in the cost-benefit analysis made no difference as the minister—in opposition to all available advice and without completed analysis—had already made the decision to go ahead with the relocation.

The APVMA is not a singular case. All corporate commonwealth entities with responsibility for agricultural policy or regulation are affected by section 22(1) of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013. Workers from the Australian Grape and Wine Authority; the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority; the Cotton Research and Development Corporation; the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation; the Grains Research & Development Authority; and the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation have all had their jobs moved interstate.

But it is not only the workers who have been affected by these moves. Stakeholder and interest groups have also made the case against the relocation of public service agencies from Canberra. Brett Finlay from the National Farmers Federation stated that the federation supports the building of stronger regions, but it must ensure this is undertaken strategically as part of an evidence-driven plan to build the entire economy. The CEO of the National Farmers Federation, Simon Talbot, has said we cannot afford policies that put productivity second to political objectives. The federation also raised concerns about the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation and the Grains Research & Development Authority.

CropLife Australia's CEO, Matthew Cossey, has stated the considerable operational disruption created by the unnecessary relocation of the APVMA will severely impact farmer access to crucial agricultural products. Similarly, the spokesperson for the Australian Veterinary Association said that the APVMA has made great progress in recent years in implementing regulatory reforms and speeding up the process of registration of new veterinary medicines. The association is concerned about the potential loss of this expertise for those unwilling to move from Canberra.

Workers did not sign up to have their jobs moved interstate, and the ultimatum of protecting their families or looking for work again has had a detrimental effect on the agency. In the words of one APVMA employee:

Staff morale is very low. People can't believe that this decision has been made, and for no good reason. The APVMA is experiencing huge staff losses and this impacts our workload and our feelings of being able to accomplish what we need to do. Applicants are not happy and this impacts on our own feelings of wellbeing and happiness in the workplace.

The Murray Darling Basin Authority—one of the several agencies already relocated—has watched other agencies disperse, and workers are dreading their turn. One worker testified:

My husband and I are each responsible for an elderly parent. While both are in aged care facilities, both have physical and mental ailments and we assist them on a regular basis. I have other siblings, but 2 of these live interstate and the other has significant health issues. It seems unlikely that such a move would be feasible for me at this stage and I would need to seek alternative employment within the APS or with another employer in Canberra or close by.

Another said:

I am very exasperated at us still not knowing our future – it has been six months of real uncertainty. We don't know our 'future direction', can't progress a practical work plan, and even don't know if we will have a job.

When employees face unstable work condition, the uncertainty flows on to other aspects of their lives.

Taking into consideration the fact that a reported 75 per cent of APVMA employees were reluctant to relocate, why is the Turnbull government still going ahead with this move that is against the will of a significant majority of APVMA staff and of little professional or economic benefit?

It is hypocritical for the coalition government to boast of the economic benefits of moving APS to regional Australia given their history of slashing public sector jobs in these communities. Economic gain from the public service should be delivered to regional Australia through the creation and restoration of public sector jobs in agencies such as the CSIRO, ATO and the Department of Human Services, as these agencies have the capacity to operate out of cities right across Australia.

Moving existing jobs and uprooting Canberra families as a result of forced relocation is not a viable solution to create economic gain. The APVMA staff are all local Canberrans and they need their local representatives to stand up for them. I note the Chief Minister wrote to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee inquiry into the operation, effectiveness, and consequences of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability (Location of Corporate Commonwealth Entities) Order 2016. This formally placed the ACT government's opposition to the

relocation on the public record and demonstrates our strong dedication to Canberra public servants and protecting their jobs.

Federally we have seen leadership from Senator Katy Gallagher, Dr Andrew Leigh MP and Gai Brodtmann MP as they continue to oppose this move. On the contrary—and somewhat unsurprisingly—Senator Zed Seselja has once again failed to protect Canberra workers. When the Turnbull government moved to go ahead with the relocation Senator Zed Seselja stood by and did nothing to stop it. By voting in favour of the government agencies decentralisation motion in the Senate, Zed condoned Barnaby Joyce’s attack on the public service and Canberra families.

As local representatives, we must continue to stand up for Canberra jobs and take action regardless of the careless pork-barrelling by the coalition government. This motion calls on the federal government to support a strong Australian public service in Canberra, and I urge all members to support it.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (5.27): Once again, we have a motion that is primarily federal in nature. But this one, I think it is probably fair to say, does have a much stronger link to the territory than perhaps some of the other motions that we have discussed. As Ms Orr has noted in her motion, over the decades—indeed, since Canberra’s beginning—federal governments of both sides of politics have done work to bring government agencies to Canberra and, therefore, many public service jobs to Canberra.

By the same token, though, reductions in public service job numbers or movements of the Australian public service out of Canberra have meant that there have been changes to numbers here in the ACT, again under governments from both sides of politics. The fluctuations in APS jobs are not something new. They have been occurring since Canberra’s beginning as the home of the Australian public service.

As the national capital, maintaining and growing the Australian public service inside the ACT will be a constant and ongoing challenge. But it is a challenge that the Canberra Liberals are committed to. The Canberra Liberals are committed to lobbying for Canberra as the home of the Australian public service, because its rightful place is here in the national capital.

The public service is vital for Canberra. It is vital for those people who are directly employed but also for those indirectly employed and for their associated families and networks. Businesses right across town, be they big or small, rely on the public service in one form or another. Of course, the public service is also a driver of residents to the ACT. If not us, then our parents, our parents’ parents or perhaps even further back may well have come to Canberra in one form or another due to the public service being here.

As local politicians, fighting for our area, fighting for our city in the Federation is worth while. It is something that we as the Canberra Liberals will stand up for. Members of the ACT Assembly should be able to put on a united front for Canberra to make sure that we get our fair share and that we are able to serve the nation, as we always have, through the public service.

However, it is worth noting that the pork-barrelling that Ms Orr spoke about is by no means solely attributed to one side of politics. Of course, one of the biggest such operations was the Gillard government's decision to put the NDIS in Geelong. That is far and away I think the biggest pork-barrelling exercise we have seen for decades. There was no mention of that in Ms Orr's speech; no mention whatsoever.

I am sure that somebody will stand up and say, "That was different because that was a new agency," but in actual fact Canberra public servants did relocate to Geelong. In fact, I believe it is still happening with some positions, and it was certainly planned when the Labor government made that call, let us face it, in order to support one or two marginal electorates in and around Geelong, most notably Corio.

There have also been other public service jobs that have either been set up or been relocated to other parts of Canberra. But the Canberra Liberals will continue to be resolute in our position that the public service's home is here in the ACT. That is always something that we will fight for. It is something that I have said in the media in recent weeks and months, and it is something that I will continue to say. I think that the arguments to move jobs out of Canberra are considerably weaker than the arguments to keep jobs in Canberra.

Of course, it was Kevin Rudd who said that he would take the meataxe to the federal public service when he committed to slashing 14,500 jobs in the public service. This fact, or this part of history, seems to have been erased from the collective memory of those opposite: that he took a meataxe to the public service. That, I think, did incredible damage to our city's reputation and, indeed, to the public service reputation.

Regardless of whether it is a Liberal government up on the hill or a Labor government on the hill, the Canberra Liberals will fight, as is our duty, and as is customary in each jurisdiction of a federation, to make sure that we get a good deal. Whilst this is a federal issue, it has significant impact here in the ACT, and almost exclusively here in the ACT. To that end, the Canberra Liberals will be supporting the motion.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (5.33): The Greens, of course, agree with this motion. I am glad that there has been an outbreak of tripartisanship because, after all, Canberra was built to be the capital of Australia. That is our purpose in life. It is absolutely important that the commonwealth public service is, to quite a large extent, located here.

I do say "to quite a large extent" because I understand that in fact the majority of the public service is located doing service delivery in other parts of Australia. Nonetheless, in the interests of having an efficient, effective, collaborative public service, it is important to have them together, together with lobbyists, diplomats, scientists and educationalists, all the things that make Canberra the great educational, intellectual, democratic capital of Australia.

I think there is another thing that should be noted as far as Canberra goes. It is that Canberra is the most successful example of decentralisation in Australia. We have the situation that Sydney and Melbourne are growing rapidly and have been doing that for

a long time. That is where new immigrants are coming. Given that probably everyone here would agree that we do not want to see Australia simply become Sydney or Melbourne, I think it is really important to support successful decentralisation. Unfortunately, we have only really done it successfully once in Australia.

I can remember Albury-Wodonga. It has grown, but it has not become what everyone thought it would be. So I think that Australia runs the risk of having a number of small towns that never get critical mass if public service agencies are moved randomly to other locations.

On that note, I would also point out that people are social. The internet is not a substitute for actual real-life human interaction. Of course, with the current federal government's and Malcolm Turnbull's NBN, the internet is not even adequate in many places to consider it being an alternative to face-to-face communication.

I will not speak much more. We all agree. Ms Orr is speaking the bleeding obvious as far as Canberra is concerned. We will support the motion.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (5.36): I thank Ms Orr for bringing forward such an important motion about the future of the city and, of course, Canberra's ongoing role as the national capital. We have always been fierce advocates of retaining Canberra as the centre of governance and administration for Australia. We have fought against federal government cuts to the Australian public service.

Unfortunately, we have seen over an extended period of newly elected conservative governments, going back to the 1970s, exercises in significant cuts to our public sector, either through mechanisms of outright reduction in the number of employees or through relocations. I think it is important to put on the public record today, particularly in response to the comments of the Leader of the Opposition and some of the interjections earlier from the former leader of the opposition, the true story of public sector employment over the past 15 years or so.

I go to the authoritative source of the Australian Public Service Commission and their data on all employees within the Australian public service. Their most recent update has data from 30 June 2002 to 30 June 2016. I think it is important that the story of growth in the Australian public service over the era of the Rudd and Gillard governments is again put on the public record.

Yes, I acknowledge that former Prime Minister Rudd made an intemperate remark along the lines of taking a meataxe to the public service. He made that remark, but I think the actions of his government point to a different set of policy outcomes. When Prime Minister Rudd was elected in 2007, the Australian public service comprised 155,087 ongoing and non-ongoing employees. In 2008 it rose from 155,087 to 159,293. In 2009 it increased again to 161,270. In 2010 it rose again to 163,784. In 2011 it rose to 165,469. In 2012 it rose to 167,330. The 2013 data, which would have included the—

**Mr Coe:** Keep going.

**MR BARR:** Yes, which would have included the year of transition to the Abbott administration, shows that public service numbers fell from 167,330 to 166,139.

**Mr Coe:** I think it was June 30. It was before the election, I think.

**MR BARR:** Yes, so 166,139 in 2013, which is still a number greater—some 11,000 greater—than the 155,000 that they inherited. The first budget of the Abbott government cut that back from 166,139 to 157,922. So the number was cut back effectively to where it was at the time of the election of the Rudd government. The Abbott government's budget in 2014 undid all of the growth in public sector employment over the previous six years of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd governments.

In 2015 the public service shrank again to 152,253. That took it back to a level that was last seen under the Howard government in 2006. The most recent data is that it has risen slightly to 155,771, which is roughly where it was at the start of the Rudd government in 2007. Over the past decade under Labor administrations' prime ministers Rudd and Gillard, public sector employment increased by about 10,000. In three years and two Abbott government budgets, that 10,000 was stripped away.

That is the story of public sector employment according to the most reliable source that we have on this, the Australian Public Service Commission. They do the head count and give us the facts on public sector employment. As Ms Le Couteur indicated in her remarks, the majority of public servants are located outside the ACT. About 40 per cent are within the territory.

They are the facts on public sector employment. It would be pleasing if there could be agreement on those facts, given that they are facts. They are not up for conjecture; they are not up for debate; they are facts. That is the level of public sector employment over that period.

It is important, as we move forward now to focus on opportunities to continue to diversify the ACT's economy, that we do so off the base of a strong public sector. We want to ensure that the actions that we take as a government have a particular focus on diversifying the territory economy, on encouraging innovation, on encouraging the export of education services, encouraging tourism and attracting growing industries such as defence and cybersecurity to insulate our economy against these economic shocks, which you can now take as a given, given the past 40 years of history, from incoming conservative governments.

Importantly, our employment rate, our rate of employment growth, in recent times has been double the national average. We are recognised as an innovative business centre with nation-leading collaborations between education, research and development institutions and the private sector. Throughout this term of government we will continue to diversify our economy and ensure that the days of Canberra being solely a federal government town are behind us.

I think it is important to acknowledge in this debate the support of those opposite. With the minor quibble over the question of public sector employment levels and who

was responsible for which cuts over the last 10 years, I acknowledge the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon. I think even he recognises that what we have witnessed with the APVMA relocation is beyond the pale and it is completely indefensible.

Frankly, only the National Party could come up with a proposition as ridiculous as this. It would be fair to say that it reflects poorly on the leadership within the federal government at this time that they recognise how silly it is, how ineffective it will be, both in financial terms and in terms of clients, the stakeholders, the users of this important service.

I think we all understand that if this becomes a trend, if the National Party are allowed to continue this process without any intervention from the federal Liberals, this will be very problematic for Canberra in the longer term. I can conclude by saying that as ill-conceived as the Deputy Prime Minister's policy is, if his objective is to relieve pressure on house prices and congestion in Sydney or Melbourne, moving nearly 40,000 APS employees in those cities, rather than from Canberra, might achieve his ends.

This federal policy seemingly is about shoring up voter support in the marginal seat of New England rather than good public policy. I commend Ms Orr's motion to the Assembly.

**MR PETTERSSON** (Yerrabi) (5.46): I thank my colleague Ms Orr for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. The Australian public service has been absolutely critical to the development of Canberra, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak about these matters today. The Australian public service is world renowned for its expertise and diligence, and that success comes from the hard work of many thousands of Canberrans employed in this sector.

It is worth reflecting—just quickly—on some of the achievements we have seen from the public service. Almost everyone in this Assembly would be using wi-fi. That is an invention that came out of the Australian public service. While many of the world's largest communications companies struggled to deal with the complex mathematics required to deal with the rapid exchange of large amounts of data via radio wave, the APS came through with a solution.

Most members present would also be familiar with Aerogard. It is a common product in most households and, dare I say, probably a necessity around summer barbecues. The formula for Aerogard was originally formulated by Doug Waterhouse, a scientist, indeed, employed by the public service. It was originally designed to protect Australian soldiers in World War II from mosquitoes, but once brought to market has become a familiar product. It is another example of the innovative spirit that is often forgotten about the APS.

The list does not end there: plastic bank notes, self-twisting yarn and extended wear contact lenses. The impact that the APS has had, not just on the development of Canberra but on the development of Australia and Australian industry, is hard to overstate.

Today, the ACT economy is not as reliant as it once was on the APS. It is still critical, but we have successfully developed new sectors and new opportunities. But the APS has been essential in developing these sectors. The growth we have seen in our education sector has been significant, with both the ANU and UC demonstrating they are world leaders in their respective fields. But without the networks, ties and expertise that come with being the nation's capital and being connected to the APS, it is hard to imagine our city experiencing such phenomenal growth in education.

Similarly now, new sectors come up and grow. Cybersecurity is one example. I recently attended a tour of the Verizon security operations centre based here in Canberra. The work they are doing there is truly cutting edge and will play an essential role in protecting Australia from cyber attacks. Again, this is another example of how strong ties between the APS and private companies in the ACT have supported our economy.

But what concerns me is that some people do not see it this way. Some people do not think that Canberra is an appropriate place for our federal public servants. They do not see the benefits of having Australia's top public servants, our best public policy minds, in one place, a place where they can collaborate more easily, work through ideas and solve the problems facing our nation. No. For them, the APS is merely a political tool, one to be used at their whim for their own political ends.

We have seen this most recently with the disgraceful decision from the commonwealth government and Barnaby Joyce to relocate the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority to Armidale in Mr Joyce's electorate. This is one of the most egregious examples of pork-barrelling from a federal minister in living memory. The Liberals have pushed through this decision with no legitimate reason. Not only did they refuse to seek parliamentary approval, they have made it so that that order cannot be disallowed by parliament. They know that this decision does not make sense, and they know they would not be able to convince the crossbenches of its legitimacy.

This decision will obviously be detrimental to Canberra. The department has almost 200 staff, only 15 per cent of whom are expected to relocate. The remaining staff have essentially been told to move or lose their jobs. This decision will obviously have a serious negative impact on these families and our community more generally.

But I do not want to talk just about the impact on Canberra. It is also worth considering the impact this will have on the industries the APVMA provides advice to, primarily agriculture. Fortunately, the federal Liberals have done the hard work for us on this one. Prior to the announcement, the government paid Ernst & Young \$272,000 to undertake a cost-benefit analysis on the decision to relocate the APVMA. \$272,000 is a hefty sum of money, colleagues, an amount for which you would expect detailed, well-considered advice. We are definitely not looking at back-of-the-envelope calculations here. This analysis found that there were no material economic advantages to support the relocation; none at all.

The report also goes into quite some detail about the loss of technical expertise and notes the relocation will cause delays in the approval of new chemicals, stating that this delay will have serious negative consequences for the industry as a whole. The report warns that some chemical companies might pack up and leave Australia altogether as a result of these negative impacts. Maybe you do not trust Ernst & Young. Not everyone trusts accountants, and we most definitely do not always trust economists.

But what about the National Farmers Federation? You could hardly accuse them of being biased towards a Labor agenda. They are not an organisation historically prone to defending Canberra or its workforce either. Even they have had to speak out against this relocation. The Farmers Federation's members have voted against the relocation of the APVMA, citing their concerns on the impact on the industry. Even they can see that this relocation makes no sense.

So we have both Ernst & Young and the Farmers Federation coming out against this move, along with the workers themselves. So who is it exactly that we have in favour? It is just one person, and that is Barnaby Joyce—the local member—pushing his own agenda.

The Ernst & Young report goes into some detail about the economic impact to Canberra. Some 365 jobs are expected to be lost, and it will rip out about \$157 million from our economy. These impacts are real and they are significant. But I think sometimes we have a tendency to look at these aggregate numbers and we lose sight of what they really mean.

Let us consider what the Liberals are asking the staff of APVMA to do. They are asking them to move some 750 kilometres away from their home in Canberra, away from their families, away from their friends. Partners of the people working at the APMVA are being asked to find new jobs in Armidale. They are asking parents to take their children from their local school and asking the children to leave behind their friends, all on the whim of one minister. It is disruptive, it is unfair, and it ultimately makes no sense.

The ridiculousness of this situation was truly amplified when reports emerged last month that APVMA public servants were forced to work out of a makeshift office at the local McDonald's. It would be comical if the situation was not so sad. In both design and function, Canberra is uniquely able to meet the needs of Australian public service departments. No other city or town has the infrastructure in place to adequately support our public service. Having a centralised public service working in close correlation with government and industry stakeholders is essential to the efficiency and productivity of the public service.

Moving the APVMA to Barnaby Joyce's own electorate of New England is not beneficial to stakeholders or the broader Australian public. This forced move serves no-one but Barnaby Joyce. That is why today I join my colleagues in calling on the federal Liberal government to support a strong Australian public service in Canberra.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (5.54): I would like to first thank Ms Orr for bringing this motion to the floor. As members are aware, Woden town centre in my electorate of Murrumbidgee is a symbol of some of the cuts the federal government has made over the years. Lovett Tower now stands abandoned above Woden like the clock tower in a ghost town. It does not have to be this way, though. A commonwealth government that has a conscientious strategy for developing the public service and sympathy for the residents and businesses of this city can see both grow in tandem, just as was originally intended.

When the early governments of the commonwealth decided to build a new city as the national capital, it was in recognition that the Australia that they wanted to nurture was not to be ruled over by a Sydney or Melbourne elite, but that it would be best to attract the brightest from all around the country to create a melting pot of ideas and innovation to assist government administration and good public policy.

It was a vision that was to persist for decades to come. That great founder of the Liberal Party, Sir Robert Menzies, saw consolidating the strengths of this great city to be a grand act of nation building. That is why he funded and built Lake Burley Griffin and substantially expanded the public service in the postwar reconstruction. So too did the Fraser government, which, among other things, moved the High Court to Canberra. Sadly, today's Liberals have seen fit to betray that bipartisan history and plunder the ACT for cruel ideology and political gain.

Starting with the Howard government, the Liberals started to undermine the role of Canberra and the APS. The 1996 cuts devastated the public service and it took years for the city to recover. Additionally, the Liberals moved federal cabinet activities to Phillip Street in the heart of Sydney. As far as the current federal government is concerned, Canberra does not exist outside of the inner city. In 2014, they slashed the public service relentlessly. Joe Hockey saw fit to move parts of the industry, finance and treasury departments to the inner cities of Sydney and Melbourne.

The Prime Minister himself loves to focus on Sydney and Melbourne, never passing up a WestConnex photo op or an opportunity to lament the east west link. Yet the Liberals' only interest in Canberra is to pork-barrel departments out of the ACT when it provides a political benefit to them. We are entitled to ask whether Mr Turnbull wants to actually be the Prime Minister of Australia or merely the Premier of New South Wales, or much less, the Mayor of Sydney.

However, the Prime Minister's neglect of Canberra pales in comparison to his deputy's active hostility towards it. Barnaby Joyce has engaged in some of the most blatant anti-Canberra rhetoric and acts of political pork-barrelling seen in Australian history. He first decided to move the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority to Armidale in his own electorate without consultation with the Canberra community and ACT government and before conducting a cost-benefit analysis. He has subsequently refused to release that analysis, obviously because such a move fails even the primary public policy test for the federal government, that is, stringent "fiscal responsibility".

He then called for more country towns to write submissions to the Senate inquiry into the APVMA move in order to pitch for their own departmental moves. And he has claimed that there are more such moves to come. For example, earlier this month, he claimed that he would like to see the Australian Taxation Office and the Department of Human Services move workers to country towns. Other than the Department of Defence, these are the two largest departments in Canberra. Taking an axe to them would devastate our local economy.

This is a minister who really has form when it comes to trashing Canberra in not just actions, but words. Just yesterday, he saw fit to call the ACT government “crazy” and “insane” for its renewable energy target. I really fear for Canberra residents, should the rumours about reshuffling Minister Joyce to the federal infrastructure portfolio hold truth.

Where was Senator Seselja in all this? This move has been discussed for years, but he did not come out against it until long after the horse had bolted; indeed, long after any sort of influence that he had in the party room had dissipated. By the time he was prepared to make any comments, it was far too late. Even when the senator spoke up, it was to oppose the move on the grounds of government efficiency and productivity, and not the compassionate plea that we expect of our ACT senators on behalf of electors’ livelihoods. Talk about using kid gloves.

This attitude from the federal government has had real demonstrable effects on Canberra and the quality of the public service. Families have had no choice but to either leave the jobs and professional security they rightly took for granted or the communities that their friends and family all live in. Indeed, the APVMA move does not just affect public servants. During the election campaign I heard of the plight of many families that I spoke to—elderly parents who have moved to Canberra in order to help look after their grandkids and be near their children in times of their own need. This affects whole families and whole communities here in the ACT.

The public service cuts also have devastating repercussions on town centres and business confidence in those local communities. Apart from the effects the environment department and DVA cuts have had on Woden, the threat of moving the department of immigration from Belconnen and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs out of Tuggeranong—now known as the Department of Social Services—causes economic uncertainty.

*At 6 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.*

**MR STEEL:** Beyond the detrimental impacts it has on our city, undermining the public service can only result in poorer policy formation and substandard service delivery.

There is a compounding effect of having departments in such close proximity to each other. It encourages knowledge exchange and cross-pollination of ideas, as opposed to

an immobile workforce that gets stuck in a constricted paradigm. Having the departments so near to the ANU and University of Canberra also ensures that they are up to date with the latest policy research.

The Prime Minister likes to talk about the “knowledge economy” fostering a so-called “innovation nation”. If he wants to give this weight, the worst thing he could do is chip away at Canberra. Indeed, any digital-centric industrial strategy needs to have a strong focus on Canberra. It was, of course, the CSIRO that invented wi-fi. The ANU is at the heart of so many groundbreaking scientific and technological developments that this nation has had. This is the most highly educated part of the country and its citizens have so much to offer.

Thankfully, the ACT government has been attempting to make up for the failures of the federal government in this area. The ACT government is dedicated to continuing the enthusiasm Menzies had for Canberra by building light rail, part of Walter Burley Griffin’s plan for Canberra. This was partly an attempt to mitigate the negative effect the federal government public service cuts have had on business confidence in the ACT.

The ACT government has just moved over 1,000 public servants from the ACT Health Directorate and Access Canberra to Woden and has also shifted over 700 public servants to Winyu House in Gungahlin in recognition that all regions of the territory need support. The ACT government has also sought to diversify our economy so that it is not so reliant on the APS. But given how many of our residents are employed by the commonwealth, there is only so much that can be done in this regard.

I believe that Canberrans are strong. They outlived the brutal cuts of the Howard years and so too can they live through the ruthless neglect of this Liberal government. But to allow Canberra to reach its full potential and for the Australian public service to best discharge its mandate to help all Australians, we need the federal government to strenuously promote both. I commend Ms Orr’s motion to the Assembly.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (6.02): I am pleased to stand as a strong supporter of Ms Orr’s motion, and I am delighted that this has tripartisan support. I am particularly grateful to the opposition leader for his contribution to and recognition of this important issue.

In the recent vote on number plate slogans, 50 per cent of voters wanted to keep “Canberra—The Nation’s Capital” on our cars. It is one of many strong ways in which we identify ourselves. We are very fond of our role as the seat of federal parliament and the administrative heart of this country. It is part of our culture, our economy and our character.

The Australian public service plays a significant role in the Canberra economy as a whole and in the local economies of town centres. While employment in Canberra is far more diverse than ever, thanks in part to this ACT government, the federal public service remains a major employer. And, as the nation’s capital, it rightly should. There are over 155,000 employees in the Australian Public Service, and 37 per cent of

those are based here in Canberra. That represents approximately one-quarter of Canberra's working population. If you do not work in the Australian public service yourself, chances are you have friends or family who do.

A strong APS workforce in Canberra is a linchpin in our economy. The federal government is our largest employer and also our biggest customer. Whether it is contracted services or a cup of coffee, there are myriad businesses around Canberra that service the federal government and its employees.

The federal government's lack of support for Canberra as the home of the Australian public service hurts the economy. Decisions to continually cut staff and relocate public service departments deal huge blows to our local businesses and our local communities.

We have already seen it happening. The hospitality and retail industries suffered immensely due to several rounds of public service freezes and cuts from 2013 through to 2016. A prime example is the Canberra institution Smith's Alternative bookshop. This iconic cafe and live music venue was on the brink of closure in 2015 when the venue's owner could not hold on any longer. The owner cited constant public service cuts as the reason for his dwindling patronage. Smith's was saved by a whisker by a new owner, but it shows just how significant the financial blows for local businesses and our local communities, including our arts and music communities, have been.

Our town centres are especially vulnerable to the economic downturn caused by Australian public service cuts. Cutting staff from town centre offices or relocating an office out of a town centre can be catastrophic for the local economy. When it was announced in 2015 that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection would move out of the Belconnen town centre, I and many others worked tirelessly to ensure that the bulk of its 4,000-strong workforce remained in Belconnen. As the major employer in Belconnen, the relocation of the entire department would have decimated the town centre. However, so long as the federal government continues to cut the public service budget and pretends that public servants are chess pieces to either move at whim or determine to be superfluous, the threat continues.

It was announced in February this year that the ABS, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, will axe another 100 employees from its Belconnen office. This is on top of the 120 cut late last year. With every job taken from town centres, with every job taken from Canberra, there is a flow-on effect: local businesses have fewer customers; foot traffic disappears; and, slowly but surely, the unique local character evaporates.

It is not only the economy, though; there is a real human cost to the federal government's decisions that undermine the role of Canberra as the national capital. The Australian public service continues to attract people to Canberra, and for those who have studied at one of our tertiary institutions, the APS provides a reason for them to stay and make their home here. It is a symbiotic relationship. The APS gives people a reason to move to Canberra, or to stay here after study; then our city takes over and does the rest. It woos people with its cafes, nightlife, bushland and ease of movement. For those who live here, being ranked by the OECD as the most livable

city in the world in 2014 was a no-brainer. The APS brings people to Canberra, but it is the city that makes them stay.

Madam Speaker, you would know that I speak from experience. I moved to Canberra for a graduate role in the Australian public service, working first at the Attorney-General's Department and then at the department of finance. I quickly fell in love with our fine city. I committed to a career in Canberra, and that let me put down roots here. I created my home in the Belconnen town centre, invested in new friendships, and introduced two dogs into my life. For me, Canberra would not have been the same without the APS, and perhaps vice versa.

When the federal government relocates a public service department outside of the ACT, it puts staff in the awful position of having to choose between their jobs and their homes. These people are being treated as political pawns as their lives are thrown into disarray and uncertainty.

We only have to look at the reaction to Barnaby Joyce's move to relocate the APVMA to Armidale, which you have heard about from my colleagues today but which I will reiterate. Since the announcement, one in five regulatory scientists has left the agency, citing the fact that they do not want to leave Canberra. They do not want to leave their home. Even the promise of a 15 per cent salary loading over three years was not enticing enough to uproot their families and move away from their friends, from their home and from their community. These scientists recognise what many up on that big hill do not: Canberra is a great place to live; it is a great place to work; and it is the natural home of the Australian public service.

The Australian public service is integral to Canberra's identity. Failing to support a strong Australian public service in Canberra puts our economy at risk and carries a heavy personal cost for those affected. Canberra is an incredible city to live and work in, and it is time that the federal government recognised the potential of Canberra and got on board with the future of our city, rather than undermining our workforce at every turn.

**MS CODY** (Murrumbidgee) (6.10): I rise today to support Ms Orr's motion on the importance of the Australian public service and its significant place in Canberra's history, character and economy. As a former hairdresser, a small business owner and worker within the Australian public service, I thank Ms Orr for bringing this motion to the attention of the Assembly and gladly support the motion and welcome the opportunity to speak.

The public service has long had a special role in Canberra's history. Since Menzies, Australian governments have respected Canberra as the nation's capital and have played a role in boosting our population and facilitating our local economy through supporting a strong and dedicated public service.

In recent years, however, this practice has changed dramatically. No longer do we have a commonwealth government which recognises the invaluable work of Australia's public servants. No longer do we have a commonwealth government which respects Canberra as the nation's capital. Instead, what we have come to inherit

from former Prime Minister John Howard's contemporary protégés is little more than distrust, disrespect and a total disregard for our city and the public service.

Former Prime Minister John Howard's policy of indiscriminately taking an axe to the public service resulted in a downturn in the Canberra economy which ACT Labor governments have been working to counteract. Almost overnight, real estate values plummeted, small businesses closed, whole departments changed and people left Canberra. Tens of thousands of public servants lost their jobs.

As I already mentioned, as a former public servant and small business owner during this period, I can attest to the experiences and anecdotes raised by Ms Orr in her speech. At the time of former Prime Minister Howard's slash-and-burn approach to the public service and Canberra, I was managing a number of hairdressing salons across Canberra. In the months following the election, I saw firsthand how the clientele base dived. My once busy appointment book became empty and business was devastated. I watched as long-term clients were no longer in a position just to swing by to get their hair done, and I watched as friends closed down their businesses.

In later years, with later Liberal governments, this trend has continued. I was working in the public service in the department of health and ageing in Woden when Tony Abbott became Prime Minister at an election where he promised to cut thousands of public servants and relegate core responsibilities to the states. Staff were subjected to a service-wide recruitment freeze, redundancies were common, and workplace morale sank.

At that time, the public service was a workplace where concepts such as doing more with less were indoctrinated into the workforce by a government that appeared ignorant of mathematical realities. Take, for example, Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce, who, in 2011, routinely disparaged the work of those at the Productivity Commission by referring to their reports as toilet paper. What about Liberal National Party Premier of Queensland Campbell Newman, who referred to shedding Queensland public service jobs as getting out the pooper scooper. Thank you for that characterisation of working people, Mr Newman. The people of Queensland obviously did not agree.

Today the trend continues. Plans to downsize and outsource our federal public service are still ongoing. Just last month, public servants at the Department of Health found out that their workplace was going to lose a further 250 jobs.

The Barr government recognises the value of a strong public service to our democracy, to our citizens and to our local economy. We have seen over 1,000 ACT public servants move into the Woden town centre. We have opened a new and improved Access Canberra office, which I would encourage members to visit.

We also recognise that Canberra can no longer trust this Australian government to support Australian public sector workers. That is why we are building our economy and diversifying our economic base. By focusing on Canberra's potential as a popular tourist destination, a university city and an innovation and start-up hub, we are securing Canberra's economy against the Liberal razor gang. Our tourism numbers

have continued to increase, with almost 2.5 million interstate and domestic visitors to our city last year. Canberra's tourism industry brings substantial income to our city and is a shining light of our economic diversification strategy. By boosting investment in local hotel stock, exhibitions and aviation capacity, as well as maintaining our standing as a welcoming and inclusive city, this government is building a city that Canberrans can continue to be proud of. I commend Ms Orr's motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Dickson land acquisition**

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (6.16): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes, regarding the land deals between the Land Development Agency (LDA) and the Canberra Tradesman's Union Club Limited, that:
  - (a) the CFMEU aligned club sold Dickson, Section 72, Block 6 to the ACT Government in a contract signed on 15 December 2014 and settled on 19 December 2014;
  - (b) the Government paid \$3.905 million for the site; and
  - (c) on 1 April 2015, a sublease was issued to the Canberra Tradesman's Union Club Limited which expires on 18 June 2018;
- (2) notes that the site next to the Dickson Tradies Club, Dickson, Section 34, Block 30, currently features a carpark for approximately 150 vehicles; and
- (3) calls on the Government to table in the Assembly by 12 noon on 30 March 2017:
  - (a) regarding Dickson, Section 72, Block 6:
    - (i) the lease issued by the ACT Government to the Canberra Tradesmen's Union Club Limited which was registered on 1 April 2015;
    - (ii) all the valuations undertaken for the purchase of the block;
    - (iii) the reason for the purchase, including the details of the Government's intended use of the block;
    - (iv) the details of the amount of rent paid to date and how much is to be paid;
    - (v) who in Government authorised the purchase;
    - (vi) the date that the LDA Board, Chief Minister and the Cabinet were advised of the purchase; and

- (vii) what was the average unimproved value of the site at the time of sale; and
- (b) regarding Dickson, Section 34, Block 30:
  - (i) the planned future use of the block;
  - (ii) the proposed lease for the site;
  - (iii) the sale contract, if it exists, and the amount paid, or to be paid, and the proposed settlement date;
  - (iv) all the valuations undertaken for Dickson, Section 34, Block 30;
  - (v) who in Government authorised the sale; and
  - (vi) will the Government allow the block to be used for residential use.

In the interests of time, I will keep my remarks brief. In 2015 the Canberra Liberals brought to the public's attention a scandalous deal in Glebe Park regarding the valuation, subsequent advice and huge sum paid for a block that may well have had a \$1 million liability attached to it as well. This deal was not an isolated one, as was revealed in the Auditor-General's report. In that document she said that transparency, accountability and rigour had been lacking in the processes used by the Land Development Agency for acquiring the three sites and the two associated businesses considered in the audit and that, without these, the integrity and probity of the acquisition process could not be demonstrated. However, it seems that these sites were not isolated ones. It seems that there are others.

All Canberrans should be very worried about the integrity of this government. Whether it is the Glebe Park site, the Tradies site, the bike hire site, the paddle boat site, these deals all stink, and Mr Barr has been responsible for this agency throughout. Mr Barr has allowed cowboys to run the show and recklessly spend millions of dollars on very questionable deals. Either they were rogue deals and rogue operators and Mr Barr was negligent or he was complicit throughout and the LDA was simply doing his bidding. We need answers.

The facts are simple. The Labor government secretly pumped \$3.9 million into the CFMEU-aligned Tradies club in December 2014. If that is not scandalous, I do not know what is. Of course there are many other associated questions about this deal. How did it come about? Why were there only three days between the exchange of contracts and the settlement? Why did the ACT government want to buy this site? Who initiated the sale? How did the Labor government deal with the conflict of interest that they so obviously have with this purchase? It seems they did not deal with that conflict of interest; they simply hoped that nobody would find out. How did the government arrive at the valuation and what are the terms of the lease which apparently is in place at the moment with the Tradies and/or CFMEU?

Further to this, it is reported that there is an associated land deal with regard to section 34 block 30 Dickson as well. That is the car park next to the Dickson Tradies site. If

there is a land deal or some sort of arrangement then I think the people of Canberra deserve to know. I do not think we should have yet another deal behind closed doors.

In the interests of brevity, given the time, I have moved the motion in my name. I very much believe that it is an integrity measure and that we in the ACT need to actually get answers to these questions. I understand that, with some amendment, there will be unanimous support for this issue.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Urban Renewal) (6.20): The blocks of land stated in this motion form part of a major urban renewal outcome in Dickson. As part of its urban renewal agenda, the government is committed to improving economic, social and community outcomes, and the land in question will facilitate this. Putting block 30 section 34 to market facilitates the better use of land in the key part of the Dickson group centre. Similarly, the land to the east of Rosevear Place will facilitate the provision of community and social housing, improving social outcomes for Canberrans.

I have circulated an amendment in my name. I now move that amendment:

Omit paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) calls on the Government to circulate out-of-session to Members, subject to legal advice on confidentiality and information that may be commercial-in-confidence, by 28 April 2017:

(a) regarding Dickson, Section 72, Block 6:

- (i) the lease issues by the ACT Government to the Canberra Tradesman’s Union Club Limited which was registered on 1 April 2015;
- (ii) all the valuations undertaken for the purchase of the block;
- (iii) the reason for the purchase, including the details of the Government’s intended use of the block;
- (iv) the details of the amount of rent paid to date and how much is to be paid;
- (v) who in Government authorised the purchase;
- (vi) the date that the LDA Board, Chief Minister and the Cabinet were advised of the purchase; and
- (vii) what was the average unimproved value of the site at the time of sale; and

(b) regarding Dickson, Section 34, Block 30:

- (i) the planned future use of the block;

- (ii) the proposed lease for the site;
- (iii) the sale contract, if it exists, and the amount paid, or to be paid, and the proposed settlement date;
- (iv) all the valuations undertaken for Dickson, Section 34, Block 30;
- (v) who in the Government authorised the sale; and
- (vi) will the Government allow the block to be used for residential use.”.

The amendment seeks only to allow some time for the appropriate review of documents for any information that should not be disclosed on the grounds of confidentiality or commercial-in-confidence, and I provide the following information now on the subject of the motion.

I have been advised that the Land Development Agency purchased block 6 section 72 Dickson, along with block 25 section 72, from the Canberra Tradesmen’s Union Club in 2012, following an open tender process by the territory for block 30 section 34 Dickson and the car park adjacent to the Dickson Tradies. In 2009 the club had participated in the Dickson centre planning project which formed part of the process behind the eventual Dickson centre master plan 2011. The master plan would encourage contiguous development with the Tradies Club on block 20 section 34 to be released for mixed use development, including major retail, to add to the activation of the centre.

In January 2010 the Canberra Tradesmen’s Union Club applied to the government for a direct sale of the car park site on the basis that it was contiguous land. In other words, it was connected to land already owned by the club. This application was not progressed as it did not meet all the criteria for a contiguous direct sale. The club applied to the government for a direct sale again in November 2010. In 2011 the government decided that instead of a direct sale the land should be put to market. In September 2012 the government decided that an open tender process would be suitable for the sale of the car park site. A request for tender was issued on 15 September 2012 and closed 26 November 2012.

Following an evaluation of the tenders, the Canberra Tradesmen’s Union Club was selected as the preferred tenderer. I am advised that during negotiations the club proposed that nearby land it owned at section 72 Dickson could be sold to the ACT government. As a result, the Canberra Tradesmen’s Union Club would purchase the 5,248-square metre car park site, which is block 30 section 34 Dickson, from the government at \$3.18 million plus GST. The government would purchase 12,201 square metres of land, block 6 and block 25 section 72 Dickson, for \$3.6 million plus GST.

The purchase of the two large blocks of land, combined with other government-controlled land in section 72 Dickson and the possibility of securing another large block from the Salvation Army in the future, would give the government

a significant urban renewal opportunity close to the Dickson group centre. In December 2013 David Dawes approved the purchase of the two section 72 blocks as part of the negotiations for the sale of the Tradies car park site.

The government has announced that one of these purchases, the former Downer club site—that is, block 25 section 72—will be used for the Common Ground development similar to the existing development in Gungahlin. Common Ground combines a mix of affordable units and housing for homeless persons with support services and a stable community. Community consultation has also been undertaken by the public housing renewal task force and economic development on a territory plan variation to add residential uses for the sites on section 72.

Block 6 section 72, I am advised, was purchased by the government on 19 December 2014 for \$3.55 million plus GST. Block 25 section 72 was purchased on 19 February 2016 for \$45,000 plus GST. Settlement on block 25 section 72 was postponed until after the demolition of the former Downer club by the Canberra Tradesmen's Union Club. Contracts have been exchanged with the Canberra Tradesmen's Union Club on block 30 section 34 Dickson, the Tradies car park site, for the sale price of \$3.18 million. Because a development was already proposed for another major car park site at Dickson, block 21 section 30, the government made arrangements to ensure car parking in the Dickson area would not be further impacted by the sale of the Dickson Tradies car park.

To limit the impact on parking the government included a clause in the contract that settlement on the sale of the Dickson Tradies car park site could not occur until development had been completed and a certificate of occupancy had been granted for the development on the nearby car park site, block 21 section 30. Because the development of 21-30 has been delayed and is yet to start, the settlement for the Dickson Tradies car park site is still some way off.

The Tradesmen's Union Club was granted a 42-month sublease of the buildings it already occupied on block 6 section 72 at a nominal rate, and the decision was made in consideration of a number of factors including the government's requirement for a delayed settlement on the Tradies car park site. Other factors in agreeing to the sublease included avoiding the potential cost to the territory of having to maintain a vacant block for an extended period of time. There are benefits to the territory in not being responsible for maintenance and upkeep on a vacant building for an extended period of time.

As part of their sublease the Canberra Tradesmen's Union Club is responsible for maintenance of the site and its buildings until the end of the sublease. The sale and purchase arrangement allowed the government to secure ownership of two key blocks of land to consolidate a significant urban renewal site, while ensuring the public car park on block 30 section 34 would remain available to the public while other significant development works took place in the Dickson area.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (6.26): I rise to move the amendment circulated in my name:

Add:

“(c) regarding Dickson, Block 25 in Section 72 (the old Downer club site):

- (i) all the valuations undertaken for the purchase of the block and the purchase price paid;
- (ii) the reason for the purchase, including the details of the Government’s intended use of the block;
- (iii) who in Government authorised the purchase;
- (iv) the date that the LDA Board, the relevant Minister and the Cabinet were advised of the purchase;
- (v) what was the average unimproved value of the site at the time of sale; and
- (vi) the planned future use of the block; and

(d) regarding Dickson, Block 22 in Section 72 (the Salvation Army land):

- (i) the reasons for the ACT Government’s interest in purchasing this block, including the details of the Government’s intended use of the block;
- (ii) why it has not been purchased; and
- (iii) all the valuations undertaken for the purchase of this block.”.

It is a very simple amendment. It is merely seeking to extend the scope to another block within section 72. It is basically all part of the same deal, and I know that the residents of the inner north are interested in all of the blocks.

Amendment to amendment agreed to.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Pets and Positive Ageing**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (6.27): There has been a lot of important discussion today about dog ownership and the necessary responsibility that goes with it. I want to take a few minutes this evening to draw the Assembly’s and the community’s

attention to the organisations Pets and Positive Ageing and the Pet Assistance and Wellbeing Service. These organisations and the work they do add another dimension to the discussion about responsible pet ownership.

I was very proud to become patron of Pets and Positive Ageing in February, following my predecessor Mary Porter's excellent work, and she still remains a patron from her new home. Pets and Positive Ageing is an important Canberra-based community organisation that is helping older Australians to keep and care for their beloved pets. It is no surprise to me that pet owners are generally healthier and happier than non-pet owners. Many of you would have seen me walking my dogs, Cooper and Bailey, around Belconnen town centre. They are always excited to see me when I come home, and they are great companions.

However, most of us do not necessarily think about what might happen to our pets if we were to move into aged accommodation or when we are no longer able to care for them properly. Pets and Positive Ageing recognises the benefits and challenges that older pet owners face, and steps in to help older Canberrans continue their relationship with their pets.

Unfortunately, sometimes older people can be socially isolated. However, owning a pet has been shown to alleviate feelings of loneliness and improve social interaction. Owning a pet has obvious physical health benefits. Pet owners have reduced risk factors for cardiovascular disease, lower stress and blood pressure. They are also likely to exercise more and have fewer visits to their GP for minor ailments.

Pets and Positive Ageing is committed to promoting these benefits, especially to aged-care facilities. Indeed pets in nursing homes are one of the few interventions successful in permanently improving the mood of hospices and nursing homes. Studies have also shown that living with pets reduces verbal aggression and anxiety in people with Alzheimer's, increases older people's perception of their wellbeing and improves their attentiveness to their own self-care needs.

Moving to an aged-care facility may be a necessary step for some older Canberrans but pet owners are understandably reluctant to leave their beloved pets. Pets and Positive Ageing is linking older Canberrans with aged-care facilities that allow residents to keep their pets. The organisation is also campaigning for pet support to be a standard service offered for in-home care packages. In addition Pets and Positive Ageing is developing a Canberra-wide program to support older pet owners during temporary health crises. Volunteers are providing in-home support for frail, low income pet owners who are experiencing a medical difficulty.

Another great community organisation that is doing some fantastic work in this space is PAWS, the Pet Assistance and Wellbeing Service run by the Northside Community Service in Dickson. PAWS helps older Canberrans to get their pets to the vet and can arrange temporary homes, pet walking, feeding and grooming.

These valuable community organisations are playing a vital role in ensuring pets' welfare, while helping older Canberrans to continue living with their pets.

I am proud to follow in the steps of Mary Porter AM and be patron of Pets and Positive Ageing. As a patron, I will be a point of contact with the organisation, attend their events—including one that is being held next month, which I encourage all members to attend—and readily offer any support that I can to help Pets and Positive Ageing achieve their goals.

I encourage everyone to support Pets and Positive Ageing so that they can continue to expand their important work. Check out their website or just have a conversation with an older friend or family member about how they are coping with their pet, and know and be confident that support and services are available.

### **Diversity, inclusivity and racism**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (6.32): I rise this evening to talk about, ironically, a topic that I believe has wasted too much time in this Assembly. But after having been preached to all morning from the other side of the chamber, I can no longer stay silent.

Time after time, I have sat silently while members on the benches opposite preach to us about diversity, inclusivity and racism. Ms Orr stated earlier that all we do is nod at stories of recent migrants and refugees at multicultural events. Ms Orr, I nod because I have been there. With respect to the stories of discrimination, adversity and harassment, I nod because I have lived it.

This government apparently stands for the Canberra community—the same government that has spent valuable time in this Assembly debating federal issues that we have no control over. This government apparently stands for vulnerable Canberrans—the same government that only last week voted against funding SHOUT, only to backflip today, putting thousands of Canberrans with a disability or health condition through unnecessary angst. This government apparently stands for diversity and inclusion—the same government that has spent most of today preaching to me about how difficult life is for people from culturally different backgrounds.

None of the members across the chamber has any idea of what life was or is like for people like me. None of the members across the chamber has been taunted in the playground, being called “black toast” or “ching chong”; being told to go back to where you came from; and having men say that they have “yellow fever” and think that it is a compliment. None of the members across the chamber has had young kids pull their eyes apart and yell out “herro” as you walk down the street, has people say, “Yeah, but what’s your real name?” or “Yeah, but where do you really come from?”

When you have lived experiences like this and you have learnt to educate, not condemn, you know the importance of what really matters. When you have lived experiences like this and you have worked hard to create the opportunities to be where you are today, only to have members opposite shove clichés and buzzwords down your throat, and only to have members opposite condemn you for not speaking up on law that is completely outside the Assembly’s jurisdiction, you know the importance of why you are here.

When you have lived experiences like this, you understand the power in your own voice in standing up against the bullying taunts from people who just do not know. To be condemned, time and time again, by members opposite for not understanding, to be accused, time and time again, by members opposite that we are failing to stand up for diversity and inclusion, is, quite frankly, insulting and condescending.

I know exactly what it is like to follow your parents everywhere—from hospital to the post office to your sister’s school—to interpret from the age of seven because even at that age your English is better than your parents’. I know exactly what it is like to see your parents spend hours, dictionary in hand, trying to interpret every single report card that you bring home. I know exactly what it is like seeing your parents get up at four in the morning to go to work in low paid, menial jobs to make ends meet, to set a good example for us, and to do their best to make a positive contribution to Australian society.

I know exactly what it is like to witness your parents kept awake all night, wondering whether the sacrifice they made to pack their bags and move to an unfamiliar country will be worth it for a better future for us.

As the Chief Minister likes to remind us almost every sitting day, ACT Labor was elected by the people of Canberra to govern for the people of Canberra. It is time that the ACT government got on with doing just that.

### **Better Hearing Australia**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (6.35): Yesterday I spoke about Heart Support-Australia, a wonderful organisation in my electorate that provides lifelong support to heart patients and their carers. Today I would like to share a few words about another outstanding community service organisation that has a significant presence in the Ginninderra electorate, the ACT branch of Better Hearing Australia.

As a not-for-profit public benevolent institution and recognised charity, Better Hearing Australia has a proud history of over 80 years in providing active support to the hearing impaired community all over Australia. Its origins date back to 1932 and the first meetings of the Victorian Lipreaders Club. In 1935 this community spread to Sydney. Better Hearing Australia first commenced operations in Canberra in 1993 as part of the Sydney branch but has since grown into its own branch, becoming an incorporated association in 2012.

The Better Hearing Australia Canberra group provide assistance to people in the ACT with hearing loss, offering information, education and support. They provide intensive training to numerous committed volunteers who then regularly help hearing impaired people in our community.

Every Tuesday afternoon in Holder and every Tuesday evening at the Woden Hellenic Club, you will find a cheery band of Better Hearing Australia volunteers and an enthusiastic community running and participating in an education program called “hearing loss management”. These sessions are designed to give new skills to those

having difficulty adjusting to their hearing loss, as well as assisting hearing aid users and helping people to make informed choices when they are at the point of obtaining hearing aids. The program welcomes people with all types of hearing loss, whether mild or profound, or anywhere in between.

In addition to their trained volunteers, the Canberra group are also lucky to have three aural rehabilitation teachers who provide training and advice on hearing loss to people in the ACT, as well as the surrounding region. Hearing awareness training is also offered to the government and local businesses as part of their access program.

Like so many other community service organisations in Canberra that do so much to help those experiencing poor health and disability of some kind, the ACT branch of Better Hearing Australia has received ongoing support from SHOUT, and I wish them the very best as they seek to continue to serve our community in the future.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.38 pm.**