



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**NINTH ASSEMBLY**

**13 SEPTEMBER 2017**

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**Wednesday, 13 September 2017**

**The Assembly met at 10 am.**

*(Quorum formed.)*

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

**Answers to questions on notice**  
**Questions 368 and 371**

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (10.03): I seek leave to make a brief statement in relation to standing order 118A as it was discussed in the chamber yesterday.

Leave granted.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you, members, for leave. Yesterday, after question time, under standing order 118A I asked Mr Gentleman for an explanation of the lateness of questions on notice 368, in relation to the development in Kinleyside Crescent, and 371 in relation to the development of Smith Street, both in Weetangera. In response, Mr Gentleman gave an excuse and informed the Assembly as follows. I quote from the proof *Hansard*:

I understand my office has been in touch with Mrs Dunne and advised that we are preparing it—

that is, an answer to the question—

so I am quite surprised that she has come in today with this motion.

According to the proof *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, Mr Gentleman said this at 3.48 pm yesterday afternoon. A member of Mr Gentleman's staff rang my senior adviser at 4.34 pm yesterday, almost an hour after Mr Gentleman's comments in the chamber, and this, according to our records in my office, is the first contact that Mr Gentleman's office has made with my office about the question on notice. So I invite Mr Gentleman to correct the record at the earliest possible opportunity or to explain to me how our records could be wrong.

**Economy—AAA credit rating**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (10.04): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes, after reviewing the 2017 ACT Budget, international ratings agency Standard & Poor's has reaffirmed the Territory's AAA credit rating, based on:

- (a) the Government's clear capacity to "successfully deliver its infrastructure plans, including private public partnerships and the Asbestos Eradication Scheme, while containing debt levels";
  - (b) the Government having "successfully addressed a number of challenges, including the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 and Commonwealth Government fiscal consolidation"; and
  - (c) the Government "reforming its tax system toward a more stable income source and away from volatile conveyance duties";
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) the ACT is one of just three States or Territories in Australia and one of only 28 sub-national jurisdictions outside the USA to hold this rating;
  - (b) the ACT has now held this rating consistently for 23 years, with only Victoria having a longer track record of holding the highest possible credit rating among the Australian States or Territories; and
  - (c) this strong ratings record has underpinned the ACT Government's investment in Canberra by facilitating affordable borrowing from both Australian and international markets; and
- (3) acknowledges that the ACT Government will:
- (a) maintain a focus on delivering Budgets consistent with a AAA rating while continuing to invest in Canberra's growth and delivery of the services our community expects and deserves;
  - (b) continue a steady path back to surplus as the local economy strengthens after a sustained period of economic challenges; and
  - (c) make continued smart use of the Territory's balance sheet to invest in infrastructure that will boost our city's longer-term productivity and growth.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to strong fiscal management. We are returning our budget to balance and maintaining a world-leading credit rating. We are doing it at the same time as delivering our positive plan to renew our schools and hospitals and invest in transport infrastructure and our neighbourhoods. For most Canberrans, good economic management is not about a positive bottom line or a AAA credit rating. It is about jobs and financial security and a government that delivers the quality services and infrastructure that we need for our growing city.

Unlike other governments throughout Australia and the globe, here in the ACT we have shown that delivering quality services and infrastructure is completely compatible with strengthening the bottom line. Prudent financial management can go hand in hand with equity. Big public investments and reforms, along with the economic opportunities that they bring, can be delivered in tandem with a balanced budget. In fact, investing in these long-term reforms and infrastructure is critical for future economic growth and, consequently, the strength of the territory's finances.

The ACT government's strong fiscal management is delivering social and economic benefits. Earlier this month that argument was further validated by the release of Standard & Poor's 2017 *RatingsDirect* report into the creditworthiness of the ACT government, which awarded our jurisdiction top marks. The report states:

The government has a sound track record of managing its economy and fiscal position through shocks such as the 2014 Commonwealth fiscal consolidation, and the 2008-2009 global financial crisis.

Canberra has been forced to confront some tough economic and fiscal headwinds in recent years, all of which were out of its own control. It is now legend that the former federal Labor government saved Australia from recession in 2008 and 2009 through its economic stimulus package, which the International Monetary Fund lauded as a "timely and significant macro-policy response which cushioned the domestic impact of the global financial crisis".

While there is no doubt that the global financial crisis was a challenge for the ACT, for us the real shock came with the election of the current Liberal government and its disastrous 2014 budget, which slashed jobs and began the morale-destroying APS bargaining crusade which has seen wages stagnate in the departments and agencies that provide jobs to our residents and in turn create demand for our 26,000 local businesses. The Standard & Poor's assessment points out:

The ACT experienced a milder slowdown than the other states during the global financial crisis in 2009.

However, with the Commonwealth government's announcement of fiscal consolidation in 2014, the ACT's economy was hit disproportionately harder than other states.

We were subject to the election of a federal government that continues to be ideologically opposed to the role of the public sector. For the Liberals, it was about small government; it was about free market fundamentalism that sought to see the role of the public service minimised, dislocated and, where possible, eradicated. My own electorate has suffered through thousands of commonwealth public servants being cut or relocated from Woden town centre. That anti-Canberra agenda is still being continued to this day with the APVMA relocation to Armidale and the continued threats of more to come, including talk just this week of Comcare being moved to Geelong.

This had an impact on the ACT economy and the budget. But one of the reasons why Canberra was able to manage through this time is that we had one government here in Canberra that was prepared to stand up for Canberrans. Our Labor government stepped up to keep the economy growing when there was a real risk of our growth going backwards. It invested in Canberra when other governments were withdrawing their presence.

The government in the ACT introduced a stimulus package, including initiatives designed to provide confidence and economic stimulus to the ACT building and

construction industry. We invested in infrastructure, with city-shaping projects like light rail, which are creating jobs and building confidence as well as stimulating urban regeneration right along the route. We saw investment in our health system grow, with the hiring of more medical staff, the opening of the Canberra Centenary Hospital for Women and Children and the beginning of the construction of the University of Canberra public hospital.

Beyond the negative economic blows, we were also affected by other adverse fiscal shocks. During this period we were also unavoidably hit with the Mr Fluffy crisis, which required the ACT government to take leadership and make tough but fair decisions. When the commonwealth failed to take responsibility for decisions pre self-government, we had no choice but to accept a significant loan to solve the issues threatening the health of Canberrans once and for all through the asbestos eradication scheme.

Throughout these shocks and challenges, the government has made smart use of the territory's balance sheet to keep our city growing. The ACT's budget went into deficit so that household budgets across Canberra did not have to. As the Standard & Poor's report states:

To support the economy during the slowdown, the ACT's fiscal strategy allowed it to maintain a high level of its own spending.

That strategy saw the government leverage our strong balance sheet for borrowing. Importantly, that financing was taken on to fund large-scale investments that will leave our city better off long after the money is repaid. As the report outlines:

We consider—

—that is, Standard & Poor's—

the ACT's debt management to be generally prudent, with debt used to fund capital expenditure and not operating expenses.

Madam Speaker, it is smart use of financing to fund the infrastructure needs of our growing city. That was not the approach advocated by the opposition. Instead of supporting economic stimulus for Canberra, they branded it “debt, deficit and deceit”. They would have replicated the approach of the New South Wales and Queensland governments of the time, doubling down on large-scale austerity at the expense of public services. They would have taken an axe to government in their short-sighted quest for a balanced budget, instead of providing the economic assistance that our city desperately needed.

Even as late as the last election, the Liberals would have torn up the light rail contracts, at the expense of \$250 million of ratepayers' money, which would have put our credit rating at risk, dampened business confidence and seen further unemployment. Their fiscal profligacy was further on display when they pledged to slow down the renewal of the Northbourne corridor, which would have seen the territory miss out on \$60 million in payments under the commonwealth's asset recycling scheme.

Gratefully, we did not take that approach. Thanks to Andrew Barr's strong economic management, years later the ACT economy has grown substantially, the population is booming and we have continued our steady climb back to a balanced budget. Standard & Poor's announced earlier this month that we have continued to retain a AAA credit rating, despite ongoing threats from the commonwealth through their continued efficiency dividends, relocation agenda and extended uncertainty about their own credit rating.

You might ask, Madam Speaker, how credit ratings are actually determined. Beyond the components outside the ACT government's control, such as national economic factors or per capita income, economists look at a variety of hard numbers like the level of government borrowing, the level of net government debt, economic growth forecasts and business confidence surveys. Then ratings agencies look at more qualitative factors like political risks, the government's economic and spending agenda, for what purposes the debt is being accrued, and the rating agency's confidence in the government's ability to follow through on its financial promises and agenda.

Using these criteria, Standard & Poor's have determined that the ACT is just one of three Australian states or territories, and only one of 28 sub-national jurisdictions around the world, outside of the United States, deserving of holding a AAA credit rating. In comparison to our rating, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania have only been able to attain AA+ credit ratings. In the cases of both Queensland and Western Australia, it is notable that the then governments of both of those states undertook major expenditure-cutting exercises in the name of so-called "fiscal consolidation" and ensuring creditworthiness. In contrast, we have still been able to pursue large-scale city-building projects.

Furthermore, the report states that "longer-term tax reforms, such as the changes to land tax, will also support the ACT's budget in the future" by making revenue sources more stable and less subject to market fluctuations, while also reducing the detrimental economic impacts of taxation or, in other words, any deadweight losses. But where I think we stand out from the pack is that the ACT government's tax reform package has actually made the journey back to surplus an equitable one, whereas governments in other jurisdictions have undeniably increased inequality due to their one-sided approaches to reducing deficits. To quote Standard & Poor's:

We expect the reform package to be revenue-neutral, and more progressive and stable than the former tax regime.

Where Campbell Newman, Barry O'Farrell and Joe Hockey all decimated government-funded support services with an austerity approach that disproportionately affected women and disproportionately affected people with disabilities, immigrants and those on the lower end of the socio-economic scale, our changes in the tax mix have meant that our service provision has been better than ever, while a greater proportion of revenue is collected from those with higher incomes and higher net wealth than ever before. We have actually managed to pull off the trick of becoming a more equitable government during a downturn.

So where do we go from here, Madam Speaker? Former Treasurer Wayne Swan is often fond of the saying that governments have to be Keynesians on the way down and Keynesians on the way up. That is what we are doing here in the ACT. As the city starts to fully recover from the commonwealth government's public service cuts, Canberra is once again standing on its own two feet and the private sector is achieving lift off. The data exhibits how well our economy is doing. Recent ABS data shows that state final demand in the ACT grew by 5.1 per cent in the 2016-17 financial year, just above Treasury forecasts and the second highest outcome of any Australian jurisdiction. In addition, retail trade spending grew by 3.8 per cent through the year to July 2017 and private sector job ads were up a third over the past year.

As the ACT becomes less in need of government stimulus, we are paring back spending growth. While recent budgets have seen spending growth trend at a forecasted rate of 5.4 per cent, future spending will grow at a more modest 3.7 per cent. And we are delivering inclusive growth, not just racking up surpluses for the sake of it. We are delivering on a positive plan to renew our schools, hospitals, transport infrastructure and our neighbourhoods by making large, long-term investments in the future.

That includes light rail to Woden and the surgical procedures, interventional radiology and emergency centre at Canberra Hospital, both of which are in my own electorate, as well as upgrades to the law courts precinct and further residential expansion of Canberra into the Molonglo Valley, west Belconnen and the West Basin. As the Standard & Poor's report states:

The ACT's fiscal strategy is not particularly onerous and focuses on supporting the economy in the short run by creating jobs and delivering services, sustaining a strong operating balance during the medium-term, and investing in important infrastructure.

Instead of making government services smaller, we are making them smarter. As part of this effort, we have shifted multiple Access Canberra services online to free up public servants from performing face-to-face administrative duties and instead focus on policy development and implementation. An effective balanced budget and a AAA credit rating are both part of this strategy. The budgetary position will mean that less future spending will be used in paying off previously accumulated debts, while the credit rating will ensure that the paying off of these debts will be at favourable interest rates.

In conclusion, the decisions that our Labor government took in prior budgets—decisions that bucked the trend of governments throughout Australia and the world—have been vindicated. To quote Standard & Poor's, the ACT's financial management:

... compares favorably to domestic and international peers. It has successfully addressed a number of challenges, including the global financial crisis in 2008-2009, and Commonwealth government fiscal consolidation. It is also addressing the substantial costs involved in remediating asbestos issues in private dwellings within budget. Further, it is reforming its tax system toward a more stable income source and away from volatile conveyance duties.

That is a direct quote from Standard & Poor's. Our investments and our priorities reflect our community's progressive values and are delivering inclusive growth. The report from Standard & Poor's is more irrefutable evidence that the government has insulated the ACT economy from external shocks, diversified our industries and continued to invest in public projects that will ensure that Canberra remains the most livable city that delivers social and economic benefits for all Canberrans.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.18): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion brought forward by Mr Steel today. The motion speaks of the local economy strengthening after a sustained period of economic challenges. Of course, the Canberra Liberals welcome the fact that a number of the recent economic indicators for the ACT are strong. Business indicators in confidence and growth, as well as tourism numbers, are doing well, and I hope that as a jurisdiction we continue to improve on these numbers. The ACT government and the Chief Minister cannot be content with where we are politically because many Canberra businesses are struggling as a direct result of increasing ACT government fees, taxes, charges, rates, duties and other decisions.

For example, local businesses in the suburb of Mitchell are enduring the light rail construction at the moment and many businesses there are doing it very tough particularly because of a lack of access but also because of a number of other issues, especially in the urban services space. As a further blow, even once construction of the tram line is complete, most of these businesses will not have reasonable proximity to a tram stop. In effect, they are getting all the pain but they are not getting any of the gain.

More generally, Labor and the Greens continue to claim that the ACT's economic position is purely a result of the ACT government's decisions. The government, particularly the Chief Minister, often use the ACT's state final demand as a measure of economic success. It is a measure of the total value of goods and services sold in the territory for either consumption or retention as an asset. The driver of the ACT's state final demand is primarily the commonwealth government. Commonwealth consumption and capital expenditure make up 60 per cent of state final demand in the territory. Even the Chief Minister acknowledges that reality.

What the Chief Minister does not seem to acknowledge is that the commonwealth contribution to state final demand has grown enormously since self-government, from 45 per cent in 1989 to 51 per cent in 2001, when Labor came to power, and then to about 60 per cent by mid-2012, where it remains today. When the idea of a dramatic increase in the commonwealth's share of state final demand was pointed out to the Chief Minister in estimates, he said he found the suggestion "extraordinary". He said:

Given that there was virtually nothing here but the commonwealth government at the time of self-government, I find that an extraordinary figure.

The reality is that the Chief Minister's tenure as Treasurer, since his first budget in 2012, coincides with the largest relative contribution by the commonwealth to state final demand since the ABS data series began in the mid-1980s. It is the

commonwealth that lies behind the ACT's economic performance and its average incomes which are so high. The only challenge the Treasurer has faced is how to get his hands on the money and, of course, the subsequent waste. How to get hold of the money is simple enough: increase revenue from rates and land taxes and lease variation charges and anything else that extracts money from people who simply want to live in our city.

This motion trumpets the government's tax reforms which have resulted in the recent savage rates increases that have caused such harm to the people of the ACT and which will snowball in the coming years unless the government finally puts the brakes on this unfair regime. I will be dealing with this later in the day in a motion listed on the notice paper.

This motion also trumpets the government's ability to successfully deliver infrastructure. Let us examine a few recent examples—and the Cotter Dam springs to mind. That is a project that the government said in 2008 would cost \$145 million. By 2013 that figure had blown out to more than \$400 million, and it finished up at about \$410 million. There were a whole host of issues, and we know that Andrew Barr was warned about the cost blowouts before going ahead with the project. Importantly, at the time the project was called in, I believe by Mr Barr as the planning minister, the project was in the vicinity of \$145 million publicly, but privately I gather they knew it was more like \$360 million.

The Gungahlin Drive extension is yet another infrastructure project emblematic of this government's management. For years, motorists commuting to and from Gungahlin spent time in the GDE car park. It was a single lane road originally costed to be a dual carriageway at \$50 million. They did half that for \$48 million and it finished up at \$200 million. Unfortunately, the poor foresight with regard to roads applies to just about every other major thoroughfare in Gungahlin. Horse Park Drive and Gundaroo Drive are just a couple.

However, the problem is not limited to roads. The AMC, our supposedly new human rights compliant jail, was full the day it opened and has been experiencing overcrowding and security issues ever since. Even in recent weeks the government seemed to brag about the amount of contraband that had got into the prison. It was quite extraordinary. And if they are not failing to deliver projects, they are failing to maintain them, as evidenced by the situation at the Canberra Hospital. When it comes to problems with infrastructure delivery and maintenance, the ACT government has it down pat. Everything they touch seems to blow out in cost and in time.

Major international and national reports show long-term decline or stagnation in the ACT with regard to literacy and numeracy, in science and in maths. Despite spending far more per student on government schools than the states do, our results are very similar to those in Victoria. A recent Auditor-General's report shows that our results are far worse than comparable schools in the rest of Australia. All these reports seem to be ignored by the government, which is simply unwilling to look at the facts.

It is all very well to cling to a handful of economic indicators that are mainly a result of commonwealth expenditure in the ACT, but what we really need to look at is this

government's management of the policies, assets and infrastructure that we all depend on. The list of failures across government is long: Bimberi and youth protection; the bush healing farm and just about every other area of Indigenous policy; the expansion of bikie gangs; the urban planning issues; confusion over public transport; dog attacks and many others.

The motion today arises from S&P's recent reaffirmation of the territory's AAA credit rating, at a cost of approximately \$150,000 for this rating. The rating is an assessment of the government's capacity to meet its financial commitments. Frankly, this is not as big a claim as those opposite would like to pretend it is. The ACT has one of the highest average incomes of any state or territory in the country. In fact, the ACT's average incomes would probably rival those of just about every other jurisdiction in the world. As has already been discussed, large expenditure by the commonwealth is a major factor in this. So if the ACT government cannot be a leader and achieve a relatively good credit risk then no government can. When you consider the amount of commonwealth expenditure and the average incomes we have in the ACT, simply getting a AAA credit rating—which is the same as the commonwealth's—I do not think is as big an achievement as those opposite would like to tell us.

What the credit rating tells us is simply the ability of this government to meet its obligations. The credit rating does not tell us about the real test of good government; it does not tell us about whether citizens are actually getting value for money out of the rates, taxes, fees and charges that they pay. The credit rating does not tell us whether the ACT's citizens are receiving high quality public services as a result of the ever-increasing taxes, fees and charges that we all pay.

The Canberra Liberals believe that the credit rating being a AAA is a good thing; there is no doubt about that. We also believe many of the economic indicators are worth celebrating, but there are many other things that are real challenges for the ACT, and we call on the government to make sure that they are addressing the real issues of concern for the people of Canberra, such as the delivery of essential services.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (10.29): I basically support Mr Steel's motion. The Greens, of course, support a sustainable society, which is more than economics; it means it needs to be environmentally sustainable, socially sustainable and economically and financially sustainable, which is where the last point of Mr Steel's motion is going. I will just talk about some of the broader issues: firstly, financial sustainability. The credit rating by itself and the surplus by itself are not the point. As Mr Coe pointed out, what is really important is what we do with the money, rather than the credit rating.

The Greens, of course, support the return to balanced budgets because over the long run there actually is no choice. We have to have a balanced budget both financially and, as I will point out in a minute, environmentally. We are pleased the ACT is currently financially sustainable because it means we can invest in things where there are gaps. We have been talking about affordable housing at some length and there are lots of other places where there are gaps—footpath maintenance and trees come to

mind. I am looking forward to some investments in these areas, given our financial stability.

But, as I said, it is not just financial stability; social sustainability is equally important, and that is the second issue. We need a society that includes everybody. And that is why I asked the question yesterday about the impact of rates and how we need to look at that impact on different people in different situations in our community. The third, of course, is environmental sustainability. I will not bore the Assembly by repeating my speech from last sitting week, but I will point out the equation again: environmental impact is population times consumption times technology. If we do not have a sustainable economy, a sustainable society in Canberra, we need to get one, and we clearly do not. People in Canberra are clearly consuming a lot more than the average person.

The fourth issue is credit ratings. As I said, it was good to hear Mr Coe's scepticism about this. We really need to be careful about our focus on credit ratings. At the beginning of the GFC I worked for a financial company, and I am very aware that the GFC showed that credit ratings are just another financial product. To some extent you pay your money to the rating agencies and that influences the result you get, but it is a financial product. We found that, before the GFC, home loans were bundled, sliced and rated into securitised products which were all wonderfully rated. In the USA many AAA products saw a 100 per cent loss. I am not suggesting in any way that the ACT is at that level; I am just saying that we need to have a very healthy scepticism as to what the AAA rating may be measuring.

As has been indirectly pointed out by Mr Steel and more directly by Mr Coe, given the particular economic circumstances of the ACT, to quite an extent our AAA rating is a reflection of the commonwealth's ratings. So this is positive for the ACT but not something that we can take total credit for. On that note, we should all remember that, regardless of what we are doing, if the federal government's credit rating is downgraded this will impact us, in that no Australian state or territory jurisdiction can have a rating higher than the commonwealth government.

The fifth issue I want to talk about is growth. The motion talks about continuing to invest in Canberra's growth, and there is the naive assumption that growth is always good. As I said, I will not repeat my speech of last sitting week, but growth is not always good. It is definitely not always good from an environmental point of view, but it is also not always good from a social point of view. Many studies have come to the conclusion that once a society reaches a reasonable level of affluence—we are all fed and we all have shelter and clothing—additional financial prosperity does not increase happiness. In fact, a lot of academic research—Pacitti started this—suggests that as a society gets less equal unhappiness goes up, regardless of the fact that potentially the people at the bottom of the pile may still be a lot better off than they were 10 to 20 years ago or than people in some other countries.

So GDP is a very, very flawed measure of prosperity. It was never intended to be a measure of quality of life or the environment, and it is not. As I said before, economic growth driven by population growth and consumption is environmentally unsustainable and does not necessarily deliver social benefits.

In conclusion, I support this motion and the Greens support the motion, but, as even Mr Coe said, surpluses and credit ratings are not the whole point of this; it is what the government can deliver that is more important. Credit ratings are demonstrably not a brilliant indicator of financial sustainability, and we seek a sustainable Canberra—sustainable environmentally, socially and economically—more than one that is growing potentially unsustainably.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (10.36): I thank Mr Steel for moving this important motion this morning, recognising that the independent international ratings agency Standard & Poor's has reaffirmed the territory's AAA credit rating after reviewing the fiscal plans the government laid out in the 2017 budget.

Madam Speaker, I will be the first to acknowledge that for some people prudent fiscal management is not seen as a particularly sexy topic. I acknowledge this. Despite the lack of razzle-dazzle that can come at times with budget management, it is critically important to manage our budget well so that we can deliver high quality services today and into the future; support local jobs through tough times and encourage their rapid expansion in periods of economic growth; and ensure that we are catering to an increased population, which will continue to be a factor in our city's lived experience. I have said before in this place that I do not think that the business of making babies is going to go out of style any time soon, so our population is going to continue to increase and the government needs to focus on sound fiscal management to invest in this city for the years to come. It is a task that has been my focus for the past six years as Treasurer and will continue to be a focus for the government over this term of the Assembly.

The AAA credit rating is the highest possible credit rating assigned by international ratings agencies. Whilst we have heard in contributions from Mr Coe and Ms Le Couteur that to a certain extent it does not matter, I am relatively certain that, were the territory's fiscal position to slip to the extent that credit rating agencies were to downgrade the ACT's credit rating, and were that downgrade as a result of actions of the territory government, we would be hearing quite a lot about the importance of our credit rating. In this instance, it is one of those circumstances where, in the context of continued vigilance and sound fiscal management, the reward is that there is not a debate in relation to this matter.

I am absolutely certain that, had the opposition won the election last year and ripped up the contract with the light rail consortium, that would have triggered a credit rating downgrade. In addition to prudent fiscal management and the state of the territory's finances, ripping up contracts is not something that is consistent with a AAA-rated jurisdiction. That would have put the ACT at extreme risk of losing its credit rating, and that certainly would have had a big impact on investment in the ACT.

The government has worked very hard to ensure that the AAA credit rating, the highest possible rating, one that is only assigned to an entity that has an "extremely strong capacity to meet its financial commitments", remains the case for the territory.

We have improved the territory's budget bottom line by \$400 million since the peak of the Mr Fluffy impact and the hit to our books from the commonwealth government's horror 2014 budget, the budget that saw Joe Hockey sacked—he is now off in Washington—and then Prime Minister Tony Abbott sacked by his own party.

That budget and that process, combined with Mr Fluffy, was the single biggest economic shock to hit this territory in its history. We have climbed our way out of that situation. The final result for 2016-17 shows a territory budget broadly in balance, with the deficit having shrunk to around \$10 million. And we are steadily and determinedly working towards a balanced budget in 2018-19 and modest surpluses across the forward estimates period.

We have achieved this whilst continuing to grow our investment in services for Canberrans. The 2017 territory budget included \$443 million in new health investments—like the SPIRE centre at the Canberra Hospital and more nurse-led walk-in centres—on top of the \$1.6 billion that we annually invest in the health and wellbeing of Canberrans each year. The budget delivered a \$210 million investment in expanding and upgrading our local schools. This is in addition to the \$1.2 billion we invest each year to give all Canberra kids access to a great education. And the budget delivered major new support for those within our community who need it, including kids who cannot live in their family homes, new migrants, Indigenous Canberrans, and our LGBTIQ community.

It is often said that there is no clearer indication of a government's values than where it invests its budget each year. The values of this government are clearly on display in this budget, which shows that we are committed to delivering a better Canberra for everyone. A central part of our plan for a better city is building the infrastructure that will maintain and improve Canberra's livability as our population grows. We have a \$2.8 billion pipeline of capital works over the next four years which will see better transport, better health, better education, and better community and municipal infrastructure for Canberrans.

The territory's AAA credit rating supports that investment by giving us reliable access to financial markets when we need it to fund this infrastructure work. The infrastructure that we are building today will be used by generations of Canberrans. These are projects with a lifespan of decades and centuries, not weeks, months and years. When we are building infrastructure that will benefit generations of Canberrans, it is entirely reasonable that we pay for this infrastructure over an extended period of time, not in one budget cycle. It simply would not be fair to expect those who live in the city right now to pay for 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90 or 100 years worth of infrastructure up front today.

That is why we borrow through domestic and international financial markets. Our AAA credit rating helps the government do so at a lower cost than would otherwise be the case. While there are many factors that contribute to the interest rates that we pay, including overall trends in the bond market, the broader national economy and competition for finance from other jurisdictions, it has been estimated that having the highest possible credit rating reduces our borrowing costs by something like five to

10 basis points. For every \$100 million that we borrow, that can mean between \$50,000 and \$100,000 saved annually on that interest bill.

We are one of only three AAA-rated states or territories in this country. I think this is an important point to make in this context: the ACT, New South Wales and Victoria have a AAA credit rating, and other states and territories do not, largely as a result of decisions they have taken in their own budgets. It is not automatic that, because the Australian government has a particular credit rating, every state and territory has the same credit rating. We cannot have a higher credit rating, but we can certainly have a lower credit rating than the Australian government. And there are just 26 sub-national jurisdictions in the world, outside of the US, that hold this highest possible credit rating. It helps the government to attract more business to Canberra from interstate and from overseas, and that helps in the continued diversification of the economy.

We have had a lot of wins in recent times in attracting that new investment into the city. Examples are Singapore Airlines, Qatar Airways, the recent announcement from Microsoft, and the University of New South Wales looking to expand its footprint in Canberra. Our AAA credit rating is a clear signal to those investors, and to thousands of others in this country and around the world, that Canberra has a stable and growing economy, strong public finances and, importantly, a clear pipeline of public infrastructure investment supported by sensible and manageable borrowing.

Looking ahead, Standard & Poor's have confirmed that our budget plans are credible, that our infrastructure delivery plans are credible, and that the risks to the ACT predominantly lie in the policy decisions of the commonwealth government. I can assure the Assembly that the ACT government will continue to focus on delivering budgets consistent with the AAA credit rating, because we understand that stable, prudent and responsible financial management delivers real and practical benefits for the Canberra community. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS CODY** (Murrumbidgee) (10.46): I would like to thank Mr Steel for bringing this motion on. How good is this? We have kept our AAA credit rating. I remember when a very big deal used to be made of a AAA credit rating. When one of my friends pointed out the reporting to me the other day, it did not seem as big a deal as it used to be. I think it is because Canberra people have got used to the smart fiscal management of Mr Barr.

While I am glad of their confidence, I think it still deserves some celebrating. I took the time to look up the report by Standard & Poor's. They pointed out that the government has successfully addressed a number of challenges, including the global financial crisis in 2008-09 and commonwealth government fiscal consolidation. That is about as big a compliment as money people can hand out. And it is a big contrast, too: a contrast to the last time the Liberals were in power in the ACT.

I know a lot of people cannot remember back then; it was a very long time ago. But I remember. I remember what happened when the Liberals were in government in this place and John Howard ripped the guts out of the local economy. It is not hard to remember what the Canberra Liberals did. They did nothing. They let the economy fall apart. Not only were there tens of thousands of federal public servants laid off, but

the lack of action from the Canberra Liberals meant that local private sector businesses went under, laying off staff and sending us into a downward spiral.

This time around, when the federal Liberals tried the same thing, our local economy stayed strong. Why is that? I will tell you why. It is because an ACT Labor government has been there to lean in, to make local investment, to pick up the slack. The work of this ACT Labor government has meant that not only has a downturn been avoided but our economy has kept growing. For real people out there, that means real jobs: jobs building light rail, jobs upgrading infrastructure, jobs in construction and the supply chain for our urban renewal. It also means that we will get the benefit of that infrastructure for decades to come.

The good fiscal management of Mr Barr has meant our economy can keep strong. The AAA credit rating is one factor that can mean we pay a slightly lower interest rate, meaning we can stretch to do a little bit more. For many Canberrans, that little bit more that we do is what keeps them working, what delivers their kids a top-class vocational education system, and what will see them enjoy brilliant urban infrastructure for decades to come. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**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) (10.50): I am pleased to rise in support of this motion and in particular to speak briefly about the critically important services that a AAA credit rating enables the government to deliver.

As I have said before in this place, and many times during last year's election campaign, vibrant, sustainable and inclusive cities do not just happen; they are built by governments with a vision for a better future. ACT Labor went to the last election with a plan to keep the Canberra we love but make it even better in a time of significant change. Canberrans endorsed that plan. Canberrans expect that this government will deliver on its promises and do so in a fiscally responsible manner. That is exactly what this latest budget has done, and that is exactly why Standard & Poor's has confirmed the AAA credit rating yet again.

Canberrans expect their government to invest in support for those who otherwise might be left behind, disadvantaged or simply not as engaged and included as they should be. Those Canberrans deserve high quality, accessible and effective services to be available when they need them. Our community expects and deserves comprehensive services for the disadvantaged. That is why this government spends \$203 million a year on social housing services; \$187 million a year on mental health, justice health and alcohol and drug programs; \$197 million on rehabilitation, aged and community care health services; \$25 million on community participation programs; and \$15 million a year to fund Legal Aid services and a wide range of concessions programs.

Our community also expects and deserves accessible services for Canberrans with a disability. This government provides hundreds of millions of dollars each year to the NDIS for ongoing disability programs and services. In this budget we have met our

election commitments to Canberrans with a disability, including providing \$2.2 million to strengthen the Office for Disability, for oversight of disability issues, including the implementation of the NDIS; \$1.8 million to establish the ACT senior practitioner to provide oversight of the use of restrictive practices, maximising vulnerable Canberrans' quality of life and safeguarding their rights; \$200,000 in funding for new disability access grants to deliver training, increase awareness and provide infrastructure modifications to increase opportunities for Canberrans with a disability to participate in community and voluntary groups; \$4.6 million to provide transport for ACT public school students with a disability; and \$3 million to further support students with a disability to continue to have equitable access and participation in ACT public schools. And it includes the development of a disability justice strategy to ensure that people with disability are treated equally before the law and in the justice system.

Our community expects and deserves services to support and celebrate multicultural Canberra, which we will again be talking about shortly. We encourage stronger social cohesion through events like the National Multicultural Festival, multicultural community broadcasters and community participation programs. In the 2017-18 budget, the ACT government will do more with new initiatives, including \$1.4 million for refugees, asylum seekers and other new migrants to improve their English language skills through expanding English language programs and, in particular, supporting them to enter the workforce with the assistance of a job brokerage service.

Our community expects and deserves culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. In this budget, the government is supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities with a range of targeted services in health, early childhood development and parenting, including \$12 million for a new Aboriginal health facility, partnered with Winnunga Nimmityjah, to deliver culturally appropriate, safe and holistic health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. It is also providing over \$500,000 to continue the growing healthy families program in 2017-18 and \$100,000 over four years in new seed funding grants for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations.

This budget delivered record funding into child and youth protection and out of home care services to ensure that we can meet the vigilance of Canberrans and continue to address the challenge of family and domestic violence in our community.

Put simply, as the Chief Minister has said and as Mr Steel has said, the ACT's AAA credit rating allows this government to responsibly borrow money at the best rate for big investments in infrastructure, health and education, to respond to challenges such as the GFC or Mr Fluffy, and to deliver these critical services for vulnerable, disadvantaged and disconnected Canberrans so that we can build a vibrant, sustainable and inclusive Canberra for the future.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (10.55), in reply: It is hard for the opposition to argue with the Standard & Poor's report. What is revealing and remarkable is not just the credit rating itself and the benefits that this provides us in terms of access to reliable

finance in the future but the commentary in the S&P report, which Mr Coe has not been able to refute today.

Let me just reiterate this by quoting Standard & Poor's. They said that the ACT's financial management:

... compares favorably to domestic and international peers. It has successfully addressed a number of challenges, including the global financial crisis in 2008-2009, and Commonwealth government fiscal consolidation. It is also addressing the substantial costs involved in remediating asbestos issues in private dwellings within budget. Further, it is reforming its tax system toward a more stable income source and away from volatile conveyance duties.

That is the approach that the government has taken.

There were alternatives to this path. In October last year, the Liberal Party bundled up their low doc, junk policies and took them to the market. But no-one was buying their junk policies, not only because many of the policies were worthless but because it would have put at risk the strong credit rating of the ACT government.

The question for the opposition leader is: will we see the junk policies return from the dead this term in a sub-prime opposition, committing again to tearing up contracts, threatening jobs and dampening investment confidence, with the potential for higher borrowing rates and diving demand in the ACT economy affecting local businesses? And there is the weak advocacy from those opposite that continues to see their Liberal colleagues on the hill tearing away at the contribution that the commonwealth and its agencies make to our ACT economy and the state final demand that Mr Coe placed so much emphasis on in his contribution today.

But the worst charge of all that can be levelled against the opposition is that they just have a pure lack of policy ambition, particularly to invest in productive infrastructure—and public transport in particular. You may remember that at the election last year they promised they would get to surplus more quickly. They wanted to run up surpluses for the sake of it, with no real plans to invest in our community, which is also important for economic growth. You have to ask: what is it exactly that they would have to have done to achieve surplus more quickly? You can only come to the conclusion that they would have done what Liberals have done all around the country: cut ACT government services to the bone.

It is very clear from the Standard & Poor's report that the ACT government has strong fiscal management. And our strong fiscal management is delivering social and economic benefits for the Canberra community. The ACT Labor government went to the last election with a positive plan to renew our schools, hospitals, transport infrastructure and neighbourhoods, and we are delivering these commitments, all the while returning our budget to balance and maintaining our world-leading credit rating.

Our commitment to strong fiscal management means that we can invest in the infrastructure our growing city needs, and deliver policies and programs that work to foster inclusion and support the most vulnerable in our community. Our investments

and our priorities reflect our community's progressive values, and we will continue to deliver the reforms and investments that benefit all Canberrans.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **International Mother Language Day**

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.58): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) in 1999, the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation proclaimed annual observance of International Mother Language Day on 21 February;
- (b) that about 170 languages are spoken in Canberra;
- (c) the significance of preserving Indigenous languages as a link to Indigenous culture and histories and as an expression of identity;
- (d) the place of language instruction in government and non-government schools and in other organisations such as the 40 community language schools in the ACT;
- (e) the social, cultural and economic benefits of multi-lingualism to the ACT and Australia; and
- (f) the encouragement to learning a language other than English contained in the government's ACT Language Policy; and

(2) calls on the ACT government to observe International Mother Language Day in the ACT to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by the people around the world, especially those in Canberra, through:

- (a) establishing collections and displays, sometimes called an "Ekushey Corner", at ACT Libraries to promote and protect mother languages;
- (b) promote the active participation, revitalisation and maintenance of local Indigenous languages;
- (c) supporting the construction of a monument in Canberra dedicated to the mother languages of Australians;
- (d) continuing the ACT Heritage Library's collection of oral history as a means of preserving the multi-lingual inheritance of the ACT; and
- (e) supporting second language instruction in schools.

The Canberra community is a rich tapestry of cultures and languages. We have seen the ACT repeatedly come together and celebrate our multiculturalism through events

such as Ramadan, Diwali, Christmas, the Nara Candle Festival, Chinese New Year and many other similar events. The Canberra Liberals believe that the celebration and observance of International Mother Language Day reinforces the ACT's pledge to create an inclusive community. My motion today outlines actions that I think would further emphasise our territory's commitment to minority languages and, importantly, to the rights of cultural identity.

The Canberra Liberals believe it is vital that our community is deeply connected to our heritage—our heritage both locally and abroad. We in the Canberra Liberals of course recognise this diversity. The Canberra Liberals recognise and represent a Canberra that is multicultural. We recognise the value of languages, and that language is intrinsically linked to culture and the importance of supporting the preservation of languages that are spoken here in Canberra or that were spoken by Canberrans.

Language has been established in the international community as an integral human right under multiple instruments. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

This principle has further been enshrined in our own Human Rights Act, with section 27 asserting that any person who belongs to a linguistic minority must not be denied the right, with other members of the minority, to use their language. When these rights are infringed, it is detrimental to the lingual and cultural community, and the broader social fabric and character of our society.

Passionate political movements have been inspired by language and its foundation as a significant part of cultural identity. The date chosen by UNESCO to observe International Mother Language Day, 21 February, is itself a tribute to the language movement of Bangladesh, and in recognition of this fact I also recognise and pay tribute to members of our Bangladeshi and multicultural community here today.

In 1948 the government of the Dominion of Pakistan declared Urdu as the sole national language of the East Bengal province, now known as Bangladesh. The Bengali-speaking people made up the majority of the population, and rose in opposition to defend their language and culture. Protests were held, with the movement reaching a climax on 21 February 1952, when student protesters were killed by police.

In 1956 the constitution of Pakistan was amended to include Bengali as an official language, a direct response to the perseverance of the language movement by the Bangladeshi people. In Bangladesh, Language Movement Day, 21 February, is now observed as a national holiday, commemorating the defenders of their language and their identity. It demonstrates the powerful relationship people have with their language, and the Canberra Liberals believe that the ACT government should support that identity, too.

The relationship between language and culture is also demonstrated in our own Indigenous community. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a deep spiritual connection to the land, and that closeness is further expressed through each group's unique language and dialect. The passing down of oral history has long been an essential tenet of Indigenous culture and so many other cultures around the world.

Members of Canberra's Indigenous community are actively working to revitalise the Indigenous language of the Ngunnawal people. The Ngaiyurriija Ngunnawal Language Group and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies are working cooperatively to develop a language program for school students and teachers. ABS statistics show that just over 10 per cent of the ACT's Indigenous population aged 15 and over speak an Indigenous language, which is about half the national average. In contrast, around 70 per cent of the same group identify with a clan, tribal or language group.

The 2017 languages pathway plan in Canberra public schools allows for schools to offer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Currently, no public schools have any Indigenous language programs. The Canberra Liberals strongly encourage the ACT government to work with the Indigenous community to take advantage of the unique opportunity to teach Aboriginal languages in schools.

We see the reinforcement of cultural identity and growing linguistic variety in language statistics. Currently, over 170 different languages are spoken throughout the ACT. In 2011, 18 per cent of Canberrans, nearly 65,000 people, spoke a language other than English at home. The recent census reveals that that number has increased to 22 per cent, slowly closing in on a quarter of our population. There are around 11,000 people who speak Mandarin and Cantonese in the ACT; 3,800 Vietnamese speakers; 3,300 Italian speakers; and thousands more who speak Spanish, Greek, Arabic, Croatian, German, Bengali and many others.

The assortment of languages spoken in the territory is increasing every year. The fastest growing languages within Canberra are: Karen, Malayalam, Nepali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Teluga, Afrikaans, Dinka, Shona and Urdu. With each passing year, our society is growing more multilingual, providing an opportunity for the ACT government to support these ever-expanding communities.

While language binds us, it can also be an obstacle. Nearly two per cent of Canberrans do not speak English well. In my own electorate, the Gungahlin region reported 28 per cent of people having difficulty communicating in English, the highest proportion in the territory. The ACT language policy includes a specific policy aim:

That English language programs are readily available to Canberrans who wish to learn the English language.

The policy summarises it by saying:

Learning English is a key tool for empowering all Canberrans to fully participate in all aspects of community life.

It is imperative that these courses are available to support social cohesion throughout the territory.

Where there is a language barrier, the contribution of interpreters cannot be understated. Interpreters for those who do not speak English well, and for those in the deaf community, perform an invaluable service. From something as simple as paying a bill to something as complex as consent to a major medical procedure, interpreters assist others to engage with their world. Not only do interpreters bridge a lingual divide; they must also contextualise cultural differences to be effective communicators. Interpreters provide a conduit for others to share in the community, and help guarantee that an individual's rights are not compromised by an inability to communicate. Of course, often interpreters are formalised, but so often it is informal support provided by family members.

Learning and speaking a different language involves developing intercultural skills and an understanding of diversity. The 2016 census data revealed that over 45 per cent of Canberrans had one or both parents born overseas. In this increasingly globalised society, it is important that we equip the next generation with the skills to enable them to communicate with a diverse set of people.

We have seen our education system already begin to adapt to meet new lingual challenges, with three schools in the ACT offering a bilingual language program: Mawson Primary School, in Mandarin; Telopea Park, in French; and Yarralumla Primary School, in Italian. This is in addition to the curriculum requirements in the ACT public schools policy 2009 which requires all Canberra public schools to provide a language program for a minimum specified time in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Indonesian, Japanese, Chinese or Korean. These eight languages are being taught throughout the territory, as well as Latin and Hindi. The learning of a language other than English is further encouraged under the ACT language policy. The Canberra Liberals support this investment in our children's futures, and we also support the possible expansion of these eight languages.

The benefits of being bilingual or multilingual have been demonstrated in countless studies. The individual benefits have been proven to include superior problem-solving skills, better focus and concentration, and even delaying the onset of dementia.

This motion calls on the government to continue utilising the ACT Heritage Library's oral history recording resources to preserve the multilingual inheritance of the ACT. History is recorded in many mother tongues, and each forms part of our cultural heritage and our cultural identity. It is important that we preserve the oral histories of our community in the language which reflects their experience and their culture. In line with the ACT language policy, every effort should be made to preserve the oral histories of our Indigenous community, the foundation of our past.

Another way for the ACT government to encourage social inclusion is the establishment of collections and displays in ACT libraries to promote and protect mother languages. These collections and displays, sometimes referred to as an Ekushey corner, contribute to the promotion and protection of mother languages

within our diverse community. The Canberra Liberals support our community's right to have their language preserved in our library system, and we encourage the government to put this in place.

The Canberra Liberals also support the construction of a monument in Canberra dedicated to mother languages spoken here in Australia. Such a monument would encourage social cohesion through the shared recognition of language rights held by each individual and member of our community. Much like the Shaheed Minar erected by the Bangladeshi language movement, it would stand as a tribute to the emotions inspired by language and its central position within cultural identity.

In conclusion, as the effects of globalisation become further embedded in our society, we see evidence of growing multilingualism in Canberra. The Canberra Liberals believe the observance of International Mother Language Day underpins the territory's commitment to an inclusive community. My motion today proposes a variety of ways in which the ACT government can support communities in celebrating their language and their culture. As demonstrated through the language movement in Bangladesh, language evokes considerable sentiment and is at the heart of cultural identity. While the ACT community does communicate in many dialects, we are all one community and we speak with one voice on the importance of mother languages.

**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) (11.12), by leave: I move the three amendments that have been circulated in my name:

- (1) In paragraph (1)(f), omit "the encouragement to learning a language other than English contained in the Government's ACT Language Policy", substitute "that the Government's ACT Languages Policy encourages the learning of a language other than English".
- (2) In paragraph (2)(b), omit "promote", substitute "promoting".
- (3) In paragraph (2)(c), omit "supporting the construction of", substitute "exploring options to support the construction of".

I am pleased to rise today to speak on the topic of mother languages. The languages we use to communicate are the basis of our social connectedness and cohesion in whatever form they may take. Be it in a workplace, school classroom, around the family dinner table or at the bus stop, our unique forms of communication actually serve to unite us. Indeed, in the ACT we speak more than 170 languages in our homes, workplaces and social settings.

The ACT government is committed to preserving and promoting the unique diversity of languages spoken in the territory, and especially those of our nation's first people. Therefore, today, we reaffirm our pledge that on 21 February each year we will honour and celebrate the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's annual observance of International Mother Language Day.

I was honoured to attend the mother language walk earlier this year and reflect on the importance of mother languages and also pay tribute to the proud speakers of Bangla who lost their lives in defence of their right to use and preserve their language. Like the Leader of the Opposition, I acknowledge the members of the community who are here today. As the Leader of the Opposition has outlined, the events of 21 February 1952 and the sacrifice made by six protesters are the inspiration behind the modern-day International Mother Language Movement.

Canberra is a vibrant, multilingual city. One in five Canberrans speak a language other than English at home. Our diversity of language has become part of the development of our community as a whole. Many languages are on offer to be learned and used by Canberrans who are interested in them, as well as those who are historically and culturally connected to them.

A range of languages and cultures serve to widen our daily experiences and thinking, increasing our knowledge and cultural engagement. It is in this context that the ACT government, through the Community Services Directorate, is in the process of extensive community consultation to review and update *Many Voices*, the ACT languages policy. Once completed, this revised policy will take our city forward into the next decade, feeding into the frameworks and strategies that govern our approach to cultural diversity and augmenting what is also being done in other jurisdictions across the nation.

Languages are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage, and we as a government, and indeed as a community, know this and work in many ways to ensure the diversity of languages is maintained and enhanced. I would like to turn my attention to some of the ways in which we do this. The ACT government provides a range of grants to promote and provide access to multilingualism through, for example, locally produced radio programs and the funding and support of organisations such as the ACT Community Languages School Association.

The association is the peak community organisation for community-based language schools in the ACT and currently has a membership of 50 language schools, with four language-based playgroups, 360 teachers and 2½ thousand students learning 36 different languages. We are proud to support the association with recurrent funding of more \$170,000 each year to ensure that children across the ACT can learn the languages of their cultural heritage and indeed other languages which intrigue them. I was pleased recently to support an increase in funding for the association and I was sorry to miss their annual dinner last weekend. But I understand that Ms Orr, who represented the government, greatly enjoyed the occasion.

Of particular note, a priority area for the ACT government is the preservation and promotion of the myriad Indigenous languages spoken by members of our community. The theme of this year's NAIDOC Week was "Our languages matter", which aimed to increase, emphasise and celebrate the unique and essential role that Indigenous languages play in cultural identity, linking people to their land and water, and in the transmission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, spirituality and rights through story and song.

By way of context, some 250 distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, with over 600 dialects, covered the continent in the late 18th century. Of these, 145 languages are spoken in Australia today. One hundred and ten of those are considered endangered, and only 60 Aboriginal languages are considered truly alive and in use as a first tongue today. A total of 10 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians identify as speaking an Indigenous language at home. That means there are almost 64,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who speak an Indigenous language within their families and communities. As I said during NAIDOC Week and reaffirm now, we must work together and treasure those remaining languages.

The ACT has three major languages spoken within the region: Ngunnawal, Walgalu and Ngarigu. There have also been a number of other dialects identified. Through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement 2015-18, under the focus area “cultural identity”, the “strong cultural Identity” and “feeling empowered to promote their identity at home, at work and in their communities” are two actions that mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are comfortable to identify and practise culture through language.

Cultural heritage and knowledge is passed on throughout each generation by language. As such, language is integral in affirming and maintaining wellbeing, self-esteem and a strong sense of identity. Languages contain complex understandings of a person’s culture and their connection with their land.

In 2012 the United Nations held a forum on the study of the role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of Indigenous peoples. The importance of language is summed up in the following quote from that forum:

Language is an essential part of, and intrinsically linked to, Indigenous peoples’ ways of life, culture and identities. Languages embody many Indigenous values and concepts and contain Indigenous peoples’ histories and development. They are fundamental markers of Indigenous peoples’ distinctiveness and cohesiveness as peoples.

To be able to teach an Indigenous language there is often a need to reconstruct it, as most language, as I have said, on the eastern seaboard of Australia was lost. As Aboriginal people were banned from speaking their language due to previous government policies, the languages disappeared. The ANU has been successful in progressing this work locally, through the linguistics faculty and the work of Dr Harold Koch and others.

As the Leader of the Opposition noted, AIATSIS, a gem we should be very proud to have hosted in our national capital here in the ACT, has been working with local traditional custodians who have been reviving the Ngunnawal language and teaching it to others. We applaud their efforts and continue to promote and value the learning and use of mother languages in our diverse and inclusive community.

Another way the ACT government works to preserve and protect the languages of our culturally and linguistically diverse communities is through our library services across

the city. Libraries ACT has long celebrated and encouraged the preservation of languages and has offered language resources to the community since the 1980s. Each year Libraries ACT celebrates International Mother Language Day, and this year acknowledged the day through a special story time with guest presenter Glenn Freeman from the Koomurri Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation. There were displays and encouragement to borrow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander books. Glenn shared the local story of why the emu cannot fly and taught participating children and their carers Ngunnawal words and the rhyme *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* in Ngunnawal language.

More broadly, and in line with the standards and guidelines from the Australian Library and Information Association and the International Federation of Library Associations, Libraries ACT provides extensive resources for our culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The collections in our library include material in approximately 30 languages from across the globe, in varying quantities, with formats such as bilingual picture books, novels, DVDs, music, newspapers and magazines. In addition, Libraries ACT offers programs throughout the year such as advice for parents about sharing languages with their children and bilingual story times, and participates with a stall at the annual National Multicultural Festival.

A special initiative of the ACT Heritage Library which I would like to highlight in particular is the loaning of recording equipment to community groups and individuals to record oral histories in their mother tongue as well as English. In return, copies of the oral histories are deposited with the ACT Heritage Library. The ACT Heritage Library receives the products of all ACT heritage grants from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, including oral history recordings. Many oral history collections refer to the cultural diversity of Canberra, in particular the Italians at the Blue Range hut during World War II and the 1955 project of interviews with representatives of our most populous migrant groups in 1955. What a wonderful resource for our community into the future!

Now that we have a wide range of multicultural communities reflected in our diverse city, it is important that we recognise and share with them the unique nature of their mother tongues and the importance to them of learning and sharing their cultural identity through language.

I proposed a number of amendments to today's motion. The most significant of those relates to exploring options to support the construction of a monument in Canberra dedicated to the mother languages of Australians. The reason for this amendment is to express the ACT government's support to explore these options but to understand that it may not be the ACT government solely that has responsibility for completing this endeavour, depending on where the monument might be located. Of course, we may have to work with the National Capital Authority and there may be support for private sector contributions to the development of such a monument, as there has been with other monuments in the past.

In closing, I do hope that Canberrans, no matter what their mother tongue, hear this message too so that the language they speak in their homes, in social settings and in

their workplaces with their families and loved ones and colleagues truly contributes to and enhances our multilingual, multicultural, diverse way of life in this city.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (11.24): I am pleased to rise to speak on the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity, including through the preservation and promotion of mother languages. The ACT Greens believe that cultural and linguistic diversity in the ACT population greatly enriches our community and should be embraced and celebrated. Our diversity is a source of our strength and a key part of what makes the ACT such a vibrant place to live.

I am proud that the ACT was the first jurisdiction in Australia to enact a Human Rights Act, providing an explicit statutory basis for the human rights which are universal and enjoyed by everyone in our community regardless of gender, religious belief, nationality, race or any other point of difference. These rights include freedom of expression and the rights of minorities to enjoy their culture.

Under the Human Rights Act, anyone who belongs to an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority must not be denied the right, with other members of the minority, to enjoy his or her culture, to declare and practise his or her religion, or to use his or her language. Additionally, we recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold distinct cultural rights and must not be denied the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their languages and knowledge.

According to the latest census data, around 24 per cent of ACT households speak a language other than English at home. The languages most commonly spoken include Mandarin, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Hindi and Spanish, with these representing just a fraction of the diversity that exists in our community. As the motion notes, there are around 170 languages spoken across Canberra. This is hardly surprising, noting that 32 per cent of people in the ACT were born overseas. But it does reinforce that there is a need for governments to support people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to fully participate in our society and actively engage in our democracy.

As the motion notes, UNESCO celebrates International Mother Language Day on 21 February each year. This year's theme focused on the importance of multilingual education, ensuring that learners have access to education in their mother tongue and in other languages. It is through our mother language that most people acquire the essential skills of reading, writing and numeracy. In addition, local languages, especially minority and Indigenous languages, transmit cultures, values and traditional knowledge.

In 1788, at the time of European settlement of this continent, over 250 Indigenous Australian language groups existed across the nation. Today only around 120 of those languages are still spoken and many are at risk of being lost as elders pass away. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in particular, language is more than just a way to communicate. It plays a central role in a person's sense of identity and is also the vehicle within which much cultural knowledge, such as songs, bush tucker and traditional medicine, is stored.

Sadly, throughout our national history we have not always recognised the importance of mother languages to Indigenous peoples. From the earliest days of European contact there was often an assumption that Indigenous Australian languages were of less value than English, and this view was reinforced through government policy, education and employment practices. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were discouraged from speaking their languages and made to feel ashamed of using them in public.

As the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, or AIATSIS, has articulated, the impact of this was that the link between generations of speakers was broken so that many children had little or no knowledge of their traditional languages. Their parents were partial speakers and their grandparents were the remaining few speakers of a language that, as the elders, they alone could pass down to the next generation.

Thankfully, today that is starting to change, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia speaking about the need to protect, preserve and strengthen traditional languages. Through the second national Indigenous languages survey, conducted in 2014, Indigenous people said that they believe traditional languages should be taught in schools and that the use of traditional languages in schools helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to succeed. Respondents to the survey held an almost unanimous view that connecting with and learning about language has a powerfully beneficial effect on people's wellbeing.

Here in the ACT, as has been noted earlier, there is a fantastic project underway with the Ngaiyurijja Ngunnawal Language Group and AIATSIS working together collaboratively on a research project to revitalise the Ngunnawal language. I understand the aim is to revive a fully functional language that can also be part of the local school curriculum, with AIATSIS linguists and group members having been painstakingly compiling a wordlist since July 2014. This is a really exciting and important project for Ngunnawal people and all people across the ACT. We know that bilingualism and multilingualism are important ways to strengthen intercultural understanding in our community. I look forward to seeing this resource develop and I support its use to improve knowledge and understanding of Ngunnawal culture across our ACT community.

Of course, multilingualism and the recognition of mother language are equally important for people from migrant communities. As I mentioned earlier, we know that Canberra is an extremely diverse place, with many people from many different multicultural backgrounds. In particular, I am proud that the ACT is the only state or territory jurisdiction in Australia to be declared a refugee welcome zone. Our support for protecting and promoting mother languages is an important part of what we can do to make the ACT a safe and welcoming place for asylum seekers and refugees, as well as other migrants.

We are also lucky to have over 50 community language schools operating across Canberra. These schools help people to connect with their own or other cultural backgrounds, promote understanding and mutual respect among ethnic communities

and teach languages, history and culture to their students. At the last election the ACT Greens called for additional funding for our community language schools, since current funding has not been adjusted to reflect increasing numbers of students and rising administrative costs. While it is great to see more students utilising our community language schools, it is important that funding continues to keep up with demand. This is one practical way the government can actively support the promotion of mother languages and language training in the territory.

Mr Coe's motion makes mention of a number of other ways that mother languages can be supported, including through promotion in ACT libraries and, in particular, the preservation of the ACT Heritage Library's oral histories collection. These are programs that will benefit our community, and the Greens are pleased to support them through this motion. I am interested to hear more about the concept behind the proposal for a monument in Canberra dedicated to mother languages. We are certainly happy to support Minister Stephen-Smith's amendment to explore options for this concept, noting that further details about the design and location of such a monument would need to be considered. We welcome input from the community on that process.

In concluding, the ACT Greens want culturally and linguistically diverse communities to be engaged and connected with the broader Canberra community, as well as supported to build networks within their own communities. We support community programs to foster harmony and social cohesion and programs to preserve and protect languages, making an important contribution to that goal. I thank Mr Coe for bringing this motion forward today and for providing an opportunity to celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity through this discussion. The Greens are pleased to support the motion and Minister Stephen-Smith's amendment.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (11.32): It seems only right that I very briefly address this motion in my mother language.

*Mrs Kikkert then spoke in Tongan.*

*Translation: I am very glad for the opportunity to be here with you this morning to discuss this important issue. I was born in Tonga; I spoke Tongan growing up. My Tongan language is a blessing to me. I would like to thank Alistair Coe for supporting this issue and bringing it up for us to discuss.*

I am, in fact, one of three Liberal MLAs in this Assembly whose mother tongue is not English. This means that, when Mr Coe and the rest of the Canberra Liberals speak up about the significance of first languages and the importance of maintaining and celebrating mother languages, we are not merely speaking about other people; we are speaking from a position informed by personal experience.

My first language is incredibly important to me. It forms an essential part of my identity. As linguists, anthropologists and other scholars have repeatedly pointed out, language is closely tied to both culture and identity. Languages serve as libraries of cultural knowledge as well as enabling the transference of that knowledge across generations. The language we first learn as infants is embedded with places, histories, spiritual beliefs and family systems, just to name a few, and it frames how we see and

understand our world. To this day there are things that I understand in Tongan that I just do not know how to understand in any other language.

International Mother Language Day, which this motion calls upon the ACT government to observe, has its origins in the Bengali language movement. When the government of Pakistan ordained Urdu as the sole national language on 23 February 1948, extensive protests broke out among the Bangla-speaking majority of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The government attempted to suppress discontent by outlawing public meetings and rallies, but the movement could not be stopped and a protest on 21 February 1952 turned deadly when police fired upon and killed a number of protesters.

Some people might argue that a language is a trivial thing to be willing to die for, but I understand. For the people of East Pakistan, this was not just about their language but about the culture embedded in that language and about their sense of who they were as a people. To be robbed of Bangla was to be robbed of their identity and their values—their way of seeing and understanding themselves and the world around them.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to join with Canberra's vibrant Mon refugee community in celebrating their national day. They too understand the relationships among language, culture and identity. One of the main tools that the Burman military rulers used strategically to attempt to strip the Mon people living in Burma of their identity was the banning of their language in schools and in print. For decades these brave people have resisted by forming literature and culture organisations in every Mon village, and in the past few years the restrictions on Mon publications finally appear to have been loosened.

In this motion, the importance of learning and speaking English competently for all Australians is not disputed, but it is important to emphasise that Australia is not a monolingual society. People often speak English at work or at school and a completely different language at home or in their place of worship. According to the latest census, almost 22 per cent of ACT households speak a language other than English. We should do all we can to celebrate and encourage this great linguistic diversity and its important role in supporting and facilitating genuine cultural diversity.

Access to different languages brings with it access to different ideas, different ways of seeing the world, and different ways of thinking and being. I want my children to have access to this richness and so have encouraged them to participate in Tongan language school.

This past Saturday, the ACT Community Language Schools Association held an annual dinner to celebrate all of the languages currently taught by its 50 school members. These include Arabic, Bangla, Cantonese, Croatian, Dutch, Filipino, Finnish, Greek, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Karen, Khmer, Korean, Macedonian, Mandarin, Maori, Mon, Japanese, Persian, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, Samoan, Serbian, Sinhalese, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Tongan and Vietnamese. How great is this?

In 1999 UNESCO proclaimed 21 February as International Mother Language Day. In February this year it was my privilege to gather with other non-native speakers of English and those who support linguistic diversity to participate in the International Mother Language Day walk. We met up under the international flags along Queen Elizabeth Terrace and proceeded together to Stage 88 in Commonwealth Park. As fantastic as this event was, it would be good for us here in Canberra to formally observe this day as a means of promoting and protecting all languages used in our territory.

I wholeheartedly endorse this motion by Mr Coe, along with its attendant recommendations, including supporting second language instruction in schools, promoting and revitalising the use of local Indigenous languages, supporting the construction of a monument and utilising libraries to further these worthy goals. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

*Mrs Kikkert then spoke in Tongan.*

Translation: *Many thanks.*

**MR MILLIGAN** (Yerrabi) (11.40): I thank Mr Coe for bringing forward this important motion. I want to talk today about the importance of the recognition of their language to the Indigenous community, why it is important to work towards the revitalisation and maintenance of their language and why we need to include it for second language instruction in our schools. I begin by acknowledging that this year is in fact the year for Indigenous language recognition. The 2017 national NAIDOC Week theme was “Our languages matter”. Throughout Australia during July we were reminded of the importance, resilience and richness of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

Why are languages so important to the Indigenous peoples? They matter as they are a primary way to safeguard and preserve their cultural identity. Language links Indigenous people to their land and water, which is in an expression of their cultural identity and assists with the transmission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, spirituality and rites through their stories and songs. So it is vital that we consider again the significance of preserving that language, and that we work towards its preservation, revitalisation and maintenance.

There are several local languages and dialects in Canberra, one of which is the Ngunnawal language. In a visit to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, I was interested to learn of the work being carried out to preserve this language. The revitalisation of the Ngunnawal language has formed a major project for the institute since 2014. The institute has been working closely with several Indigenous families and corporations to not only revitalise the language but also develop a language program for primary schools. But I am told that the work has stalled. I call on the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs to move beyond the tokenism that is so often associated with the actions of this government in this space, to promote and support the revitalisation project both financially and through active facilitation.

Why is it that supporting their language is so important? Indigenous communities maintain their cultural heritage by passing on their knowledge from one generation to the next, through speaking and teaching their languages. They identify themselves through their connection to their country, through their relationship to each other and through their language and stories. Language then becomes an important part of maintaining those connections to culture. Yet recent statistics from the NATSIS survey showed that only 26 per cent of Indigenous children in areas such as Canberra spoke an Indigenous language, and sometimes this was only a few words.

The same survey states that to make a difference in educational, employment and training outcomes, and to lower engagement with high-risk and antisocial behaviours, Indigenous children need to be connected to their community, their culture and so, most importantly, to their local language. Particularly in the early years of a child's life, the investment in culture is critically important. It provides children—and their families and communities—with social and emotional benefits. There was evidence that this investment strengthened communities, bridged cultural divides, fostered resilience and contributed to reconciliation—all the necessary attributes that lead to closing the gap and improving outcomes for Indigenous communities.

In 2015 the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies worked with Indigenous leaders and the primary school in Fraser to run a pilot program of teaching the Ngunnawal language to preschool children. It would be great to see this project continue, for the government to sponsor the creation of local language dictionaries in Ngunnawal, Walgalu and Ngarigu. It would be great to see the development of children's books in all the Indigenous languages in ACT schools.

The work here in the ACT is only in its infancy. Seeing the large collection of artefacts, books, stories and songs in the Pitjantjatjara language at the National Museum, and knowing that there are summer schools that anyone can attend to learn this language, it would be great to see that here in the ACT. It would be terrific if the revitalisation of the mother languages of the local Indigenous people could lead to the teaching of them in the ACT as a second language, alongside the more traditional European and Asian languages. I therefore call on the government to support the active participation, revitalisation and maintenance of the local Indigenous languages for future inclusion as a second language option for schoolchildren.

**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) (11.45): I thank Mr Coe for bringing this motion to the Assembly today and giving us a chance to talk about our inclusive Canberra. I also thank the Minister for Multicultural Affairs for outlining the importance of and support for our city's multilingual way of life.

Canberra has a really great record as being an inclusive and vibrant community which is deeply connected by our value of diversity. The government's support of the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's proclamation of 21 February each year as International Mother

Language Day is firmly enshrined. I know that there were a couple of members of the Assembly who joined in the Mother Language Day walk recently. I have been on walks in the past supporting Mother Language Day and I think it is a great way to celebrate our city's continued diversity and support for mother languages.

During this year's annual National Multicultural Festival in February the government funded community organisations such as the International Mother Language Movement through the participation multicultural grants program to promote mother languages to the more than 280,000 people who attended the three-day festival. The festival of course is a shining light each year and the pinnacle celebration of cultural wealth in the Canberra community.

The diversity and inclusiveness of our city makes it a welcoming and interesting place to live and work; something we are all very proud of. It has also made Canberra's Multicultural Festival a growing attraction for many thousands of domestic and international visitors that we welcome each year, as well as those who come to the capital from other states who are looking for a fresh start.

During the 2011 census, 37 per cent of the ACT population reported either being born overseas or having at least one parent born overseas. Seventeen per cent were born in a non-English-speaking country, which is up from 14 per cent in 2006. So it is very important that we continue to support and create opportunities for individuals to explore and engage with languages tied to their personal cultural heritage, as well as those unfamiliar to them, and it makes good economic sense as well.

An important area that will be explored as part of the impending review of Many Voices, the ACT language policy—which I understand has been outlined by Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith—will be how languages impact on economic development in our city. There is broad recognition of the economic benefit from knowledge of other languages and cultures, as well as strong translating and interpreting skills. This is particularly true in our jurisdiction, where there is an increased economic reliance on tourism, global markets, trade and international education.

Our community is home to more than 100 embassies and high commissions and comprises individuals who hail from over 200 different countries. The government will continue to work closely alongside multicultural community leaders and members and of course the new ACT Multicultural Advisory Council to further formulate and revise this important policy which governs and values our city's language wealth.

Our government's central goal for social inclusion is to help every person reach their potential as a member of our diverse, inclusive and creative community, including through the protection of mother languages and access to services and programs to speak one of our country's languages, English. That central goal for social inclusion and the preservation of language and cultural heritage is particularly imperative when we refer to the very important and significant contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

But it is not only about the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans; it is about celebrating and learning what it means to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in our city. Through ACT public schools there is a swathe of programs and initiatives which teach the broader school population about the precious languages and the culture of the nation's first peoples, as well as programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This support strongly extends to the revitalisation and maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, in particular Ngunnawal and other local region languages. It is important to understand that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages cannot be taught in isolation. In order for students to have a full and deep understanding, languages need to be taught alongside local culture and knowledge.

ACT schools are promoting the incorporation of Indigenous languages in teaching and learning programs. This includes resources promoting the 2017 NAIDOC Week theme, "Our languages matter". A new and important initiative in this space centres on the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies developing an Indigenous language and culture course. The focus of this course is Indigenous languages and culture of the Canberra region, including Jervis Bay. In addition, the course will examine language and culture outside of the region. Course development will begin next month, and it is envisaged that the course will be accredited and available for delivery in 2019. The Education Directorate has also implemented several programs and projects dedicated to promoting and building teacher capacity to incorporate Indigenous languages.

Earlier this year six schools participated in a pilot program to incorporate a biographical DVD *Aunty Agnes: Footprints on Our Land* in professional learning and classroom activities. The pilot included several workshops and the development of school-based projects to support learning and teaching activities in ACT public schools. In addition, four primary schools are participating in a curriculum project exploring ways in which to incorporate the Ngunnawal story *Mununja the Butterfly* into learning activities and programs for upper primary students. *Mununja* is a bilingual text enabling students to experience a little of the Ngunnawal language and culture.

The directorate has also been working to strengthen the environment of cultural integrity in all ACT public schools, as part of the student resource allocation. Through this initiative approximately 100 students are participating in learning programs using the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Concurrently all ACT public schools provide a language program in at least one of the eight priority languages: Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

Right now, approximately 28,711 Canberra public school students are learning a language. The number has increased from 17,594 students since 2008. In 2017 a total of 17,638 students are studying priority Asian languages. In 2017 a total of 10,832 students are studying priority European languages. Just last year there was an increase of 2,121 students studying a language in Canberra public schools due to the concerted effort of the government and public schools to increase participation rates in language courses. With more than 170 languages spoken in homes and workplaces

across our capital, Canberra truly is the embodiment of a global city and the government will continue to cement that status from the kindergarten classroom up, with our youngest Canberrans learning how to embrace our diversity and speak for themselves and others in a multilingual world.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (11.53): Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker.

*Ms Lee then spoke in Korean.*

*Translation: The journey that I've taken to get to where I am today has been at times challenging and at times joyful. Most importantly, I've learnt a lot along the way.*

I was born in Gwangju, in the Republic of Korea, and Korean is my first language, my mother language. My first words were “eomma”—“mum”—and “appa”—“dad.” So even in different cultures, something that we, as the human race, have in common is that most of us will claim “mum” and “dad” as our first words.

In preparing to migrate to Australia in 1986, when I was seven and my sister was five, my parents started to teach us English so that we could have a head start in settling into Australia. They put up wallpaper containing the alphabet in our room, and each evening we would sing the alphabet song and say simple phrases like “Mama, goodnight,” and “Goodnight, Papa.”

My parents knew very little English. They attended adult English school for the first month or so, but, because they had a young family to feed, they started working pretty much immediately. My parents will never master English. When you move to a foreign country well into your 30s, having spoken nothing but Korean, when you do not have a huge amount of formal education, when you do not have the opportunity or the freedom to pursue further education because you are still, at almost 70, working full time in low-paid manual labour to make ends meet, it is impossible to ever bridge that gap. Even after more than 30 years in Australia, Dad will say, “Australian movie star Jack Hughman,” and Mum will call her wrist “hand-neck” because in Korean the word for wrist is “sonmog”, which literally translates as “hand-neck.” But, hey; even non-Koreans can understand that.

Even though he can understand less than half of what he sees, hears or reads in the news, my dad is an avid consumer of Australian public affairs and political news. He makes sure that his work TV is turned on to the 24-hour news channel so that whenever he pops into the staffroom he can catch a glimpse of what is going on. He reads whatever newspaper happens to be in the staffroom every lunchtime and he has his car radio tuned in to a news channel so that he knows what is going on. I can only imagine how hard it is to concentrate that much to capture maybe 20 to 30 per cent of what he sees, reads and hears, but he still does it every day.

My parents' English may be nowhere near good enough to pass an IELTS level, whatever it is, but they are more “Australian” and they contribute more to Australian society than anyone I know. When we first moved to Australia, my parents got us into the habit of writing in a diary in Korean every night. They had the wisdom to realise that English would come naturally to us as we started going to school and making

Aussie friends and as we became more immersed in Australian life, but that it was important we did not forget our first language. Each day, my sister and I would dutifully write our page in neat Korean script about who we had played with at school or the homework we had to do, and, on one occasion, there was excitement because we had purchased our very first microwave. Gradually, these beautifully written Korean pages started to contain one, then two words of English, then a sentence in English, and before too long more than half a page would be in English.

My parents were right. English came naturally to us and today it is the language that I am most comfortable with. But what the habit of writing in a diary in Korean did was to make sure we did not forget our first language. Because we maintained at least this base level of Korean, we were and are able to communicate better with our parents. We are able to appreciate traditional myths and legends from thousands of years ago that resonate with life lessons of today. We are able to contribute to Australian multicultural society in a way that allows Aussies from a Western background to see that Asian Aussies have a lot to contribute to making Australia great. We are able to preserve the unique language created by King Sejong of the Joseong dynasty in the 1400s that gave us the ability to speak our own tongue, the language of my ancestors, that I can pass on to the next generation.

Learning a second language has enormous benefits, not just to the person learning it but to our society and our economy. UNESCO's Mother Language Day is celebrated on 21 February because "language is fundamental to communication of all kinds, and it is communication that makes change and development possible in human society".

We live in a global world that is connected more than ever, and whilst it can be easy for Canberrans who speak only English—which, according to the 2016 census, was over 70 per cent—to take for granted that they speak the generally accepted international language, there is a lot that these Canberrans can gain from learning a second language. If they do, it does not mean they will forget their mother language; it means they will learn a new way of communicating with the world and they will learn to value and respect their own mother language.

I love that there are words in Korean which do not quite translate simply into English—words that express an emotion, a feeling, a circumstance or a meaning that does not exist as a word in English. I do not have to look far for some great examples. My Korean name is "Seul-gi", which roughly translates to "wisdom" or "to be wise". The Korean name of my middle sister, Rosa, is "Bo-ram" which means "fruitful" or "to be of worth". The Korean name of my youngest sister, Sara, is "Sae-rom", which means new life or new beginning. This has a particular meaning in my family because Sara was born in Australia when we started a new life here.

The relationship between Korea and Australia is an important one. We have a free trade agreement which has cemented one of the strongest and most complementary economic relationships in our region. Korea is the fourth largest export market for Australian goods and services and in 2016 the Korean market was worth a total of \$32 billion in trade for Australia.

Diversity in language, culture and experiences is only a strength of our community because it is the people, with their shared and diverse cultural experiences and hopes, that make a city a home. I thank the Bangladeshi community for everything that they have done and do for the Canberra community and for being here today. I also thank Mr Coe for bringing this motion to the Assembly and for giving us the opportunity to talk on this important matter in this chamber. I commend his motion to the Assembly.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (12.00): I would like to thank all members of this place for their support for this motion. It is rare that on private members' day we have such support. I do think it is an important issue, and it is a demonstration that this Assembly really does value the multicultural community and, in particular, values the importance of language for our society.

There are a number of people and organisations that I would like to thank. In particular, I would like to thank the Mother Language Conservation Movement, and individuals Nirmal Paul, Enam Hoque, Ajoy Kar, Ignatius Rozario, Victor Matilanca, Dr Ezaz Mamun, Dr Zamir Hussain, Councillor Mohamed Zaman Titu, Councillor Masood Chowdhury, Shawpna Banu Kamrul, Hasan Khan and Pervejul Alam.

I was particularly heartened by the in-principle support that the minister gave for a monument in Canberra. Of course, these things are not easy. These things are always complicated, in terms of making sure that the relevant stakeholders are engaged, including the commonwealth and the National Capital Authority, if it is indeed in that parliamentary zone or in one of the other areas controlled by the commonwealth. I think it is an important demonstration, and I think it is worth the Assembly getting behind. I know the opposition is very keen to work with the government and with other stakeholders in order to get this monument off the ground.

In conclusion, I think mother languages, indeed all languages, are central to the principles of sovereignty. To that end, I think it is so important that we do all we can to recognise the sovereignty of individuals, the sovereignty of culture, and of course the sovereignty of nations. Language is also, as demonstrated in the contributions of Ms Lee and Mrs Kikkert, central to personal identity. It is central to who we are as people. It is, of course, central to our culture, it is central to our community here in Canberra and, above all, I believe it is central to our future. I very much thank all members of the Assembly for their support for this motion and hope that it will lead to some tangible demonstration of this Assembly's and this territory's commitment to mother languages.

Amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Mount Taylor recreation precinct—access**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (12.04): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that Mount Taylor:

- (a) provides an invaluable recreational asset for the whole of the Canberra community;
- (b) has a number of walking trails that provide opportunities to improve health and wellbeing across a wide range of fitness levels; and
- (c) is utilised by many thousands of Canberrans;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) use of Mount Taylor is growing noticeably as more residents discover its ease of access, the variety of its walking trails and spectacular views of the ACT;
- (b) accessing Mount Taylor from Sulwood Drive has become increasingly popular with many dozens of vehicles parked adjacent to the Mannheim Street Kambah entrance for lengthy periods of the day and evening;
- (c) Sulwood Drive is a major thoroughfare connecting Tuggeranong Parkway with Erindale Drive and also provides several access points into Kambah and Wanniasa;
- (d) many pedestrians, motorists and cyclists utilise the access point to Mount Taylor from the parking area adjacent to Mannheim Street at times of the day that coincide with peak traffic flows along Sulwood Drive;
- (e) there is no infrastructure to facilitate pedestrian, cyclist or motorist safety when entering or departing this parking area;
- (f) there is a significant and growing concern over the safety of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians accessing Mount Taylor from this parking area;
- (g) the lack of signage, the ad hoc way drivers enter the parking area and disrepair of the parking area itself, presents a significant danger to drivers, cyclists and pedestrians, including those proceeding along Sulwood Drive and those within the parking area itself;
- (h) there is a lack of suitable cycling infrastructure linking Athllon Drive and the Tuggeranong Parkway along Sulwood Drive; and
- (i) there is an opportunity to enhance community utilisation of Mount Taylor with improved walking trails; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) create dedicated, visible, and safe entry and exit points to the Mount Taylor carpark on Sulwood Drive with dedicated and clearly defined safe crossings for pedestrians and cyclists;
- (b) improve the safety and amenity of the parking area by installing lighting and a bin;

- (c) consider changes to improve the intersection of Mannheim Street and Sulwood Drive with regard to the safety and needs of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians wishing to access the Mount Taylor carpark;
- (d) extend the footpath on Mannheim Street from MacKay Crescent to Sulwood Drive; and
- (e) investigate the construction of a dedicated bike lane on Sulwood Drive.

This motion brings to the Assembly's attention the value of the Mount Taylor nature reserve and the need to improve the safety of its access from Sulwood Drive. We are so lucky to have so many wonderful recreational assets at our suburban backdoors that are relatively easy to access. My wife, Louisa, and I just adore Mount Taylor, as do so many people in the Tuggeranong valley and beyond. There are closer hills for us to climb regularly, but Taylor has become our friend for a number of reasons. Among the reasons is the relative good condition of the pathway up and the fact that at pace it is still a challenging climb. I think it is also about community, the dogs that you meet, the people you have conversations with, and the number of people that you do not expect to see climbing Mount Taylor and the conversations that you do not expect to have—I recall recently seeing Senator Seselja and his wife, Ros, on the way up.

The other thing Mount Taylor has going for it are the views—stunning panoramic views of the Tuggeranong valley through to the Brindabellas on one side. Right at the moment, about three-quarters of the way up on the southern side, if you look south there is this gorgeous view with Gibraltar Rocks in the foreground and I think it is Mount Franklin in the background covered by snow. They just line up perfectly. Of course, you can also see Mount Tennent standing proudly behind Tharwa and Booroomba Rocks. It is just a great spot; I could sit up there for hours. There is a wonderful view of pretty much the entire city and suburban area to the north.

Mount Taylor nature reserve is one of Canberra's great natural assets. It has made a remarkable recovery from the 2003 fires, which left it as a charcoal ruin. There are more than 25 pedestrian access points to its great hiking trails and viewing points. The reserve provides equestrian trails as well as a great network of walking trails right up to its summit, 855 metres above sea level.

This government has for a long period gone to great lengths to encourage people to be more active, and we certainly support that. I engage personally in that measure as well and have for a long time. Rock up to Mount Taylor at just about any time of the day or night and you will see people heeding the call, and you can tell by the number of cars in the car park. One particularly busy access point is the parking area alongside Sulwood Drive, adjacent to Mannheim Street in Kambah. A few years ago you might have seen two or three vehicles parked there, but now you will often see a couple of dozen or more. It is not just vehicles that are using this access point but also cyclists and many pedestrians.

Sulwood Drive is a busy thoroughfare connecting Erindale Drive and Tuggeranong Parkway with several feeder roads into Kambah and Wanniasa. It is heavily used by motorists and cyclists. There are no cycle lanes, nor does the roadway have sufficient

width at this stage to allow marking the sides as cycle laneways. It is, therefore, quite a danger for cyclists attempting to use it, and I can speak from personal experience on that. Of course, it can be used to gain access to Mount Taylor or also just to traverse from east to west on the southern side of town.

The Mount Taylor parking area itself is simply a potholed and rutted dirt area between Sulwood Drive and the reserve's boundary fence. It is often the case that peak traffic periods coincide with peak times for accessing the Mount Taylor parking area, which makes it even more problematic, with vehicles and cyclists and pedestrians trying to enter or exit the parking area at the same time. The parking area is still being used well into the evening and throughout the day, and I think it is pretty clear to most that some safety issues are becoming evident.

There are no exit lanes to facilitate a smooth exit from Sulwood Drive nor for getting back onto that road from the parking area, so motorists often have to make a sudden turn off onto the dirt with someone right up on their back or to beat oncoming traffic to get back onto Sulwood Drive. Motorists entering or exiting the parking area must do so in one of the rare moments that there is no oncoming traffic. There is no signage to warn road users that they are approaching a busy parking area. Pedestrians from Kambah and Wanniasa must take their chances against oncoming traffic, particularly so from Mannheim Street, where pedestrians and cyclists must confront traffic from a multiplicity of directions.

The parking area is well used after sunset in all seasons. The only lighting available to those using the parking area of an evening is that from oncoming traffic. A few years ago these deficiencies probably were not as significant as they are now, but with the steep increase in popularity of this access point the risks and the dangers for motorcyclists and pedestrians are escalating. I think we need to consider some basic measures to improve the safety and accessibility for this parking area, not only to cater for the current level of usage but also in order to cope with future growth, to futureproof Mount Taylor we might say.

We need entry and exit lanes to facilitate safe exit and entry to the parking area. We need signage to alert motorists and cyclists that they are approaching the parking area. We need a defined parking area with a decent surface to accommodate existing and future patronage for motorists and cyclists alike. We need some lighting in the parking area to improve night-time accessibility and safety. I would love to see a defined pedestrian crossing at a suitable point. We need a dedicated cycle path from one end of Sulwood Drive to the other to provide direct route access to the Mount Taylor parking area and proceeding onto the path along the Tuggeranong Parkway.

We appreciate that all this comes at a cost, but I think the community value, the health benefits, the safety gains are also considerable. I have been a regular user of the Mount Taylor Sulwood Drive car park for many years. I have been moaning and whining about it for a long time, and during my time here in this place I have raised it in the Liberal Party room as an issue that we should be addressing. As we were moving forward in that direction, I was most pleased to see a public petition appear online, and I commend the work that has been done by Taryn Langdon in this space.

Certainly the work done on that petition assisted us in getting the final wording of this motion together.

I would also like to make mention of my Labor colleague Mr Steel, who I understand will be tabling the petition on this matter in some weeks. There are not enough occasions in this place during which we all stand as one and support a particular direction, and I would like to think that this will be one of them. Thanks also to Minister Fitzharris and her office for engaging with us last night and again today regarding this motion and possible amendments. It was a pleasure dealing with Blair and also with the minister. Although in the end we did not come to agreement on amending the original motion, I look forward to getting to these amendments and ultimately to us all standing side by side to get this done.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (12.12): Oscar Wilde once said that “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness”, and I suppose I am flattered that Mr Parton has brought before the Assembly an issue which members on this side of the chamber have been championing for some time. If the Canberra Liberals want to see some more success for their party in future elections then getting ideas from the Labor Party is a good place to start.

The Liberals committed zero dollars to Kambah at the election, so I am not surprised that they are now looking to us for the sort of leadership that has seen a transformation, with upgrades underway at Kambah Village, upgrades to Kambah’s public toilets, a new bus stop on the blue rapid route in Kambah and Athllon Drive, footpath improvements in Kambah and the green bins rolled out in Kambah. I know that the Liberals do not support all of those initiatives, particularly green bins, but, quite seriously, it is excellent to see the Canberra Liberals onside with us on the idea of improving accesses to Mount Taylor nature park.

My colleague Bec Cody and former Labor candidate Angie Drake ran a petition on this issue during the ACT election campaign last year. As Mr Parton has acknowledged, I am presently sponsoring an Assembly e-petition on behalf of Canberra residents who would like to demonstrate the community’s support for traffic improvements around Mount Taylor, particularly near the intersection with Mannheim Street and Sulwood Drive.

The wording of the petition is almost this motion verbatim, and if the e-petition reaches over the 500 mark it will be presented to the Assembly, hopefully on 28 November, with the petition referred to the relevant committee and to the Minister for Transport and City Services for consideration and a response. I am sure it will get close to that mark, with the hard copy sitting on the windowsill down at the beloved Biginelli’s cafe on Mannheim Street, at the shops. I look forward to speaking on the matter again in detail rather than pre-empting it today. I think these petitions can be very powerful when they come to us, because they help the community to promulgate and think about the issues they want addressed. They demonstrate public support and come directly from the community as well.

Mount Taylor is a fantastic natural asset attracting thousands of people from Kambah, the surrounding community and across Canberra. I grew up and have lived by the

mountain most of my life. My house backs onto Sulwood Drive and I walk my dog, Pickles, up to Mount Taylor most evenings. I have certainly noticed the increase in cars parked around the mountain on Sulwood Drive as it becomes more popular for Canberrans to visit for recreational purposes, particularly during the spring and summer months, when I have often counted up to 80 cars parked along the mountain.

Because there is no formal car park and there is an intersection nearby on Mannheim Street, it is important that the government consider the traffic issues in the area. I think the petition I am sponsoring will help to convey the range of issues the government can investigate. Part of the work I have already done has seen traffic studies conducted on Mannheim Street and Sulwood Drive. I have also drawn the attention of the ACT government to speeding issues along Sulwood Drive, which is an 80-kilometre an hour zone. The ACT government has added six additional speed vans to monitor people's speed along ACT roads, including Sulwood Drive.

I mention at this point the hard work of former local member Mr John Hargreaves, who worked with Kambah residents on Mannheim Street to see a traffic island installed in the past to improve safety on the street. We could even go back further to the Follett Labor government that actually invested in the original summit trail that is now so popular with the community on Mount Taylor.

The ACT Labor government's vision for Canberra is a healthy, active and vibrant city, and this means ensuring our city is well connected and accessible, including providing better access to our nature parks for recreational purposes. That is why I am happy to continue to assist the work of the community to work constructively with the government to improve safety and ensure that more Canberrans can enjoy Mount Taylor. I am pleased to see that the Liberals are on board with the government in this endeavour. I will be supporting the motion today.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Yerrabi—Minister for Health, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (12.17): I wish to amend this motion. Therefore, I move:

Omit paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) calls on the Government to investigate the following improvements to the Mount Taylor carpark:

- (a) creation of dedicated, visible, and safe entry and exit points to the Mount Taylor carpark on Sulwood Drive with dedicated and clearly defined safe crossings for pedestrians and cyclists;
- (b) improvements to the safety and amenity of the parking area by installing lighting and a bin;
- (c) changes to improve the intersection of Mannheim Street and Sulwood Drive with regard to the safety and needs of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians wishing to access the Mount Taylor carpark;
- (d) extension of the footpath on Mannheim Street from MacKay Crescent to Sulwood Drive; and

(e) construction of a dedicated bike lane on Sulwood Drive.”.

I look forward to what I understand will be agreement on this amendment. Mr Coe noted in the debate on the previous motion that it is not very often that we have agreement across all parties in this place, but today I am pleased to say that it looks like we will have at least two.

I thank Mr Parton and Mr Steel in particular, who I have been speaking with about this particular matter for a number of months now. As Mr Parton was speaking, I almost was taken back to drives into work a couple of years ago, listening to Mr Parton describe those magnificent views, but I did not know that dogs talked on Mount Taylor, so I will have to check in with Mr Steel as to whether those conversations with dogs have extended to Pickles now talking as he walks up Mount Taylor.

It really has been fascinating, over the course of this Assembly, to see the amount of community engagement that has been expressed through this place, in the form of motions and petitions. It is tremendous. But I also note we had a discussion in the last sitting about how governments shape budgets, and Ms Le Couteur’s motion, which the government also supported in part after it was initially amended, talks about how a government might form its priorities for each budget. We of course debated and passed the budget in the last sitting, so this is grist to the mill as we head towards the next budget—thinking about all the sorts of priorities we have in our community and how we invest equitably and sustainably right across all the different regions in the city.

As has been noted, there is a lot of activity on Mount Taylor. I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Steel and Mr Parton that this sort of activity is exactly the sort of activity that the government wishes to encourage and support. Not only do people get a chance to celebrate our city, to get active, to get out into our nature parks but also the social connections that people make as they make new friends walking up and down Mount Taylor really cannot be assessed in one particular way.

Mount Taylor nature reserve forms part of the over 35 reserves across the ACT that comprise the Canberra Nature Park. These reserves conserve the natural values of the ACT while also providing access to our bush setting. Reserves are greatly valued by the community for the recreational opportunities they provide. They are a well-regarded feature of the Canberra landscape and our bush capital. They are a unique feature of our growing and developing city; you can escape to the natural surrounds of parkland and bush areas so close to home.

The opportunities for informal activities on Mount Taylor reflect the low-key facilities provided across the Canberra Nature Park. The government maintains an extensive network of management trails and walking tracks on Mount Taylor and has installed a number of seats at key locations across the reserve. There are also picnic tables located at the end of Waldock Street for the ACT community to use.

The government is aware that the walking trails accessing the summit of Mount Taylor attract around 7,000 visitors per week. Access to the nature reserve is available from a number of suburbs on its perimeter, and indeed a number of locations right along Sulwood Drive. For the access at Mannheim Street and Sulwood Drive, the safety records at that intersection are positive and show that this part of the network is performing well. The safety of the ACT's transport network is continuously monitored by Transport Canberra and City Services.

As has been noted, at the moment there is no formal car park on Sulwood Drive; instead, people using the reserve are parking on the road reserve adjacent to the pedestrian access. Of course there is scope to improve the community's ability to easily and safely access the services provided by Mount Taylor, and this is an issue which the government will seek to address. Road safety and supporting physical activity such getting out into our nature parks is a really high priority for me as minister, as well as for the broader government. New facilities which can improve access to our open spaces will encourage more people to walk and cycle, which in turn will meet many of our policy objectives.

It is worth highlighting that TCCS receives over 200 requests per year for upgrades or new community paths across the territory, in addition to requests for new car parking facilities and intersection upgrades. Clearly there is a strong role for government to consider these requests and balance the priorities across the city. We recognise the importance of improving community paths and cycling facilities to provide safe and attractive routes and facilities for people in our community to use. Connecting residents to nature reserves will inherently support our community being active.

That is why we will continue to seek improvements in our existing network to provide a number of access options for people, including the provision of on-road cycling facilities. These are an important way that we can more broadly promote active travel options. For many years Transport Canberra and City Services and its predecessor agencies have adopted a strategy to take opportunities presented by the extensive annual road resurfacing program to extend our on-road cycling network. Each year, all of the roads identified for resurfacing are investigated to assess the feasibility of installing lane markings to provide for these new on-road cyclepaths.

As has been noted by Mr Parton, the provision of on-road cycling for the length of Sulwood Drive would be a fairly significant undertaking, requiring upgrades at a number of intersections to ensure an uninterrupted and safe facility for pedestrians. These upgrades will be considered, as will the opportunities to align any planned resurfacing work with the delivery of improvements in the most coordinated and efficient way we can.

To provide for those people who feel more comfortable in an off-road environment, work has already been initiated within City Services on the provision of community paths, together with appropriate crossing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. This includes the connection or extension of the existing community path along Mannheim Street, from MacKay Crescent to Sulwood Drive. It also includes considering the safety of users, links to community facilities such as from residential areas to schools,

shops, businesses and parks, and the likely demand of the new community path. In addition, TCCS considers links to the strategic cycle network to identify and complete important missing links in the network.

The Bicycle Advisory Group, which is represented by a number of community groups, including Pedal Power and the Heart Foundation, the Physical Activity Foundation and other walking and cycling advocates have endorsed the TCCS warrant process for a number of years now. It has been used successfully to identify, prioritise and define elements of our active travel program across the city.

Transport Canberra and City Services also receives many requests for additional lighting in public areas at a wide range of locations where there is the potential for improved safety and amenity. Again, City Services carefully investigates these requests and considers priorities in terms of the potential for improved amenity, environmental impacts and security and safety outcomes. Members may be aware that street lighting is already provided at intersections on Sulwood Drive, including the intersection at Mannheim Street.

TCCS is further investigating whether the existing lighting arrangements are sufficient. I am pleased to advise that already we have underway investigation of some short-term measures to implement limited vehicle access to the nature park near the intersection to reduce some of those safety concerns. We will also be considering a range of other short-term measures such as those that have been mentioned, including signage.

As per the intent of the motion, we will also investigate existing arrangements at the Mount Taylor car park and investigate short, medium and longer term improvements to this area so that we can be sure that people can continue to access Mount Taylor, that the area is sustainably maintained and, of course, that it is safe. I am pleased to say that in moving this amendment I look forward to agreement across the chamber and look forward to TCCS continuing their work on investigating these improvements. I thank Mr Parton and Mr Steel for their support for the motion.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (12.25): I support the amendment and support the basic intent which was part of Mr Parton's motion. I also have met with Ms Langdon and talked about the issues of that car park. I am someone who does not go there nearly as frequently as the two previous gentlemen speakers; I live a bit further north and it is not my normal walking area. But it is a wonderful asset to Canberra to have Mount Taylor there. Having Canberra Nature Park within Canberra is an incredible asset for Canberra.

It is very good for the humans of Canberra because we get out into a natural environment where we can walk, we can talk, and those of us who have dogs can take their dogs. It is a way that Canberra really feels connected to the bush. At the end of last year or the beginning of this year the government ran a competition for the slogan for our number plates, and the winner was "the bush capital".

One of the reasons why we vote for "the bush capital" is that the bush capital is within where we live. It is part of most people's lives in Canberra; they actually do see the

bush. This is really important for our mental health and it is also really important for our regard for nature, for realising that we are part of the natural environment. So, yes: a big tick for this. I wish I lived closer to Mount Taylor and walked up there more often than I do.

When I drive along Sulwood Drive, it is very obvious that this is not a safe car park; it is not a safe intersection. You take your life in your hands trying to go across there. Clearly something needs to be done. I think we have universal agreement in this Assembly on that point. Also, I am pleased that we have universal agreement on Ms Fitzharris's amendment that we call on the government to investigate those improvements.

As Minister Fitzharris said, the ACT government has a lot of requests for improvements. We all, as members of the Assembly, get a lot of requests for improvements, and we are in an impossible position in trying to determine what the priorities should be; we simply do not have the information to do that. That is why last sitting period I moved the motion about a participatory budgeting trial. There is a very large desire for work by the government to be done in Canberra, as in other jurisdictions. There is a finite government budget. We have to work out the best ways of making our decisions as to which is the highest priority. I simply do not have the information to know whether this should be the highest priority or whether something else should be. The process by which MLAs move motions about it has some political advantages, possibly, but I think in the long run this is really not the way we should allocate our budgets. I am very glad to see the amendment, which makes it clear that this is not how we are going to determine the TCCS budget.

I do not think for one minute that this was Mr Parton's intention, and I note that he has agreed to the investigation. We are all aware that this is important and that there are lots of other important things. I will not bother going through the wonderful features of Mount Taylor; the previous speakers, particularly Mr Steel and Mr Parton, have gone through that at much greater length and more eloquently than I can, due to their much greater exposure to Mount Taylor. I have only been up to the top a few times in my life, I must admit. But I wholeheartedly support the intent of the original motion and I will be supporting the amendment and then the motion as amended.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (12.30): Before I speak to the amendment and close the debate, can I say that I am most disappointed that Mr Steel must respond to every single issue in such a partisan way. I am not sure how we ended up talking about Kambah Shops and green bins during this debate, but we did. I do know that for Mr Steel it is always about the war. Everything is about the war, is it not? Everything for Mr Steel is about us versus them. Here is a bloke who has publicly questioned whether he should accept my yes vote in the same-sex marriage debate because he does not believe that I am passionate enough about the cause.

Here is an elected Liberal—me—who is very openly voting yes and advocating that others do so but, because Mr Steel's sole focus is on the political battle, he has declared in RiotACT that my support is highly dismissive and patronising. I think Mr Steel should know that my support for the yes vote, for the reasons I have highlighted, resonates with a bucketload of conservative voters and that it is about the

end result, very much like this motion. It does not actually matter who gets to the top, as long as we get to the top.

Very quickly, regarding this amendment, I say thanks to the minister and her office for reaching out to us late yesterday and genuinely attempting to make the amendment offline. In our discussions with the Fitzharris office last night I did hear the arguments that were put forward, and we have heard them here this morning, and they are practical arguments. In the end, we made the decision not to amend the original motion last night but instead to let the minister do it on the floor, for a number of reasons.

Despite the fact that we will be supporting and voting with the government, it is our job to hold the government to account, and I wanted the Canberra Liberals to go on the record as calling for these improvements to be made. We are not really interested in excuses; we just want to get things done. You could forgive a casual observer for believing that this amendment allows the government to weasel out of doing anything, because at the end of the day what this amendment does is severely weaken the original motion. But I hear what the minister has said. That is all I have to say on that. I am going to sit down so that Mr Hanson can get to lunch.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

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

### **Questions without notice**

#### **Light rail—local contracts**

**MR COE:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, which Canberra businesses have a contract with Canberra Metro for the construction of light rail?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mr Coe for his question. A number of businesses have contracts with Canberra Metro to deliver stage 1 of light rail. I will take on notice the specific details of the significant number of local businesses that have been engaged not only by Canberra Metro but by Transport Canberra.

**MR COE:** Minister, do you receive any regular reports about the level of locally engaged contractors? If so, are you satisfied with the level of local engagement?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Yes, I do and I am. I know that at different phases of the delivery of the project there are different sectors of our local economy that are engaged by Canberra Metro and by Transport Canberra and City Services.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, can you name right now a single business that has a contract with Canberra Metro for the construction of light rail?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Minister, would you like him to repeat that?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Yes.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Can you name right now a single business that has a contract with Canberra Metro for the construction of light rail?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I could name a number of businesses but I do not have the details. I just do not have the names of the businesses.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Ms Berry:** Point of order. Seriously, the number of interjections from several members opposite is really unhelpful. This is not a test for the minister. She answered the question.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Ms Berry:** Here they go again.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms Berry. Can I remind members of the opposition that there are a number of standing orders that provide that when members are on their feet they are not to be interrupted; they are allowed to be heard. Again, it was within 15 seconds or less that the sound was quite loud. I ask you, yet again, if you can please just attend to the matters; if you ask a question you should be waiting for the answer and, hopefully, listen to it. I am assuming you have finished your response, minister, yes.

### **Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—aluminium cladding**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Yesterday you told the Assembly that you did not know whether your directorate had ordered replacement cladding for the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children. Minister, do you know today if your directorate has ordered it?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** If I recall correctly, my answer to yesterday's question was that I was not aware if they had done that. Certainly the advice that I have is that ACT Health are in the process of discussing a statement of requirements for the work required to remediate the Centenary hospital. Planning is underway for that. I have stated in the Assembly previously, on a number of occasions, that the advice that I will have by the end of September is whether cladding can be safely removed before cladding becomes available to then put back on the Centenary hospital. That advice will be available to me by the end of September.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, will there be further delay in ordering the replacement cladding, given what we saw in the newspaper today about delays arising from the demand for new cladding?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Not to my knowledge, no. I would note that ACT Health has been at the forefront of this work, both within ACT government and, as we see,

around the country. It was just last week, indeed, that New South Wales Health identified the Queanbeyan hospital as potentially having this cladding as well. So ACT Health has in fact been very proactive.

They are undertaking the methodical work that they need to do now to assess where they need to replace that cladding and how much they need to order. They are undergoing a statement of requirements before—

**Ms Lawder:** Point of order—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Resume your seat. Point of order, Ms Lawder.

**Ms Lawder:** Madam Speaker, as to relevance. The question related specifically about whether there would be an additional delay on when the order is being placed.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I do not believe there is a point of order. I think the minister said, “Not that she was aware of,” and she is providing some further details in the answer. Have you concluded?

**Ms Fitzharris:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, how long are you prepared to leave the women and children in the Centenary hospital exposed to the risks from this dangerous cladding?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Frankly, that is a ridiculous question. As I have said and as I have been advised by consultants, by infrastructure experts at ACT Health and by ACT Fire & Rescue, the Centenary hospital is safe. I am simply not exposing women and children to harm, and I frankly think it is utterly irresponsible of the opposition to continue this line that somehow people are not safe. People are safe.

*Mrs Dunne interjecting—*

**MS FITZHARRIS:** If Mrs Dunne is an expert in fire-related matters, then I welcome her expert advice. But I have expert advice, and that expert advice has advised me, as I have said previously, that it would be irresponsible to remove those panels immediately. There may be further risk to the building from, for example, its watertightness in a storm event or a rain event. There may be an issue with voiding building warranties if we remove the panels. It may also reduce the operational efficiency of the building if those panels are removed before replacement panels are available. The Centenary Hospital for Women and Children is a safe, modern building.

### **Litter—leaflets**

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services and relates to leaflets left on windscreens. Minister, it has come to our attention that someone is leaving leaflets about voting no on the postal survey on cars parked at Jamison centre. These leaflets are factually incorrect and misleading. What enforcement can be done under the Litter Act 2004 to prevent this from happening?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I will certainly take the question on notice regarding the Litter Act and the powers available to the ACT government. I would note that, under the Litter Act, I do not think there would be a role for the government to determine whether these pamphlets were either correct or misleading. I will take the question about the Litter Act on notice.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Minister, are there any efforts that can be undertaken by the government to prevent or minimise distribution of factually incorrect material during the postal survey period?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I will take the question on notice.

### **Council of Capital City Lord Mayors—ACT relationship**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, you recently attended a meeting of the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors in Sydney. Can you please update the Assembly on the activities of the CCCLM, and Canberra's growing role in driving the group's agenda?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Orr for the question. The Council of Capital City Lord Mayors met at the end of August and the beginning of September over two days in Sydney for its annual general meeting. These meetings of lord mayors of Australia's capital cities provide a very valuable opportunity for a key group of city leaders to discuss a range of issues of shared concern and to advocate on behalf of Australia's capital cities and their residents.

The most recent annual general meeting covered a broad range of issues, including a discussion with the CEO of Infrastructure Australia on the infrastructure challenge facing cities; a discussion with the commonwealth's assistant minister for cities, the Hon Angus Taylor, on the commonwealth's smart cities plan; an examination of the impact of climate change on cities; and a discussion of opportunities for commonwealth, state and city governments to work together to incentivise the uptake of electric vehicles.

Through the CCCLM, the ACT will continue to contribute to the development of key cities policy on issues such as city responses to homelessness and the commonwealth government's recently released crowded places strategy.

I am working to ensure that Canberra takes a leading role in this organisation. I can advise the Assembly that following the annual general meeting, I have been elected chair of the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors for 2018. Having been deputy chair in 2017, it was the ACT's turn to take over the chair of this august body, and it is an ideal time for the commonwealth, together with state and territory governments, to make proper investments in our cities. (*Time expired.*)

**MS ORR:** Chief Minister, what benefits has the ACT region received as a result of our membership of the CCCLM?

**MR BARR:** There are many benefits from being engaged in this national forum. Through collective advocacy and joint policy development, the CCCLM gives Canberra a voice in the development of national cities policy and an opportunity to influence federal policy, such as the commonwealth government's smart cities plan and of course the development of city deals.

As the nation's city leaders, the CCCLM provides an opportunity for lord mayors and, indeed, one Chief Minister, to build partnerships across political, jurisdictional and geographic lines.

Working with Sydney's Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, will drive support to grow and improve the rail services between Sydney and Canberra. Lord Mayor Moore has agreed to join me in advocating for stronger public transport connections between Canberra, our nation's capital city, and Sydney, the largest city in the country.

Similarly membership of the CCCLM has directly led to the development of a smart city cooperation agreement between Canberra and the City of Adelaide. Under this agreement, the two cities have made a joint application in a nation-leading way to the commonwealth's smart cities and suburbs program for the development of an integrated smart parking application, something that will benefit drivers in both of our cities.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Chief Minister, how will the ACT government contribute to the CCCLM agenda for 2018?

**MR BARR:** The chair of the CCCLM, as I have mentioned, rotates through member cities on a yearly basis. I look forward to taking up the chair role in 2018. The key priorities that I will be working towards will be championing the importance of sustainable transport infrastructure in cities, especially light rail, strengthening international collaboration by building closer relationships amongst the CCCLM with Canberra's sister city, Wellington, and Auckland and Singapore, and continuing to work across the lord mayors network to implement practical reforms in areas such as homelessness, economic development, infrastructure and climate adaptation.

Of course, all of this work will be occurring in the context of a possible federal election campaign, rumoured to take place in the second half of 2018, which will certainly be the perfect time to put capital city issues on the national agenda.

One of the CCCLM's key objectives, and one that I will pursue as chair, is to advocate strongly for the important role that cities play in the economic life of our nation. The prosperity and productivity of cities must be supported by strong federal leadership, a clear cities policy, but, most importantly, on-the-ground results.

### **Mental health—office for mental health**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health: in your ministerial statement yesterday on 12 September in relation to the office of mental health, you said:

... there have unfortunately been some unavoidable delays in progressing formal consultation on this initiative.

Minister, what caused the delays and why were they unavoidable?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I did think it was worth being forthright about the fact that this is not going as quickly as I had hoped. What has come up is that there is a range of models in different jurisdictions and it has taken the directorate some time to work its way through those different models to provide me with a level of research that I was then happy to share with the key stakeholders as part of the conversation starter which I referenced in my statement yesterday.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, what will you do to ensure that the office for mental health is people-centric and not outputs driven?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I think a very important part of any model is that we actually want the focus to be on those who are seeking care within our system. We should ensure that the system is all about their needs because they are coming to seek support at a vulnerable time in their lives. Therefore, we need to ensure that the system is as people-centric as possible.

In that sense, it is all about making sure that the journey through the system is as smooth as possible for people, that they get the support they need when they need it and that it is clear to them how the system works.

**MS LEE:** Minister, how much of the 2017-18 budget appropriation of \$500,000 has been spent so far on the office of mental health initiative, on what has this been spent and will the full amount be spent this financial year?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I will need to take that level of detail on notice.

### **Justice—incitement offence**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, a recent High Court case concerned an ACT prisoner who drafted an eight-page plan detailing how witnesses would be forced to retract their evidence and seek another prisoner to recruit a hit man for that purpose. The High Court found that there is currently no offence of incitement to procure in the Criminal Code. The judgement stated this was a gap or omission. Attorney, you are quoted in the media as saying:

I think there's certainly a very, very arguable case that this is a serious matter and is something that we need to be looking at to change the legislation.

Attorney-General, what briefings have you had regarding this apparent gap or omission in our laws and when will you provide a response to this place or to the community?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Mr Hanson for his question. The particular case that he is referring to is, of course, the case of the Queen v Holliday. A matter of fact has been

raised. It has been looked at in relation to the drafting of our criminal laws. I have had the chance to work through the High Court decision itself. I have also spoken with my directorate on the matter, and I have also sought advice in relation to it from the Government Solicitor's office.

Members would be aware that it is not uncommon for courts to make recommendations or observations in relation to legislation. That matter was raised by the justices of the High Court and attested to the fact that if it was to be addressed it needed to be addressed by the legislature. I am working with my directorate on that. We are looking at this particularly closely and I look forward to being able to, having received further advice in relation to that particular act and in relation to that particular offence, advise in the near future.

**MR HANSON:** Attorney-General, have you sought advice as to whether such a law could be made retrospective?

**MR RAMSAY:** With the human rights in operation within the ACT, it is not something that the government is inclined to do, in relation to making any criminal act retrospective. It is not something that we would be considering in this particular case.

**MR WALL:** Attorney, will the facts relating to this case be considered by the parole board?

**MR RAMSAY:** The matter is under the Sentence Administration Board, something not within my particular area, although it sits within the justice portfolio. Matters in relation to that particular matter are rightly determined by the Sentence Administration Board itself.

### **Education—STEM skills**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research. Noting that National Skills Week has just concluded, can the minister please update the Assembly about how this important week was acknowledged in the ACT?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. Skills Week was a tremendous success. The ACT government supported a range of activities held throughout the week as they were also celebrated in other jurisdictions. The week was used as an opportunity to promote and celebrate the career pathways available through vocational education and training.

In the lead-up to Skills Week, on Friday 25 August I attended the Academy of Interactive Entertainment's STEM future skills experience showcase for local high school students. This showcase was a fantastic opportunity for these local students to explore the world of animation, artificial intelligence and virtual reality applications and to discover the exciting pathways that STEM skills can take them on.

Other activities throughout the week included a consultation workshop to discuss training opportunities in the growing community services sector. WorldSkills regional

competitions were held in Canberra surrounding National Skills Week. This included competitions in restaurant service, tiling, plastering and painting. Competitions in landscape construction, sheet metal and welding are happening over the next two weeks. The remaining competitions will occur in the following weeks through till the end of October.

Finally, the highlight of 2017 National Skills Week was the 2017 ACT training awards, held on 31 August, which showcased the commitment, innovation and outstanding achievements of all those involved in the ACT VET sector. It was a terrific night. There has been subsequent reporting of the winners of those awards. I take this opportunity to thank very much Mr Pettersson and Ms Cody, who attended, and also Ms Lee from the opposition.

**MR PETTERSSON:** How else is the government promoting STEM in vocational education and training?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Through the government and Skills Canberra, there are a number of subsidies provided for training in many STEM-related industries. These include information communications and integrated telecommunications; electrotechnology; metal engineering and manufacturing; and surveying and spatial information.

These training packages have been identified as being highly relevant to STEM-related occupations in Australia. Qualifications from these training packages are included on the ACT skills needs list and subsidised under the ACT government skilled capital and Australian apprenticeships programs. Many training packages in the VET sector provide STEM skills and the sector is a strong contributor to STEM skills development within the Australian workforce.

The ACT has also recently applied for Australian government funding to develop an end-to-end skills education strategy for cyber security with a view to positioning Australia as a global leader in training for cyber security.

Skills Canberra is also working with the Australian Information Industry Association to understand the future and emerging skills needs within the ICT sector and, more broadly, ICT skill sets that may be relevant for workers in all industries. In addition, skill sets are also likely to be funded through ACT government programs in next year.

**MS CODY:** Minister, can you tell the Assembly about some of the ways CIT partners with other organisations to offer STEM programs?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Cody for the supplementary. As you know, CIT, a wonderful Canberra institution, has many programs and partnerships offering STEM-related activities. CIT has recently partnered with the Canberra Innovation Network as well as two local start-up entrepreneurs to co-host facilities equipped with 3D body scanners, 3D printers, CNC cutters and robotics. STEM-based activities are also delivered with a range of CIT qualifications, and the use of aerial drones has been included as a specialised component within the CIT certificate IV and diploma of surveying.

Some other examples of STEM-related CIT partnerships and activities include a formal partnership with renewable energy providers and a number of school-based STEM programs. CIT forensic science partners with the Australian Federal Police and the University of Canberra to provide training for police forces from Thailand, Indonesia, Iraq and various other countries. CIT forensic science also has a partnership with the Canvas Network to host a massive open online course in biometric technologies. There are partnerships with a number of IT industries to provide internships, higher apprenticeships and employment opportunities for students. CIT and the Academy of Interactive Entertainment partner as higher education providers to offer a nationally recognised qualification for the games and virtual world industries.

### **Education—Koori preschools**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the minister for education. Minister, you have consistently stated that Koori preschools are helping to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous children. The evaluation report by the University of Sydney released in August shows that there is no evidence to support this claim. Furthermore, there are no agreed measures of student outcomes for the Koori preschool program, and KPIs have not been developed or mandated. Minister, how can you assert that Koori preschools are making a difference to the educational outcomes of Indigenous children?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Milligan for the question. I continue to support Koori preschools in the ACT, having regard to the support that they provide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children. There are a number of reports that show how much of a difference it makes to a child's learning in preschool and future years when they have more than one year of preschool education. The Koori preschools provide two years of preschool education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the ACT; that has proven to be of benefit, and it is being called for.

Mr Steel spoke about this in his adjournment speech on Tuesday evening, when he talked about a report that he was a part of producing that calls for increased preschool education for young people, because the evidence is there, the research supports it, and it is what early childhood educators have been saying for decades: the benefits of early childhood education in preschool on a child's future learning.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, when will you establish agreed measures of outcomes?

**MS BERRY:** We are currently developing a strategy in the ACT for early childhood education that will also feed into the strategy for the future of education that will consider what education will look like in the ACT over the next 10 years. Part of that discussion will include the kinds of supports needed for early childhood educators to make sure they can provide the best quality early childhood education and how the sector can support young people into their future education.

**MR WALL:** Minister, when will you require that the early years framework be implemented so that Indigenous students attending Koori preschools do not start at a further disadvantage?

**MS BERRY:** As I have said, the ACT government is embarking on a conversation with the community in early childhood education and will be engaging with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to ensure that outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are improved and determine how we can build on the success of Koori preschools in providing expanded early childhood education for children in preschools.

### **ACTION bus service—route alterations**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, in October this year, bus route No 5 will be cancelled and routes in that area altered. Bus route No 6 will not provide the same level of service or the number of stops. Minister, why are you cancelling the No 5 bus?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** In fact there will be increased services offered. I know that, in particular, for residents of Narrabundah, this will present a change. There is a significant amount of information available to residents of Narrabundah in order to understand the changes that will be happening. As we move towards a network that provides more frequent services for more Canberrans and better connections to more frequent services, we will see some changes to our routes. This is one that is being introduced in October. We are delighted that the new green rapid will now be in place, offering services every 15 minutes on weekdays, which will provide increased levels of service to residents right along that route, including in the inner south in particular, including in Narrabundah.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what consultations did you or your directorate undertake before cancelling the No 5 bus and what feedback have you had about the cancellation?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Information is being made available to residents now. The change in the network will start in early October. We have had some feedback obviously from residents who have a change to their level of service. The effort now is to make them aware of the increased connections that they will be able to take, particularly through the introduction of the green rapid. There is an extensive amount of information available on the buses themselves and from the Transport Canberra website, and there is also ongoing engagement with local residents groups.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Minister, how many people will now have to walk more than 500 metres to their nearest bus stop; if, in fact, there are more?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I assume that Ms Le Couteur means on this particular route. I do not have those specific numbers at the moment. It would, of course, relate to where people are coming from and where they are going. It is important to note that there will still be services particularly to the Narrabundah shops and, of course, Winnunga Nimmityjah nearby there. There will also be increased levels of service available to people through the green rapid.

### **Access Canberra—online licence renewal**

**MS CODY:** My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services. Minister, how is Access Canberra making it easier to access government services, such as renewing your driver's licence?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Cody for her question. This government is indeed getting on with the job of making it easier to interact with government. Access Canberra has redesigned its service centres to more efficiently service those who visit in person, and Access Canberra continues to make more and more of its services available online.

A key priority that I have given to Access Canberra is to make doing business with the ACT government easier and simpler. Where possible, it is seeking to reduce red tape, including introducing digital solutions. Access Canberra now has nearly 300 of its services available online, with that number continuing to increase. It is also the creator of some of the government's most popular online services, such as fix my street. Our most frequent user of the service submitted 353 requests in the last financial year. We then invited this particular user, with nine other "frequent flyers", so to speak, to help test and shape the next iteration of fix my street, ensuring that it has everyday Canberrans at the centre of its design.

A key new online service that I was delighted to launch a few weeks ago is online driver's licence applications. This means that many Canberrans no longer need to attend a service centre to renew their driver's licence. We have also extended the maximum validity of licences so that they can be issued for up to 10 years as well as allowing people to re-use their photos as long as they were taken in the past 11 years. Unlike others in this place who I know are looking forward to a new photo, I look forward to keeping my current photo for as long as possible.

**MS CODY:** Minister, how does the new online drivers licence renewal system make it quicker and easier to renew your licence?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Cody for her question. The new online drivers licence system is indeed designed to make life easier for Canberrans. The majority of those who need to renew their licence will be able to do so without having to set foot in an Access Canberra service centre. Those who have had a photo taken in the past 11 years and have a straightforward renewal can now do this relatively easily online. Access Canberra will then issue the person with a temporary licence that can be used for up to a month while the new card is posted out. The system will also provide Canberrans the option for either five or 10 years, depending on their preference.

I am happy to report to the Assembly that this is already a popular service, with 186 people renewing online in the first five days alone. There were even 44 people who were so keen to use the service that the system had to remind them that you can only renew your licence if the current one has less than a year's validity remaining.

Gone are the days when you had to take a number and wait for someone, wait for your photo to be taken, then wait for the printer to print the licence. This change will mean that the average Canberran will be able to go through the whole process without leaving the comfort of their own home.

It will also free up the resources to allow Access Canberra's talented staff to more quickly process those who do need to attend a service centre, such as those needing an eye test, those getting their Ls or those who have gotten the most out of their previous masterpiece photo and would like to have a new one. Access Canberra is all about making it easier, simpler and faster to transact with government. That is why we are putting more and more services online for those people who prefer to interact with us in that way.

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, how will Access Canberra ensure those who cannot renew online are still well supported?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary. The capable staff at Access Canberra remain ready and willing to help. For those without internet access, the Access Canberra shopfronts have touch screen computers that members of the public can use to lodge applications online. Those who choose to lodge their licence renewals in this way will still be able to receive a temporary licence and receive a new card in the mail so that they do not have to wait. All of Access Canberra's online applications can be accessed on these touch screens, with staff nearby and available to help should it be needed.

For those who are not comfortable transacting with us online or for those who are unable to renew online due to their circumstances, the friendly staff at the nearest Access Canberra shopfront or the Civic drivers licence centre are there to help. Staff can take a licence application in hard copy and process it while the person waits.

Whether it is in person or on the phone or online, Access Canberra is always striving to make it as easy as they can for people to do business with government. They have set up their processes so that those who want to make a quick transaction are able to do this. Access Canberra makes sure that the resources are available to ensure that those who need or want a little extra help or who have a more complex inquiry are able to be supported.

The government will be working to ensure that we have the best practices in place to ensure that our citizens' interactions with the government meet their needs.

### **Floriade—participation regulations**

**MR WALL:** My question is to the Minister for Tourism and Major Events. Minister, the operator of the historic half-million-dollar Australia Fair organ has been part of every Floriade festival since its inception. Despite the long history of this attraction at Floriade, the operator has encountered a staggering level of red tape when seeking to be a part of the event in the past few years. These hurdles include attempts to charge him up to \$20,000 to attend as an entertainer, poor positioning within the site and lost

application forms; up to this year, when the operator was notified only in the last couple of weeks that his application for the 30th Floriade had not been accepted. Minister, why is it that people wanting to continually enrich the Floriade experience have been treated with contempt; and why have applicants found out if they had a space at this year's event only a matter of days before the event's commencement?

**MR BARR:** I am very familiar with this particular case and this particular entertainer or participant in the event. There are a number of facts that Mr Wall has omitted from his preamble. In fact a number of the statements he made in that question are heavily contested and are not factually correct. But as it relates to this individual, he has a long history of not complying like every other either business trader or entertainer in this particular event, by either refusing to fill out the appropriate paperwork in order to gain entry into the venue or refusing to pay for various slots in the venue, like every other business has to.

In this particular context, the process, as I am aware, involved significant contact with Mr Alabaster. This is an issue that has arisen at this time of year almost every year in the 11 years that I have been involved as minister for tourism. It is not a new issue, and this is an individual who constantly seeks ministerial intervention to get around the rules that have been set quite appropriately by the event organisers. I will not be entertaining a political fix in relation to this issue. There is too much form and too much history in relation to Mr Alabaster.

**MR WALL:** Chief Minister, is it acceptable for participants in one of the territory's premier events to be in limbo up until the weeks prior to the event to find out whether or not they have a space to participate?

**MR BARR:** They are not in limbo in this particular instance. As I said, there is so much history to this case. I have dealt with this as minister in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and now 2017, where this issue of not responding to invitations to participate, not wanting to be part of a change in the nature of the event is such that unfortunately there is not a prospect for Floriade 30. Should Mr Alabaster wish to participate in future Floriades, he, like everyone else, should go through the same process; no special deals.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how many performers and/or entertainers at Floriade will be paying the \$20,000 traders fee to participate in the 2017 event?

**MR BARR:** I do not have the exact number of performers, traders and otherwise but, as part of staging the event, contractual arrangements are entered into with those who seek to trade within the event. It is not a free-for-all; not just anyone can rock up and decide they want to sell their goods and services inside Floriade. It is a commercial event. And this is not just a performance; this is a business seeking to sell things as well. Let's be clear on the history of this. It is not the first time this issue has been raised, and even a modicum of research would demonstrate that this is a perennial issue with this individual. As I said, I am not going to intervene again given the long and repetitive history of this approach.

**Ginninderry—community opportunities**

**MS CHEYNE:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, how is the Ginninderry joint venture, of which the ACT government is a 60 per cent partner, providing opportunities to Canberrans, particularly those in West Belconnen, to gain important skills and pre-employment experience?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. Those who are local in the West Belconnen community will know of the fantastic training program SPARK, a training and employment initiative which will generate economic opportunities for people in the local community over there in West Belconnen particularly. It is a program that forms partnerships with training providers, with local support organisations and with community organisations. It reaches out to individuals in the community to get them involved in training or work experience with a view to getting employment after they have completed those programs. To date, there have been 304 training places, 136 work experience places and 96 jobs gained by participants in those programs.

The programs include pre-employment, child care and youth employment pathways, as well as business administration. A number of programs are coming up and have already been announced. These are in hospitality and community care, as well as being a partner with a social enterprise which will be well known to Mr Ramsay: the Mower Shed, which was developed in partnership with the local community and UnitingCare Kippax. It is one of the things that were remembered about a former MLA in this place, who assisted with getting that social enterprise up and running. It is about delivering services to people who cannot afford to pay for them themselves. It has already won some work in that area.

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, what has vocational and pre-employment training such as the SPARK program got to do with building a new community such as Ginninderry?

**MS BERRY:** The important part of the SPARK program and the Ginninderry development is that it is mindful of the existing community in making sure the existing community is not being left behind in the development of a new community out in West Belconnen. The building of the new community is not just about bricks and mortar; it is actually about building inclusion and bringing locals into that new development but also not leaving the current West Belconnen community behind. It is about giving people who need a job the opportunity to get the training they need to get work in their local community, and the SPARK program is helping with that.

Part of the SPARK program and the arrangement with Ginninderry as they go out to tender for stage 1 of the development includes a requirement for work experience places for people who are part of the SPARK program as well as job opportunities for those individuals.

**MR STEEL:** Minister, what are some of Ginninderry's most recent achievements?

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** If members opposite have questions about the program they are always welcome to go and visit the development. I know that a number of members have been on a tour of Ginninderry to have a look at what the development will offer the Canberra community over the next three decades at least.

One of the great things that have come out of that program—and people may have heard about the individual—was a young person, a teenager, Marvellous Sigudu who came from South Africa in 2012 and attended Hawker College. He did not have a lot of money for post secondary school. He saw on the noticeboard at the school a program that was being provided by SPARK. It was something that he was interested in because he could use his hands. He could then be part of a program that he could afford. It was a 10-week program.

Participants renovated the old Kippax health centre courtyard, which supported Belconnen Community Services, and also a community garden facility at Canberra City Care. The graduates received a certificate II in construction and a white card and an asbestos awareness ticket. Marvellous was one of those graduates.

I know Mrs Kikkert has attended at least one of the graduation programs, and I have as well. It is truly a moving experience to see people who might not have ever thought that they had the chance to get a qualification after completing year 12, through SPARK, getting the chance to get not only a qualification but a chance to work within their own community.

Marvellous got experience within construction sites and he experienced what construction was like. In May, only a few months after the end of the program, he accepted a carpentry apprenticeship with the Australian Training Co, being hosted by J&J Interiors, an Australian training company that does professional interior design and construction. He plans to become a fully licensed carpenter and then builder. The experience and skills that he gained through SPARK training have set Marvellous on a fantastic path. (*Time expired.*)

### **Conflict Resolution Service—funding**

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is to the Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion. Minister, you recently told ABC Radio that the Conflict Resolution Service has been responding to demands that go far beyond what they are funded for but that you still need to determine if other more appropriate services should receive funding increases instead. Minister, why was the decision made to scale back CRS's output by half, resulting in extensive waiting lists and clients being turned away, before you knew whether any other service providers are already in place and adequately resourced to meet the needs of those no longer served by CRS?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Madam Speaker, I would draw your attention to the very lengthy question asked by Mrs Kikkert. However, I am happy to respond to it and to clarify that, of course, the government has not in any way reduced CRS's funding. The Conflict Resolution Service is continuing to receive more than \$630,000 this year

from the Community Services Directorate to support its work in general family and dispute resolution, neighbourhood disputes and mediation between young people and their families where the young people are at risk of homelessness.

Mrs Kikkert has referred to comments I made which related to an interview by the CEO of CRS, Shawn van der Linden, last week in the media where Mr van der Linden noted that CRS has had a history of never having waiting lists because they always just said yes to everyone, and he talked about an increase in referrals from a range of services. I absolutely want to commend the CRS team for their fabulous work but I also want to commend Mr van der Linden and the CRS team for the work they have done in looking at their service model to ensure that it is, indeed, sustainable into the future.

CRS is part of a service system that also includes a range of other providers. I talked on radio, for example, about community legal centres that I understand had been referring to CRS. Of course, the government committed an extra \$1.6 million to community legal centres in this latest budget.

The Community Services Directorate, as I said, continues to fund CRS for more than \$630,000 in this year and continues to work with CRS to ensure that its services are targeted to low income Canberrans who need them. The Community Services Directorate has been encouraging CRS to consider diversifying its business model and to consider financial— (*Time expired.*)

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, what other existing alternative dispute resolution services can vulnerable Canberrans who wish to avoid the justice system now be referred to?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I again emphasise that the Conflict Resolution Service continues to provide the services for which it has been funded for a number of years, specifically around the family tree house program and the other programs around general family and dispute resolution and neighbourhood disputes. The tree house, of course, is about mediation between young people and their families when young people are at risk of homelessness. That is what CRS has been funded for for some time, and that is what it is continuing to do.

As I said, they are part of a service system. There are other services that we have funded. For example, in one of my other portfolios, we are supporting a family group conferencing pilot for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families coming into contact with the child protection system to empower those families, in a mediation-type setting, to work among themselves and with community service providers to find solutions for their own challenges to keep children safe at home. As I mentioned, the most recent budget put in an additional \$1.6 million for community legal centres which provide those services.

And as I said on radio, there is a range of other services within the sector, including advocacy services, that support people in different parts of the system. What we need to do, and what we are doing, is to work with the Conflict Resolution Service to ensure that they are providing the most appropriate service, to consider their financial

model, to ensure their viability and then to continue to work with them to consider their need for future funding within the context of our move towards a restorative city.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, will the government now update the Access Canberra website, which assures Canberrans that the CRS provides “alternative dispute resolution services for the ACT with no waiting lists”?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I can assure the Assembly that CRS does continue to provide dispute resolution services. It received more than \$630,000 in this financial year to continue its work of general family and dispute resolution, resolving neighbourhood disputes and mediation between young people and their families when young people are at risk of homelessness. That is what it has been funded to do. That is what it is continuing to do. The Community Services Directorate has continued to work with CRS to ensure that they are able to provide those kinds of dispute resolution services to people who are in need, to the most needy, in our community.

### **Government—gambling harm minimisation**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services, in the gaming and racing space. Minister, the federal Minister for Human Services, Alan Tudge, said earlier this month:

Online gambling is growing faster than any other form of gambling and the incidences of problem gambling is [sic] higher. The gambling problems of the future will all come from the online space ...

Minister, you are hosting a gambling harm minimisation round table this week. If this is really about minimising gambling harm, why are you completely ignoring the fastest growing form of gambling addiction?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Mr Parton for his question. I am surprised in some ways that he does not follow all the things that are going on in the area of gambling and gambling reform. One of the things that I was doing most recently, just last week, was gathering with the gambling ministers, as we are called, down in Melbourne, and continuing the ongoing reform to which Minister Tudge referred. I was particularly pleased to be able to be part of the group that is working around the areas of precommitment, advertising and gambling reform messaging and a whole range of national principles that we are looking to have in place by the end of—

**Mr Parton:** A point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Minister, please resume your seat. A point of order?

**Mr Parton:** The question specifically related to the gambling harm minimisation round table and its not addressing this form of addiction.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I will let the minister continue. He has a minute to go. I should have stopped the clock.

**MR RAMSAY:** I note that the question asked why I was doing this and ignoring other areas. I am pointing out in response to the particular question that I am actually not ignoring those other areas, but I am particularly active in those. The round table that we are having on Friday is one of a series of consultations that are taking place. This particular one is in the area of harm minimisation reform in clubs. That has been something that has been made clear; it has been something that I have made clear in the Assembly. It is something that we are working on, along with other things.

This government has been committed all the way through to reducing the impacts of problem gambling in relation to those affected through problem gambling.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Mr Gentleman:** A point of order, Madam Speaker. You have asked the opposition to remain quiet during question time a number of times. Mr Hanson is a repeat offender. You have asked him to remain quiet during question time.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**Mr Gentleman:** He continues to interject.

**Mr Coe:** A point of order: was it advice to him?

**Mrs Dunne:** On the point of order—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** No, I will respond to that point of order first. When someone is on their feet on a point of order about interjections, it is really just not on, Mr Hanson, to interject on a point of order about your own behaviour. Mrs Dunne?

**Mrs Dunne:** On the point of order, it is ironic, Madam Speaker, that there is selective deafness on the other side; as soon as anyone talks about the Labor club and poker machines, they are on their feet taking points of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. The time has expired.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, why does the round table not include organisations like the casino, Tabcorp and some of the gaming machine manufacturers?

**MR RAMSAY:** There is a range of people present at this particular round table; there is a range of people who will not be present at this particular round table. One of the key things is the workable size of a round table. As I have said, this is one part of a series of consultations. I look forward in other consultations to be working with people who are working in the clubs. They are not involved in this particular round table, but I will be consulting with them in the future.

There are other areas, including industry and manufacturers. I will be speaking with those in the future.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR RAMSAY:** We do not have a time when we gather everybody with any possible interest in the one place. We do not call that a round table.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Ramsay, can you resume your seat. Members! Really? Enough. You have asked the question and you are not even bothering to listen to the answer, Minister, do you have anything else to add?

**MR RAMSAY:** As I say, we do not call it a round table if we gather absolutely everyone at the one time. We could call it an open picnic, if you would like. But we will be gathering particular people at particular times, and this Friday will be an important part of that.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, are you conflicted on this issue because of the millions of dollars received by the Labor Party and, consequently, MLAs, through the proceeds of pokies?

**MR RAMSAY:** No.

### **Environment—healthy waterways project**

**MR STEEL:** My question is to the Minister for—

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Can you resume your seat. We are up to the final question. Then you can take yourself outside to continue your laughter. Mr Steel.

**MR STEEL:** My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. Minister, could you update the Assembly on the progress of the healthy waterways grants and education programs?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Steel for his question and his interest in the environment, particularly in the Tuggeranong area. The H2OK campaign, the program which operates as part of the overall healthy waterways program, is a joint initiative of the commonwealth and ACT governments and includes a residential grants scheme and a targeted education program.

Both the grant and education programs play a key role in ensuring the continued success of the overall healthy waterways project. By speaking with local communities and residential households, the ACT government aims to create a change in the way Canberrans interact with their local waterways and decrease their pollution levels all around Canberra.

Over 60 applications were submitted for the grant program, and each application was thoroughly assessed, including through site visits, before the final 15 projects were selected. Spread across the ACT, the grant recipients will fund projects such as rain gardens, mulching systems, downpipe disconnection and nature strip treatments, and, for rural areas, erosion control as demonstrations of the best practices others can learn from.

These 15 successful project sites will provide practical examples of how others can implement simple solutions for managing stormwater on their block and lead to a further removal of polluting intakes from our waterways. Through our partnership with Open Gardens Canberra, people will be able to visit the sites to see firsthand how others are redesigning their gardens to make better use of water, minimise contamination run-off and ensure that only rain goes down the stormwater drain.

The broader education program, including projects such as “Drain art”, which includes the placement of painted designs and asphalt art decals and stickers in prominent areas along City Walk in Civic, will show how pollutants such as rubbish, cigarettes, oil, leaves and grass, which wash from the street into stormwater drains, result in poor water quality for water that ends up in our lakes and our waterways. *(Time expired.)*

**MR STEEL:** Minister, how will the grant projects help to improve the health of Canberra’s waterways?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The grant program plays a very important role in getting the community involved in improving the health of our waterways. With over 80 per cent of respondents to a survey indicating that they enjoy the waterways on a regular basis for activities such as jogging, cycling or fishing, it is clear that the people of Canberra value their waterways greatly, and the ACT government is committed to keeping them healthy.

The grant program, which as I said before has seen over \$55,000 provided to 15 residential properties, will enable the delivery of projects such as rain gardens, mulching systems and, for rural areas, erosion control. These projects will provide actual benefits to the residential properties and the waterways through the reduction of waste entering stormwater drains and subsequently the waterways. But they also provide practical examples of how others can implement simple solutions for managing stormwater on their blocks.

Examples such as a property in Chisholm—where a refurbishment of an established garden to reflect better management of water, including rehabilitation of an artificial creek, conversion of an existing nature strip to a more water-friendly treatment and an upgrade of the existing irrigation system to better connect to new and existing rainwater storage—show how these improvements have been made in suburban areas; while a redevelopment in Curtin, which includes flo-cell units to be installed to support lawns fed by below-ground water storage beneath the turf, shows how more densely populated areas can also contribute.

These projects have both the practical effect of reducing the inflow of rubbish materials into our stormwater drains and subsequently our waterways and also enabling others to see what they can do on their properties, in their homes and in their suburbs to help contribute to healthier Canberra waterways.

**MS ORR:** Minister, how will the education campaign help to improve the health of Canberra's waterways?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for her interest in our environment. Education programs form a vital part of the healthy waterways program and contribute greatly to the cleaning up of Canberra's waterways. By providing Canberrans with information on how different items going down the drains can affect and damage our local waterways, the ACT government is working with local residents to reduce this inflow.

We want to get the message out about the impact pollutants entering our lakes and rivers have and provide simple and accessible fact sheets on what residents can do to help. Everything from raking up leaves on their nature strips to ensuring that cars or other vehicles are not leaking oil into the gutter are some of the simple things that households can do to help protect our waterways.

Further, through the grant project and our partnership with Open Gardens Canberra, people will be able to visit the sites to see firsthand how others are re-designing their gardens to make better use of water, minimise contaminated run-off and ensure that only rain goes the stormwater drain.

Lastly, the drain art project, comprising artwork, will draw pedestrians' attention to, and subsequently change, what we do in the streets and on our blocks at home. Rubbish, cigarette butts, leaves, chemicals and oil all wash down our stormwater drains and end up in our lakes and rivers. The artwork will also help people visiting the Civic area make a clear and visual connection to what goes those particular stormwater drains that lead directly to Lake Burley Griffin, on into the Molonglo river and eventually downstream to the Murrumbidgee River.

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

## **Language of debate**

### **Statement by Speaker**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Earlier today Mr Coe moved a motion on mother language, and two members spoke in Korean and Tongan, as I understand. As noted in *House of Representatives Practice*, although there is no specific rule set down, the house follows the practice of requiring members to speak in English. The reason for this is so that members and those listening are able to follow the debate. It is unlikely that the chair, for example—in this case, me, given that I do not speak Tongan or Korean—would be able to follow that debate.

You provided Hansard with a copy of the text straight after the speeches and thank you for that. I do not want to hamper debate; we are a progressive, diverse Assembly.

But I ask that, when you do that—and there will be appropriate and right times that you do—you provide the chair and Hansard with a copy so we can all have an understanding and follow the debates and the comments that you make.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (3.36): Madam Speaker, I just want to clarify something on the point of the mother language motion. I did provide a translation in English straight after I spoke in Tongan.

**MADAM SPEAKER**: You did. Thank you for that.

**MRS KIKKERT**: That is okay?

**MADAM SPEAKER**: If you know you are going to do it, it would be handy for the chair to have a copy beforehand. As chairs, we are responsible for making sure matters are in order.

**MRS KIKKERT**: Okay.

**MADAM SPEAKER**: That is all. Thank you and I think it was a great contribution, particularly on that motion on mother language.

## **Leave of absence**

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mrs Jones for today's sitting for personal reasons.

## **Answer to question on notice**

### **Question 371**

**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): After question time yesterday, in response to Mrs Dunne's statement regarding questions, I said that my office had been in touch with Mrs Dunne's office in relation to overdue questions on notice. However, that was incorrect. My office, though intending to, had not yet been in touch to discuss the matter at the time of those comments. This confusion was due to a mix-up in my office, and I apologise for this.

I have signed the questions on notice, Madam Speaker, and I have also written to Mrs Dunne to respond to her correspondence. I wish to place on the record my thanks to my staff for their commitment to their work, in particular the detailed extra work to complete these requests, often outside normal hours.

## **Tourism—major events strategy**

**MR PETTERSSON** (Yerrabi) (3.38): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes recent data from Tourism Research Australia indicating the strong growth in visitor numbers to the ACT, including:
  - (a) a 9.1 per cent increase in the number of international visitors, taking the Territory's total to 221 000 international visitors for the 2016-17 financial year;
  - (b) a 27.3 per cent increase in international visitor expenditure since the previous financial year, the fastest growth rate of any jurisdiction taking the total international visitor expenditure to over half a billion dollars; and
  - (c) similarly strong growth in domestic visitation, with domestic visitors to the ACT increasing by 2.7 per cent and total domestic trip expenditure increasing by 16.3 per cent;
- (2) notes the important role major events play in attracting both international and domestic tourists to the Territory, noting that:
  - (a) Floriade attracts more than 400 000 local, interstate and international visitors each year;
  - (b) the Enlighten festival attracts over 280 000 visitors each year;
  - (c) the National Multicultural Festival similarly attracts approximately 280 000 each year; and
  - (d) the vast array of other major events that attract visitors to the Territory, including, but not limited to, the National Folk Festival, the Canberra Balloon Spectacular, Skyfire, Summernats, Australia Day and New Year's Eve celebrations;
- (3) notes the release of the ACT Government's Major Events Strategy, building on the success of the ACT Government's Special Event Fund to:
  - (a) provide the right policy settings for events to grow and prosper in Canberra;
  - (b) focus on the acquisition of new and exclusive major events;
  - (c) revitalise and grow our existing anchor events like Floriade and Enlighten;
  - (d) deliver events throughout the year;
  - (e) encourage collaboration and coordination across the events sector; and
  - (f) enhance our major event venues and infrastructure; and
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to explore options in implementing the Major Events Strategy to:
  - (a) utilise the natural and cultural assets located in the Parliamentary Triangle;

- (b) continue to partner with national cultural institutions to deliver events;
- (c) introduce additional family friendly celebrations;
- (d) promote the use of Women's Safety Audits in preparation of ACT events and in line with the ACT Women's Action Plan 2016-26, to ensure women's full, equal and safe participation;
- (e) commit to increasing local content to assist local artists to showcase local arts and entertainment;
- (f) implement a new festival celebrating Canberra's innovation, strengths and global outlook;
- (g) establish a new music festival; and
- (h) introduce an iconic Canberra midnight celebration for New Year's Eve.

Canberra may be described as just an oversized country town by our haters, but we are proving to be an increasingly popular tourist destination. Canberra has so much to offer. We are surrounded by beautiful countryside and pristine national parks, we are home to iconic cultural and political institutions, we have a vibrant cafe and dining culture, and we are host to world-class events and festivals.

We do not always agree on much in this chamber, but one thing I think we all agree on is that Canberra is a great place to live. Our enthusiasm for this city is what encouraged many of us to seek public office. And we are far from the only people who think this. Canberra's tourism industry is thriving, as both domestic and international visitors are visiting in ever increasing numbers.

This success can be attributed to the cooperation between our government and innovative Canberrans whose ongoing efforts have helped make Canberra the destination it is today. But, like anything, there is always room for improvement, and this motion seeks to call on the government to explore a range of options for how our major events schedule could be improved, benefiting the tourism industry and our broader economy.

Canberra is a growing tourist destination. In 2016, we received 214,500 international visitors and 2.5 million domestic overnight visitors. This represents an increase of 9.1 per cent for international visitors and 2.7 per cent for domestic visitors from the previous year. These international visitors stayed for 4.55 million nights whilst domestic visitors stayed a huge 6.37 million nights. For a city of just about 400,000 people, these are impressive numbers.

Our international visitors are coming to Canberra from across the globe. Canberra continues to remain a destination for traditional markets like the UK, the US and New Zealand. It is also becoming an incredibly popular destination for visitors from across Asia, with the largest number of international visitors to Canberra now coming from China. This growth from Asia has been rapid. For example, since the previous year, the number of Chinese visitors rose 26 per cent, Singaporeans 72 per cent, Indonesians 43 per cent, and South Koreans 38 per cent.

As the middle class grows across Asia, it is vital that we appeal to these tourists for our industry to continue to grow. These visitors have a significant impact on our economy. As of March 2017, they represented \$2.35 billion in total expenditure in this city. Total expenditure from international visitors was \$521.7 million, with the average international visitor spending \$115 per night. This represents a 27 per cent increase in international visitor expenditure since the previous year, the fastest growing rate of any jurisdiction. Domestic visitors represented \$1.57 billion in total expenditure, with overnight visitors spending \$247 per night and day trippers spending \$139 per trip.

Various government programs and initiatives have contributed to this increase in visitation. The direct flights from Canberra international airport to Singapore have made a very positive impact, and, as I mentioned before, visitors from Singapore rose 72 per cent since the previous year. These numbers will continue to grow as more international routes are added, further growing our economy.

Cheaper domestic airlines like Tigerair have also meant that it is far easier for people across Australia to visit Canberra. The recent 2017 budget has allocated funds to event spaces such as GIO Stadium, Exhibition Park and Manuka Oval, making these venues more appealing to large-scale events.

Overall, this tourism activity represents a \$2 billion contribution to Canberra's economy. Tourism creates jobs and currently there are 16,400 Canberrans working in the tourism industry. It is important that Canberra has a diverse economy for our city's wellbeing. Further investment in the tourism industry will further assist in diversifying our economy and will allow this sector to continue to grow, creating more jobs and more opportunities for Canberrans.

Our city is home to a host of wonderful events that reflect the unique personality of our city. Not only are these major tourist events; they help make Canberra an exciting place to live for our local residents. Eighty-five per cent of Canberrans agree that events improve the quality of life in Canberra.

Canberra's events cover the interests of a diverse range of people. One of our largest events is Floriade, which attracts about 400,000 local, interstate and international visitors each and every year. Floriade is a unique event, and highlights the natural beauty that Canberra's climate and location can produce. It has a broad appeal, across ages and all backgrounds.

The Enlighten festival and the National Multicultural Festival bring roughly 280,000 visitors each per year. Again, these cultural events highlight the beauty of our city itself, and also the vibrancy of its inhabitants. Other notable events include the National Folk Festival, the Canberra Balloon Spectacular, Skyfire, Summernats, Australia Day and New Year's Eve celebrations. There are many other great events, but I will run out of time if I keep talking about them.

These events all have an enormously positive impact on Canberra's civic life. They act as advertisements for our city, showing visitors that Canberra is a safe, welcoming and fun city to live, work, study and play in.

I therefore welcome the government's new tourism strategy, announced just this week. To have a centralised tourism plan will make for a coordinated and collaborative partnership between government and industry. Classifying events as global regular anchor events and one-off feature events, regional or local, will ensure that event organisers get the support they need from our government. This plan will ensure continued growth for Canberra. These initiatives will help put Canberra on track for the ACT Tourism 2020 goal of growing overnight expenditure to \$2.5 billion.

With this plan in mind, I call for the government to explore further larger event options within the major events strategy. There is no doubt that our current events and festivals are successful. But we need to add to this success. Canberra cannot remain static. As our city grows, we must invest in new and exciting events and festivals that appeal to a diverse cross-section of the community. Target audiences should include families; overseas visitors, especially our regional neighbours; and, may I just add, young people.

Canberra has unique natural and cultural assets that should be utilised more to bring visitors to this city. The parliamentary triangle is one such example. As the seat of Australian democracy, it is a cultural icon not just for Canberra but for the whole of Australia.

The government must continue to encourage the continuing partnerships with other national cultural institutions such as the National Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and Questacon. Events and festivals should be encouraged to incorporate these natural and cultural assets where applicable. This will encourage the creation of more iconic Canberra events, continuing in the footsteps of Floriade.

Having young children should not be a barrier to enjoying events and festivals across Canberra. Existing events should be encouraged to incorporate a family-friendly option where applicable. The government must lead the way in organising additional family-friendly celebrations. This will open up these events to a larger sector of the population who may otherwise not attend. A family-friendly city will encourage more domestic and international visitors, and further contribute to our economy. On top of that, local Canberran mums and dads should not miss out on what Canberra has to offer just because they cannot find a babysitter.

Canberra is a growing city. We need a new festival that celebrates Canberra's innovation, strengths and global outlook. Our city has changed and developed and continues to jump from strength to strength. We need a new festival that celebrates the achievements of our city. This will open up new markets, and encourage visitors who have different interests. It is vital that our events and festivals engage with the thousands of visitors coming from across Asia to visit Australia. Not to actively encourage the participation of these visitors would be a mistake. A new festival focusing on Canberra's global outlook would be the perfect opportunity to engage with these visitors and show off our city to a global audience.

Canberra is home to successful music festivals including the Canberra Folk Festival, Groovin the Moo and Spilt Milk. I see the enthusiasm from—I am assuming—

previous attendees at all of these events, especially Groovin the Moo. I am seeing laughter down at the front.

Most recently, the Folk Festival had close to 50,000 attendees, whilst GTM, which is Groovin the Moo for those less hip folks in the chamber, and Spilt Milk had about 20,000 attendees, mostly coming from interstate. Not only do they boost the local economy; they provide a social and cultural experience. In particular, festivals such as Spilt Milk and GTM provide entertainment for young people, who are often not the target demographic for Canberra's large events. Local Canberrans often miss out on seeing artists perform when concerts and festivals only play in larger cities. Music festivals are definitely a case of "build it and they will come", with music revellers travelling from across the country to attend the Folk Festival, GTM and Spilt Milk.

Another music festival will help Canberra become a festival destination. It will also allow us to continue to show off our local talent. It is vital for our local music scene to be cultivated, and government support for festivals such as these allows these artists to massively expand their listener base and gain national exposure.

Finally, Canberra needs an iconic midnight celebration for New Year's Eve. We need an event that celebrates Canberra's unique atmosphere that can be enjoyed by all Canberrans, an event that might incorporate the lake, the parliamentary triangle, and even Telstra tower. Who knows? All of them would be exciting. This will make it a distinctively Canberra event, with a broader appeal. New Year's Eve should be an inclusive celebration, with an event that has something for all parts of the community to enjoy. Canberrans should not feel as though they need to go down to the coast to celebrate New Year's Eve. I would like to see more Canberrans staying in Canberra for that celebration.

Canberra is home to unique and dynamic events and festivals. They have an enormously positive impact on the cultural life of our city, as well as contributing to the economy. Our city is a growing tourist destination, with an increase in both international and domestic visitors. The creation of new events and festivals will continue to grow our tourism industry, and make Canberra an even more enjoyable place to live. I hope that all members can support this motion and help make Canberra even better.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (3.49): I rise today to support this motion. Major events in Canberra are an integral part of ensuring that our city remains vibrant, engaging and diverse and great fun for those of us who live here. Major events bring visitors to the nation's capital and, with them, much-needed expenditure. And we have every reason to be proud of our city. It is unique across the globe and it is a unique city in our nation.

So it makes every kind of sense to promote and encourage visitors through major and exclusive events as they show people what makes Canberra so great. They are one of the things that bring people to Canberra. They promote the opportunities to participate, to connect with and to enjoy the beautiful atmosphere and surroundings of our bush capital and, hopefully, to appreciate part of the democracy of Australia, which, after all, is the reason Canberra was established.

In standing here today I do really feel the absence of Brendan Smyth. Events and tourism were his lifeblood, and I truly hope that he was involved in writing someone's speech about this. Unfortunately, it is not mine. I assume that in his current role he is still involved in promoting major events in Canberra. I do hope he is listening to this debate.

Many of us have been to most of these major events such as Floriade, Enlighten, the Multicultural Festival, the Folk Festival, Skyfire, the Balloon Spectacular, Summernats and Australia Day. I will admit, Mr Pettersson, being slightly older than you, I have not been to Spilt Milk or Groovin the Moo. The festivals when I was attending had some different names.

**Mr Pettersson:** We will get you there, Caroline.

**Mr Barr:** You are not a Woodstock girl, are you, Caroline?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I hope so. Yes, the Aquarius Festival, absolutely, although that was not in Canberra. I should not go on. Tempting though it is to go into the history, I actually will leave those major events of my past at that for now.

**Mr Parton:** Probably a good thing.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Yes, possibly a good thing. I have attended a number of these events and I look forward to many of these events, such as the Multicultural Festival each year. I think this is really one of the biggest events for community participation. It certainly promotes diversity and acceptance and I like that there are local and interstate performers entertaining the crowd and the huge range of food and the traditional cultures and dances in particular. I think it is a great weekend for Canberra.

One of my other favourites is the National Folk Festival every Easter, which is a weekend full of music, dance, busking and people selling their wares. I love how anyone can get up and have a go. While it is one of the few events on this calendar that actually does cost a significant amount of money, I would note that those people who are not in a position to pay can use the opportunity to volunteer, which in some ways is better, I understand, to participate in and enjoy the festival.

Events like Enlighten and Floriade are already signature events for us here and we know that many local, interstate and international visitors come to Canberra specifically at these times—some of my visitors—so that they can benefit from being part of these events in some way. And the fact that a lot of these do not cost money to attend is a real bonus and ensures more equal participation for the people of Canberra and also, importantly, for people who do not live in Canberra. It is great seeing people coming to Floriade.

I am very pleased that Mr Pettersson also talked about the issue of ensuring that major events are accessible to families: accessible in terms of cost and, importantly, accessible in terms of access. That is one of the reasons I particularly support the promotion of women's safety audits for major ACT events. The women's safety audit

is a tool that enables a critical evaluation of the urban environment or, in this case, the environment where a major event will take place.

It is a tool that increases awareness of violence against vulnerable groups and helps users and decision-makers understand how men and women experience the environment in different ways. It gives legitimacy to women's concerns and is an effective tool for building community safety. It considers both environmental and social safety.

Beyond encouraging physical environmental changes, the women's safety audit aims to empower women to take ownership of public space and participate in local decision-making. Moreover, by focusing on women's perspectives, it is hoped that the tool can identify how environmental factors cause insecurity for other marginalised populations which may be overlooked by mainstream professionals, many of whom are likely to be male, able bodied and middle class.

The strength of the women's safety audit lies in its participatory process. By supporting and legitimating the use of women's firsthand accounts and knowledge in decision-making, this tool has the unique ability to portray to key decision-makers the emotional and physical experiences of citizens whose views are often marginalised.

I note that the women's safety audit information and suggested tool were updated on the CSD website in August this year. I therefore feel the need to express some concern that it appears that a fundamental aspect of undertaking these audits has been overlooked, that is, that they be undertaken by the very people who feel the least safe, as the information on the CSD website specifies that the assessment for events should be undertaken by the event coordinator or other specified person. Vulnerable women are the ones who are experts in their own sense of safety and this should not be overlooked.

Nevertheless, at least there is an intention to undertake an assessment of safety in relation to such issues as lighting, signage, audibility of calls for help, security-police presence, entrapment sites and more. It is through undertaking these types of audits that we can ensure that events are accessible not only to women but to all people who feel vulnerable such as people with disability, people with poor eyesight or hearing and people with prams and walking aids.

Even though some of you may feel that this is a minor consideration, in my view it is important so that we can ensure full, equal and, importantly, safe participation by all the population of Canberra and, in this context, at major events, our visitors from other places. Obviously, undertaking such safety audits will also increase the family friendliness of the events.

The major events strategy focuses on acquisition of new and exclusive events and revitalising our existing events and expanding them. It is important that they occur throughout the year so that the economic benefits of major events are sustained throughout the year, thus sustaining employment in Canberra for that time. Of course, collaboration and coordination of events and consideration of the enhancement of venues and infrastructure go hand in hand.

I am particularly pleased that this motion has a commitment to increasing the amount of local content in events. I understand that different events will have different requirements but we must make sure not to overlook our local and aspiring entertainers, performers and artists. This is particularly important if we are going to have a Canberra arts biennial event that will showcase Canberra's leading innovation network and creative and cultural industries.

We must also ensure that, where we employ local artists for their work or provide funding for local performers to contribute to flagship events, we actually pay them properly. It is a good way to showcase local talent and a good way to express the fact that we value our local community and that we want to support those making a living, or trying to make a living, through the arts. It is an opportunity to nurture partnerships between government, local businesses and artists and performers in a way that will provide an array of major events that will attract local, interstate and international visitors to our city.

I support this motion and I look forward to the development of the strategy and attending many more major events in Canberra.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (3.59): “Blooming gorgeous”, “a must-see in the capital”, “no need to visit the Netherlands”: that is how visitors have described Floriade on a well-known travel review site. After our long winters, Floriade ushers in the warmth and the colour of spring. The festival has become part of the fabric of Canberra. The Ferris wheel popping up on our skyline is a sign that spring is just around the corner, if we go by the Equinox, and we wait with excitement and relief for the new season.

The lawns of Commonwealth Park burst with life as the bulbs open and we welcome thousands of visitors to our city. Canberra is becoming a festival city, with Floriade now being joined by a string of festivals throughout the year that celebrate our seasons, culture and arts, from the National Folk Festival and Enlighten to the Balloon Spectacular, Skyfire, Summernats, Australia Day and New Year's Eve celebrations.

Locals come out in droves for our festivals, awed by the sights and satiated by the local culinary offerings at these world-class events. Visitors from around Australia and across the globe also pour into our city to see what all the fuss is about and, as we heard from the reviews, they are not disappointed. Floriade attracts more than a 400,000 visitors every year. For a city of only about 400,000 people, that number is huge. Enlighten and the Multicultural Festival also attract over 280,000 people each.

The ACT government recognises the cultural and economic importance of our major events and festivals. We had the foresight to establish the special events fund, now the major events strategy, to ensure an ongoing focus on the development of existing and new events in our city, and we are seeing outstanding results.

The figures for international visitors to the ACT in the past year are in and it was a record year. International visitor numbers are at an all-time high. Over 200,000 international visitors explored Canberra in 2016-17. That is up a huge nine

per cent on the year before. The number of domestic visitors also increased, by 2.7 per cent, as the rest of Australia cottons on to everything that Canberra has to offer.

The great news for our economy is that people are spending more when they come to Canberra too. International visitor expenditure is up 27.3 per cent and domestic visitor expenditure is up 16.3 per cent. Every dollar spent in Canberra supports our local businesses and helps to create jobs for Canberra.

This train is not slowing down any time soon. The ACT government will keep working hard to implement the major events strategy so that we continue to see our tourism and events figures grow. We will not have to wait long to see our events get bigger and better. A 30th birthday is a big deal for anyone. You and I know that well, and Floriade is no different. She is getting a new frock and tzunging up for her big 3-0 as celebrations kick off this weekend.

There will be more flowers and more to see, more to do and more to learn at Floriade 2017. The festival will get a huge kick off with the Floriade twilight concert this Friday night. You will be able to sip champagne under the stars and listen to the David Bowie tribute band, Ziggy Band, on stage 88. Ziggy Band will be accompanied by none other than the Canberra Symphony Orchestra.

The festival will also be jam-packed with workshops. If you are interested in cooking, gardening or floristry you will be able to pick up some new skills at workshops throughout the festival. For the crafters out there, you will be able to try your hand at candle-making or participate in perfume workshops. And if you are less into doing and more into surveying the fruits of someone else's labour, then sit down, grab some local food and wine and soak up the sunshine along with the tulips. For the night owls out there, Night Fest will now be extended across two weekends. Enjoy the flowers under the stars and be entertained by roving artists, pop-up performances and an aerial fire show.

Finally, and this one has me very excited, there will be a dog's day out. I hope to see Pickles there as well. On Saturday, 14 October Floriade will be overrun by dogs, big and small. Perhaps Pickles and Bailey can talk to each other. You will be able to pose with your pooch in a photo booth, get some treats at the Pooch Cafe and be comfortable knowing that the Floriade Festival ends the next day, 15 October, just in case your dog digs up something it should not. With so much going on, you might just need to go twice or more.

Another key event on the festival calendar is Enlighten, my personal favourite. Floriade is to spring what Enlighten is to autumn. The festival of lights also marks the turning of seasons, ushering in the fiery colours and longer nights of autumn. I get excited for Enlighten every year and 2018 will not be any different. Next year's event will stretch across 16 nights and will be an absolute feast for the senses. The banks of Lake Burley Griffin will be transformed into a nocturnal playground. The open fields of Barton and Parkes will unleash curious and quirky performances, food markets and stunning architectural light projections on our national monuments. More surprises will be unveiled closer to the Enlighten launch date and I will be eagerly awaiting these announcements.

Canberra's tourism and events industries are on fire. We are transforming into a city of festivals as we see more, bigger and better events stretch across the calendar. And our focus on improving our major events is paying dividends as we see our tourism industry booming with huge increases in visitor numbers and expenditure.

I commend the government for its foresight and for its creativity in driving the major events strategy and if the past few years are anything to go by I am confident the calls for continued efforts to explore new options for special events in Canberra will be answered with exciting new offerings.

**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) (4.05): I rise to speak in support of Mr Pettersson's motion on major events in the ACT. As set out in the motion, the tourism sector in the territory continues to grow, as part of the government's efforts to diversify our economy. Earlier today we spoke about the government's responsible fiscal management and the AAA credit rating that that has resulted in. That is one element of the government's strategy, but diversifying the economy has been an equally important part of the ACT weathering the downturn in federal government jobs as a result of the federal Liberals' cuts.

Diversifying the economy is critical to the future of our city and our tourism industry is a cornerstone of our economic diversification strategy. The ACT government remains committed to working with the sector to attract more visitors, with the aspirational goal of growing the ACT's overnight visitor expenditure to \$2½ billion by 2020, as outlined in the major events strategy.

As Mr Pettersson set out in his motion, major events play an important part in attracting these visitors to the capital, contributing significantly to the life and economy of our city. The major events strategy released this week recognises the importance of major events and the vital role they play in making our city a great place to live, work and visit. The strategy provides a framework to inform our approach to attracting, staging and promoting major events in the ACT, ensuring we maximise economic and social benefits to strengthen our position as an event-friendly city.

Achieving this will involve supporting the array of major events that are already held in Canberra and exploring opportunities to establish new events to build our portfolio. This will not only help grow the contribution of visitors to our local economy but also promote and shape Canberra as a vibrant, dynamic, creative and inclusive city for all people, again, reflecting that vibrant, sustainable and inclusive cities are built by governments with a vision for a better future.

It is important to acknowledge that the benefits of our major events go beyond the obvious economic benefit. As the strategy identifies, events also create social and community benefits. On that note, of course, I cannot miss the opportunity to plug the event that perhaps contributes the most to the vibrancy and livability of this city in

terms of bringing communities together and enhancing social wellbeing—although I am a little biased in this matter—the Multicultural National Festival.

Over 22 years Canberra's annual National Multicultural Festival has become recognised as Australia's biggest celebration of cultural diversity. The festival generates millions of dollars annually for the economy and is increasingly a tourism drawcard. As Ms Cheyne mentioned, more than 280,000 people flocked to the heart of Canberra in just one weekend to take part in the 2017 festival as it celebrated its 21st birthday. Every year the Canberra community and thousands of visitors and performers make the weekend's celebrations an overwhelming success.

This success is in no small part due to the volunteers who give their time during the festival. This year 4½ thousand people gave their time to ensure that the three days ran smoothly and successfully and that their communities were able to share their culture, their food, their dancing and their singing with the rest of the Canberra community and our visitors. The ongoing success of the National Multicultural Festival is a reflection of Canberra's cultural diversity, which is something all Canberrans can be proud of and, again, something that was spoken about passionately by members on both sides of the chamber earlier today.

This year saw innovations at the festival, including sanctuary spaces that were available for the first time for people to take some time away from the crowds, including a children's sanctuary, which was extremely successful. Next year's festival is slated to run from Friday, 16 February to Sunday, 18 February 2018 and will no doubt continue to be a favourite event of the Canberra community.

I remind members that stallholder and entertainer applications are now open, and close on 30 September. So if you know people in your community who would like to get involved, please encourage them to submit applications. Late applications will not be accepted as it is such a popular event.

While this motion before us today and obviously the strategy itself focus on major events, I also want to take the opportunity to reflect on the importance of local and community events. They may not bring large numbers of visitors to our city or see large-scale investment in the economy, but these events—whether they are larger ones like the Canberra Nara Festival or smaller community, cultural and religious events—are the backbone of a vibrant community. Attending these events is one of the great honours that each of us in this place has on a regular basis.

The motion mentions the introduction of additional family-friendly celebrations. This is an extremely important element of bringing our community together. In this context I would like to mention the Family and Community Day picnic that UnionsACT is running on 25 September, and encourage people to go to that event, as this will be—assuming that the bill passes tomorrow—the last Family and Community Day when we will have that opportunity. Next year we will be able to support Labour Day, and I am looking forward to working with Events ACT and others to figure out how we support Labour Day and celebrate the great achievements of the labour movement in a family-friendly way on that day.

Next year we will also celebrate Reconciliation Day, assuming the bill passes the Assembly tomorrow. We will be working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, as well as the broader community, to construct some family-friendly celebrations for Reconciliation Day. It is important to recognise that it is an event for the wider community. Reconciliation is not just the business of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but of all of us.

We have already seen that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is capable of putting on fantastic family-friendly events during NAIDOC Week. For those who did not get to this year's NAIDOC Week events, I would strongly recommend checking out the family day next year and some of the other events that occur during NAIDOC Week.

I want to finish by thanking the communities, organisations, individuals and volunteers that make each and every one of these events possible and who contribute so much to creating the inclusive city that we all love.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (4.12): I thank Mr Pettersson for moving this motion today and my colleagues for their contributions. We have heard, and it is a great thing to celebrate, that our city is currently experiencing a record number of domestic and international visitors. With this record number of visitors has come a record level of expenditure in our economy.

In the past 12 months we have seen the number of international visitors reach an all-time record high and, as we have heard, a near 10 per cent increase on the previous 12 months. Those international visitors injected an additional \$115 million into the economy in the past 12 months, taking that total contribution to over half a billion dollars. Our domestic visitors continue to be the mainstay, though, of the ACT's tourism market. To the end of March 2017 the territory welcomed 2.5 million overnight visitors, and these visitors contributed \$1.572 billion to the territory economy.

I highlight these points to highlight the economic contribution that tourism makes to the ACT. With that in mind, our tourism 2020 strategy provides the framework to build programs and activities that will help achieve our 2020 goal of growing overnight expenditure to \$2.5 billion. Currently, domestic and international overnight expenditure is worth \$2.11 billion, so we are well on our way to achieving the \$2.5 billion target by 2020.

The territory government continues to actively market Canberra to international visitors through VisitCanberra's program of activities, including the Australian Tourism Exchange, travel trade and media engagement, and cooperative campaigns with travel agents and with Singapore Airlines. The "one good thing after another" marketing platform underpins VisitCanberra's ongoing approach to marketing Canberra domestically and internationally. The premise of this campaign is very simple: there is no other destination that offers the diversity of tourism experiences so close together as our city.

Mr Pettersson's motion highlights the importance of events in generating domestic and international visitors, and they are a key part of attracting people to our city. We seek to be recognised as a leading events destination that provides a high quality, enticing suite of year-round events to show off the city and the broader Canberra region. We are committed to building and nurturing Canberra's events calendar through event delivery, through funding events, through attracting new events and through the ongoing development of our existing events.

Our city needs a bold and diverse events portfolio that incorporates a range of artistic, cultural, sporting, community and special interest pursuits throughout the year. Events bring life, colour and vitality to the city and the region. They help to build a strong sense of community pride, they help to shape public perceptions of Canberra and they showcase and share the very best of ourselves and our city. Supporting events as key drivers of the visitor economy has also been identified as one area of focus for realising our city's tourism potential.

Since 2011 the ACT government's special event fund has supported 21 completed exhibitions and events, attracting in excess of 2.9 million attendees and delivering an estimated \$636 million in economic return to the territory. The major events strategy, the strategic framework of the ACT government's approach to acquiring and operating events, was launched this week. It outlines our vision to have Canberra recognised as a world-class events destination and one whose events reflect the city's essence and personality.

It outlines the plan for making Canberra an even more event-friendly destination, defines major events by distinguishing between regular anchor events and one-off feature events, looks at practical ways to support event organisers, and identifies how events will consistently be reviewed and measured. The major events strategy will assist in developing a balanced and diverse major events portfolio that harnesses Canberra's competitive advantage as an events destination, that aligns with our city brand positioning and enhances national and international exposure of Canberra's people, our places and our way of life.

Engagement with events stakeholders has clearly identified the need for a more streamlined system for doing event business. I addressed this through the creation of Access Canberra. This gives a single point of contact within government for event approvals. Events and event organisers continue to have links and synergies across a range of other ACT government agencies, including those related to tourism, the arts, venues, sport and recreation, trade and investment and urban renewal. This approach can assist events in reaching their full potential, it certainly supports the ACT government in better leveraging our investment and it can encourage new event organisers to consider Canberra as a viable events destination.

Events have a proven capacity to generate significant economic outcomes. The major events strategy will ensure that Canberra is recognised as an innovative and creative destination renowned for its major events. A vibrant event offering also helps drive population growth by positioning Canberra as an attractive place to live. Our recent event successes have provided further momentum for harnessing our rich community

spirit and engendering a sense of ownership and pride in Canberra and its event offerings.

I am pleased to say that community surveys over the past four years have consistently highlighted support for ACT government involvement in events, with the most recent data showing 87 per cent of Canberrans supporting ACT government involvement in attracting and securing events, and 92 per cent of Canberrans believing it is important for our city to host major events.

Community support and participation are a critical factor in determining an event's success. In the simplest possible terms, whether or not an event is embraced by the community is key to its success; therefore a good cultural and strategic fit within its community is absolutely imperative. Canberra has many talented artists and highly regarded arts organisations that provide inspiration and opportunity for residents within Canberra and beyond. The organisation and delivery of large events are seen as a real strength of the city. However, these can also be enhanced by a range of smaller local events and festivals, as Minister Stephen-Smith outlined in her contribution.

A framework focusing on local events can provide a supportive environment for those events to flourish and also allow opportunities for new events to be introduced into our annual calendar. The framework seeks to build more events designed specifically for families, more music events specifically for over 18s, and a winter festival for the city.

In addition, the major events strategy will be leveraged to develop an overarching whole-of-government framework to realise the full potential of our events sector, covering events managed and delivered by the ACT government, along with those events that are owned or operated by local groups, commercial event organisers and associations.

In maximising the benefits for the Canberra region and strengthening our position as an event-friendly city, there is a clear focus on developing a whole-of-government approach to event facilitation and support for Canberra to become a world-class events destination.

I am pleased that we have had the opportunity to discuss these issues today in the Assembly. I particularly thank Mr Pettersson for his passion for new event ideas. I am very cognisant of the need to renew and refresh the New Year's Eve event, as the format for that event has been relatively static, it would be fair to say, for a number of decades. Whilst there are elements of it that definitely need to be kept and enhanced, I believe there is an opportunity for Canberra to be a little bolder in our celebration of the new year.

I also note, and will be very interested in, community feedback in relation to the significant changes that have occurred for Floriade for the 30th anniversary, noting the introduction of the Floriade Fringe event that will take place in Haig Park in October. That, together with NightFest, are two examples of innovation in the context of a core and popular event; two examples of innovation that broaden the appeal and the demographic appeal of the Floriade event. It is Australia's premier celebration of

spring, and we certainly look forward to achieving new records in attendance across Floriade daytime, Floriade NightFest now over two weekends, and the new Floriade Fringe.

**MR WALL** (Brindabella) (4.22): Whilst I am pleased to speak to this motion today, I must say at the outset that it is certainly not a surprise to see this topic on the agenda for this week. In fact, when I saw the launch of the major events strategy earlier in the week, the cynic in me thought to myself, “No doubt this will prompt at least one self-congratulatory motion from the Labor backbench on this issue.” On the face of it, Mr Assistant Speaker—

**Mrs Dunne:** I thought the same thing, and we did not even talk about it.

**MR WALL:** No collusion on that one. On the face of it, though—

**Mr Barr:** Don’t resort to becoming an old cynic like Mrs Dunne, Andrew. You’ve still got time.

**MR WALL:** There is hope for you as well then, Andrew. On the face of it, Mr Assistant Speaker, the government has put together another glossy brochure that says all the right things. The strategy talks about creating the right environment with the right structure and the resources to make Canberra one of the premier event-friendly cities in Australia.

There is much reference in this new strategy to streamlining permits and licensing and to ensuring that government processes are easily understood by organisers. We might refer to question time to realise that not all organisers necessarily find this process simple. The document also talks about adopting a standard approach to major event considerations and refers to the opportunities that are possible in positioning Canberra as an attractive proposition to host major events that will in turn grow our tourism dollar.

The indication that private partnership agreements may be considered for future events is also cautiously welcomed by the Liberals. Mr Barr is talking about what is understood as quite a Liberal approach to conducting business events. I personally see this as a very positive approach so long as it is implemented appropriately.

I believe in Canberra’s potential as a vibrant and attractive host for major events. However, I see some missed opportunities and wasted energy on the part of the government currently when it comes to nurturing and supporting existing home-grown events and attractions. I was the chair of the estimates committee. We heard from MusicACT about their proposal and report that they put to government back in 2015 entitled *Cool Little Capital*. They are still awaiting a response from government. That report was presented to Mr Corbell.

When there is an unwillingness or an inability on the part of government to work with industry or grassroots organisations such as MusicACT to have a strategy that in this instance promotes live music, it leaves a lot missing on the greater events calendar and what adds to the substance backing up and supporting major events in the

territory. If we cannot get the basics rights at home first, hosting a world-class event without any substance behind it becomes all the more challenging.

Let us take a look at our very own Oktoberfest, a home-grown event that has sadly been forced across the border simply because it is easier and cheaper to operate an event of that scale such as Oktoberfest in New South Wales. Whilst this event might not be considered “major” in the terms of this report, it certainly plays a part as one of the supporting events. It would certainly have the potential to grow into a major drawcard if we were able to allow it to do so.

The Harmonie German Club, who have hosted this event for many years, have said that the fees and charges required by the current government to operate such an event have, in their words, “got out of hand”. The increases in charges for the weekend use of Exhibition Park alone had increased from a total of \$6,000 in 2011 up to almost \$20,000 in 2016, more than a three times increase in just five years. And we thought we had it bad on rates!

Add to this the increase in costs for a police presence and liquor licensing, the cost burden for the club easily rises rapidly to over \$40,000. The big winner in all of this is the city of Queanbeyan, just over the border. Having spoken to the state member, and deputy premier, over there, Mr Barilaro, I add that he is all too happy to see a continuation of this government’s policy towards events. And need I mention what a likely outcome for the ACT greyhound racing industry may well be?

Let us not forget also that it was the Labor Party, upon coming to government, that axed one of the most important, prominent events that the territory hosted, or once hosted, in terms of exposure. That, of course, was the GMC 400. The V8 supercar event is a major event hosted not just in Australia but also internationally. It is hosted by capital cities such as Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Darwin and also regional centres such as Newcastle, Ipswich and Townsville. It is an event that brings great prominence and great publicity not just for the city domestically but also internationally through its TV reach and audiences. The benefit of an event with such global exposure should be considered—

**Mr Barr:** The locals hated it and no-one turned up, and it was massively over budget. That was the problem.

**MR WALL:** The Chief Minister interjects and says that locals hated it and no-one turned up. I can remember as a kid spending my freezing weekends out there.

**Ms Berry:** I did.

**MR WALL:** And it is good to hear Ms Stephen-Smith also saying—

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** No, I did not say that.

**MR WALL:** Who was it, then—Ms Berry?

**Ms Berry:** I said that I am afraid I did go to one—

**MR WALL:** You did; there you go.

**Ms Berry:** but I did not see anyone else there.

**MR WALL:** So there is some commonality between a Queanbeyan and Tuggeranong upbringing and a west Belconnen one. We love our motor sport. We love our motor sport, Mr Assistant Speaker.

**Mr Barr:** I went to it once too, but there were not many people there because it was so cold.

**MR WALL:** The Chief Minister is right in highlighting the weekend it was held. The Queen's Birthday long weekend in Canberra is not the ideal weekend for an outdoor sports event that was held over three to four days. But bear in mind that this was chosen as a time of year when tourism numbers in the territory are at their lowest. It was, in part, designed as a drawcard to boost tourism through what was the beginning of the winter months.

I note that the benefits of such an event, held over multiple days, that attracts people from interstate are that they do not necessarily attend only that event. Whilst people are here they are attending restaurants; they are attending other attractions. There was certainly the experience of the extended family that visited for the event. Part of the family would go to the race and others would go to some of the institutions and other great attractions that the territory has to offer. I think it is all-important that these sorts of events be put back on the table for discussion and for consideration.

**Mr Barr:** Massively expensive.

**MR WALL:** "Massively expensive," says the Chief Minister; but also of great benefit. Dare I say, as someone who hates football, the cost of GWS games may be seen as massively expensive as well. I think that beauty is in the eye of the beholder when it comes to what major events we bring to the territory. If you love your football, then there is no price too great for getting football into the territory. If you have a different sport of choice, it seems that some prices are too much.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order!

**Ms Le Couteur:** Point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker. I cannot hear a word anybody is saying:

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms Le Couteur.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order! The member will be heard.

**MR WALL:** Ms Le Couteur might be the luckiest one in here. If we turn also to infrastructure and the need for appropriate infrastructure to host events, we need look no further than the debate that continues over a suitable convention centre as a starting point.

Every major city in Australia has a convention centre, convention facilities or a facility of some sort or another. Some, as can clearly be seen, are better than others. It is safe to say that our convention centre has failed to meet the needs of, particularly, the growing Canberra business community. This is something that is seen on all sides of politics and there is some agreement across party lines.

I note that the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism has this on their agenda, with an inquiry into the new convention centre for Canberra. It is important also to note the terms of reference for the inquiry. They include the level of priority that should be given to a new convention centre in relation to other infrastructure projects in the ACT and the appropriate source of funding for each stage of the project. The outcome of this inquiry will be interesting. It should, amongst other things, ascertain once and for all the level of support that should be offered by this place for such a project.

I finish by flagging an omission in Mr Pettersson's motion, and that is the government's plan to entice visitors to stay longer than a day or two. There seems to be an absence of an overarching strategy behind our major events to ensure that visitors are staying here for longer than simply the duration of the event itself.

We have many natural resources at our doorstep and great tourism opportunities but there has been a failure to realise the potential of these, particularly with some creative work on the government's part to bring these organisations and opportunities together and to promote them as a package: the potential to capture an extra visitor dollar beyond that one day event that gets people here in the first place.

I look forward to seeing what progress is made on the government strategy, but it remains to be seen whether or not the government can in fact turn their glossy brochures into genuine outcomes for the ACT.

## **Visitor**

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** On behalf of the Assembly, I acknowledge that we have here with us in the gallery former member for Molonglo Michael Moore. Welcome, Mr Moore.

## **Tourism—major events strategy**

**MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.32):** I wish to speak briefly on this motion and concentrate on the point in the motion that relates to assisting local artists and increasing the number of local artists who become part of the arts and entertainment in these festivals and events. Much has been said about how events diversify the economy but we fail to recognise that a lot of the money spent on events actually goes

to people interstate and, in some cases, overseas, because a lot of the performers are not ACT performers. So we are not necessarily spending a great deal of money on performers that stays in the territory. We would be doing more to diversify our economy and to diversify our arts if we put more effort into that. I commend Mr Pettersson for raising this particular point.

In this respect, I would like to dwell on a couple of issues that have come my way as the shadow minister for arts. Earlier this year I was alerted to what looked like a fairly substantial amount of money spent during Enlighten on a feature event performer, in this case Theater Tol vzw, which is a Belgian theatre group.

I asked successive questions on notice. The first question on notice was about what the \$35,230.75 that was paid to Theater Tol vzw related to. It was clear from the answer by the Chief Minister—I thank the Chief Minister for his expansive answer—that this was to bring here a Belgian theatre troupe of 18 people: 17 from Brussels and one from Perth. The \$35,230.75 was the cost of their economy airfares.

The Chief Minister said in his answer that accommodation was not part of these costs. So we asked another question on notice—questions on notice are pesky but they are quite revealing—and in addition to the \$35,230.75 spent on airfares, I and the people of the ACT subsequently learned that \$8,460 was spent on accommodation, \$23,500 was spent on appearance fees, \$3,268 on meals and incidentals and \$9,000 on transport, coming to a massive \$79,458.75.

I am not casting any aspersions on Theater Tol. I was not here at the time and did not have an opportunity to participate in Enlighten this year. But it does raise the question: what benefit does the ACT get out of such expenditure? One of the issues that I have been talking about for a long time as the shadow minister for arts in a couple of Assemblies is that when we bring people like this to the ACT we should get some value add out of them.

Perhaps as part of their contract to come and perform in the ACT, they might conduct some sort of master class or something and value add to the arts community in their particular area. But that is not something that this government has shown any interest in in the past. I have been in correspondence with Mr Ramsay, the minister for arts, and have raised these issues with him, but as yet to no avail.

The other issue that arises from this has been that representations have been made to me as the shadow minister for arts by local performers who cannot get any entry into many of these events. I have had extensive correspondence and communications with one particular constituent who is a member of a band who, to his credit and to the credit of his band, has been quite proactive in trying to get EventsACT to take more interest in local performers.

Of their own volition, this band has opened discussions with EventsACT to try to break down some preconceived ideas about local performances. My constituent has said to me that they have had some constructive discussions about Floriade and NightFest. They succeeded in breaking down one of the barriers that caused interstate acts to be selected over local acts. That was that the team at EventsACT believed that

local people wanted to see interstate acts, that they did not want to come out to see local acts because they could see them any time.

While this was pointed out, there was nothing empirical to support it. This was an assertion by EventsACT. EventsACT, to their credit, seems to have modified that view. As a result, EventsACT asked this band and others to put together demonstration tapes. There were six bands that were approached and asked to put together demonstrations and videos to be reviewed. As a result of that, I understand that two bands have received positive outcomes and will be performing at various times at Floriade.

The particular band that raised all these issues themselves were not successful. But I think that, as a rock band, they probably do not quite fit the Floriade demographic. However, it is good to see local people, local bands and local performers standing up for themselves and standing up to EventsACT and demonstrating that they do have a positive and important role to play in major events.

I am also glad to see that EventsACT has somewhat, at least, relaxed their view and are becoming more open to local entertainment being part of major events like this. I commend the government for the steps that they have taken so far, but I would also encourage them to do much more in this space. I commend this particular part of the motion because I believe that this is a very important part of developing the arts in the ACT and ensuring that when we spend money on events, a lot of that money is actually kept in the ACT.

**MR PETTERSSON** (Yerrabi) (4.40), in reply: Briefly, Mr Assistant Speaker, this has been a lot of fun. I did not think it would be as much fun as it was. We have learnt a lot today. We have learnt a little about Ms Le Couteur's partying past, her festival days. We have learnt about Ms Cheyne's passion for all things flowers and we have also learnt about the Chief Minister's passion for New Year's Eve. Hopefully, we will see you on the dance floor in Garema Place this New Year's Eve.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Education—students with complex needs**

**MR WALL** (Brindabella) (4.40): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour (Schools for All) was established by the ACT Government after a 10-year-old boy with autism was locked inside a cage at an ACT school;
- (b) in November 2015, the report listed 50 recommendations for schools in all sectors that were all immediately accepted by the ACT Government;

- (c) since the report was delivered there have been a number of delays in implementing the recommendations in ACT government schools; and
  - (d) the Independent and Catholic school sectors have implemented all but one recommendation; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) implement all recommendations as a matter of urgency;
  - (b) demonstrate that ACT teachers and staff are better equipped now than they were prior to November 2015 to deal with students with complex needs and challenging behaviours;
  - (c) undertake an audit on the status of the inclusion of suitable withdrawal spaces and appropriate calming and sensory spaces in all ACT government schools and the progress of modifications that are underway; and
  - (d) report to the Assembly on (2)(b) and (c) by the last sitting day of November 2017.

I bring this motion today on behalf of the families and the educators alike who are supporting a student with complex needs, disabilities and challenging behaviours. Quoting from the schools for all report, these behaviours are defined as:

Any pervasive behaviour, or set of behaviours, regardless of cause (or even without any apparent or identified cause) which disrupts the capacity of the person, or other persons, to learn within the school environment, and which requires targeted or personalised interventions.

The situation I am about to recount was most certainly not the ACT's finest hour. In March 2015 a school in Canberra constructed a small cage out of blue metal pool fencing. This cage was designed for a 10-year-old child with autism. It remained in place for 17 days and was used on a number of occasions to restrain the child during the school day. This practice stopped only after a complaint was made by the ACT Human Rights Commission to the Education Directorate. Ironically on World Autism Day, which was 2 April 2015, the then education minister announced that "an inappropriate structure" was at the heart of an internal inquiry that was underway. The story then became headlines around Australia and the world. My colleague Mr Doszpot and his office diligently pursued the issue from that point forward and ensured that scrutiny remained firmly on the minister and the directorate for their actions.

After the spotlight was shone, some pretty terrible governance was highlighted. Professor Anthony Shaddock, Dr Sue Packer and Mr Alasdair Roy were called upon to review policy and practice in all ACT schools with regards to students with complex needs and challenging behaviours. This review culminated in a report that articulated 50 recommendations for both government and non-government school sectors.

In November 2015, six months after the situation was made public, there was no question at that point that all of the recommendations were to be implemented. All parties involved agreed that action needed to be taken. However, by June 2016 it became clear that the implementation of all the reforms in the schools for all report was not happening at a great pace. At this point we were now seven months from when the report was handed down, and only two of the 50 recommendations were considered completed.

The first oversight report highlighted that expertise was difficult to come by, time lines were not being met and meetings were not being attended, in other words, bureaucracy was getting in the way. While the process of reform was never going to be an overnight tick-in-the-box exercise, this was certainly not a good start. By August 2016 nine of the 50 recommendations had been implemented, and here we are now, one year on, and still not all recommendations have been progressed. As at the end of August, 15 of the 50 recommendations remained outstanding for ACT government schools and only one for the non-government sector. Deadlines have been pushed out and no doubt there are still obstacles to getting everything done.

The government are quite right in saying this should not ever be a tick-in-the-box exercise, and this is not what my motion seeks to do. I firmly agree that the work that needs to be done must be managed and carried out carefully so as to ensure lasting and meaningful change. However, there should be no more barriers and no more excuses. These recommendations need to be implemented as a matter of priority.

It is no secret that schools in Canberra have struggled for a long time to deal with the challenges that some students bring to the classroom. Last Assembly, in my then capacity as shadow minister for disability, I met with parents of children, some of whom had a formal diagnosis and some of whom did not, who were simply not being adequately cared for within schools. This is a situation that all school communities are aware of.

There are many students who may present as high functioning in many areas but have some level of a disability. These are the students who are mainstreamed by and large and these are the students our schools have not been able to deal with appropriately. That includes students who may not have any formal diagnosis or any formal recognition of a disability but still struggle with behavioural issues. It is a great shame that it took an incident such as a cage being built in a school to force some action on this issue and to confirm what many parents, teachers and students had known for a long time.

My motion today calls on the government to demonstrate how reforms are impacting the day-to-day life of teachers, students and school communities as a whole; how ACT teachers and support staff have been better equipped; and how the situation has changed for them on a daily basis. These questions must be asked and must be answered.

A key chapter in the schools for all report is chapter 8, which relates to the physical environment and infrastructure of schools. The inclusion of a safe, calming, sensory

space as a key tool in dealing with students with complex needs and challenging behaviours is crucial. The challenge for all schools is sticking to the principles of universal design and the provision of flexible classrooms and playgrounds. For some of our older schools this must be a continuing challenge. During some of the visits I have undertaken to schools in the ACT it is obvious that adapting old buildings and finding the space to carry out this recommendation properly has, in some instances, posed a challenge.

My motion calls on the government to report and continue to report to the Assembly on the progress of the work undertaken and is aimed at providing some transparency around the changes being made. In some cases only moderate changes may be needed, however, in some cases, wholesale changes will be required. Today my aim is not to single out any school in particular or to lay blame at the feet of anyone in particular; that will remain a matter for history to decide. What I would like to achieve today is an undertaking from the government that the minister continue to take the schools for all report seriously and that there is no change in the level of priority when it comes to implementing all of the recommendations outlined in the schools for all report.

We owe it to families of children who have difficulty in school to have all these recommendations actioned as a priority so they can be confident that their children are being treated with the dignity, respect and support they need to succeed in school. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

**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) (4.48): The government will not be supporting the motion, and I will be proposing amendments to the motion that will be circulated in my name. I am sure that all members are aware of the context that led to the government commissioning an expert panel to review and report on the policy and practice in all ACT schools with regard to students with complex needs and challenging behaviour. It was a very difficult experience for all those involved. The result has been a long-term focus on improving how all ACT schools support every individual student. What needs to happen now is that leaders in our community get around schools, teachers and other staff to support them in their vital role.

I am disappointed to see that members in this Assembly who purport to be community leaders are not living up to up to their role. It is quite clear that Mr Wall has not actually read any of the cross-sector status updates on the schools for all programs, and it seems he has not read the schools for all report either. Instead he has used a newspaper article which was an incomplete assessment of the progress of schools for all to date to have a go at public schools and their teachers and staff. He has contributed to divisiveness, not inclusion and, true to form, he has again tried to pit these government schools against non-government schools. This lacks informed comment. It is a dishonest motion. It lacks maturity. It is made up.

As I have made very clear since being appointed as minister to the education and early childhood portfolio, I hold a fundamental belief that every child deserves a great education and the life chances that flow from it. This is not a matter of simply dealing

with these children. The education system that I will foster will strive to be inclusive of all children; it will embrace difference, because the government respects diversity in our society.

The report of the expert panel was delivered in November 2015, with 50 recommendations for both the government and non-government schools. The government accepted on behalf of all schools in the ACT that each recommendation had merit and therefore agreed or agreed in principle to the recommendations. Of the 50 recommendations, 49 related to government schools, while only 26 related to non-government schools. Mr Wall would know this if he had read the report, the government response, the quarterly updates since 2016 and the end-of-year report provided by the cross-sector schools for all program board. Instead he has gone on the radio today and misled the community by claiming that non-government schools have implemented 49 of the 50 recommendations when 24 do not even relate to this sector.

He might also know that, although the government and the Catholic Education Office agreed or agreed in principle to all 50 recommendations, the Catholic Education Office is implementing the 26 recommendations relating to its schools. The Association of Independent Schools noted all 26 that related to non-government schools on the basis that the member schools that they represent are independent. I can only hope that Mr Wall will go back on the radio and correct himself.

Mr Wall's motion and his remarks target government schools, teachers and staff. I will not stand aside and let this happen without a strong defence. The scale of the task for the government schools is large. From the outset the government made it clear that it was embarking on a three-year program of work to implement the schools for all recommendations.

As Mr Rattenbury, as Minister for Education at the time, stated in April 2016:

... the Schools for All program is to be implemented over three years, to ensure it is done correctly and with the appropriate policies, systems and supports in place.

We are only halfway through this process. Right from the start of the program, the government established an expert, independent oversight group, which initially included Emeritus Professor Tony Shaddock, an author of the report, to oversee the implementation of the recommendations.

It was not just the government deciding to take a methodical approach to implementing the recommendations. In November 2016 the schools for all oversight group advised the government to take more time than was initially contemplated to consult and be considered about implementing the recommendations. That was the advice of the schools for all oversight group to the government. In doing this, the government has been able to ensure, led by the oversight group, that the work occurring is rigorous, of a high standard and creating enduring change.

Implementing recommendations like those in the schools for all report takes thought, time, consultation, a mature and steady hand and consideration of other related

projects already underway in ACT schools. It is not something that is just done immediately, like Mr Wall wants to claim.

Since the schools for all program commenced, the Education Directorate has closed 34 of the 49 recommendations related to government schools and remains committed to continual improvement and building on these recommendations. Contrary to Mr Wall's motion and public statements, the Catholic sector has closed 15 of the 26 recommendations related to it. If Mr Wall had read the report, the government response and updates that have been provided by the government to date, he would have known that many recommendations, including recommendations that remain open, relate to more than one school sector and require action by several school sectors. The one open recommendation for Catholic schools that his motion refers to is discrete to this sector. Others are shared recommendations related to this sector that remain open.

This work is not about pitting schools against each other. The schools for all program board of all three school sectors has been working together to achieve lasting change for the benefit of all schools and all students. To this end, work led and resourced by the Education Directorate has supported non-government school sectors to close recommendations related to Catholic and independent schools, because the government is committed to supporting every student in any school presenting with complex needs and challenging behaviours.

Work on open recommendations has been occurring throughout the schools for all program and, while these recommendations cannot be regarded as closed, they are being implemented. A number of the remaining recommendations are dependent on the finalisation of cross-government initiatives and other reform projects currently being undertaken by the directorate.

The recommendations that remain open include one recommendation, number 15.3, which asks that the Education and Training Directorate, Catholic Education and the independent schools co-fund a tertiary institution or other relevant research institute to undertake a longitudinal study on post-school outcomes for students with complex needs and challenging behaviour. Longitudinal means that it is going to take a little bit longer to get that study up and running.

Another recommendation, number 10.7, asks that ETD, Catholic Education and independent schools commit to the professionalisation of LSAs to ensure that by 2018, that is, next year, (a) all LSAs hold, or are in the process of obtaining, at least a certificate IV in school age education and care or equivalent; and (b) all LSAs working in a learning support unit or specialist school hold, or are in the process of obtaining, at least a certificate IV in education support or equivalent. That is happening too. Both of these recommendations were agreed in principle.

I encourage members to look at the latest status update and the key outcomes achieved against the open recommendations. Change on the scale contemplated by the schools for all report takes time, but progress is being made by all ACT schools.

The government invested \$21.5 million in implementing the schools for all program. This investment required the government school sector to reallocate resources and prioritise money for the implementation of the recommendations. The funding has supported a range of projects including: developing and implementing a positive behaviour support in schools program for schools; providing additional training for school leaders, and scholarships to build professional expertise in managing students with complex needs and challenging behaviours; undertaking research within primary schools to develop innovative approaches for students with complex needs in mainstream settings; and reviewing the student-centred appraisal of need.

As a related project as part of the national education reform agreement, the government has been consulting with the community about a new approach to allocating funds for students with disability as part of the student resource allocation work. Non-government schools have the same option and independence to reallocate their resources and re-prioritise money for implementation of schools for all recommendations. Among the government's investments in the program are a total of \$5.6 million over four years to June 2020 for targeted upgrades to provide safe, sensory learning spaces.

Since 2015 the Education Directorate has conducted three audits of government schools to ensure that there are no inappropriate withdrawal spaces and that all schools have spaces which can be used for safe, independent withdrawal and time away from the classroom. Funding for upgrades to these spaces is being provided through grants to the schools. The 2017-18 grant applications process is currently open, and closes at the end of September. I am happy to return to the Assembly in November with a further update on this issue.

There is no doubt that ACT teachers and staff are being supported by the government to support and include students presenting with complex needs and challenging behaviours. Considerable work has already occurred to achieve this. The positive behaviour for learning approach is being implemented, with 28 public schools starting on that journey. Online training is now available for autism spectrum disorders; dyslexia and significant difficulties in reading; students with speech, language and communication needs; motor coordination difficulties; understanding hearing loss; and understanding and supporting behaviour.

KidsMatter and MindMatters are now available to schools. A new Education Directorate inclusion and wellbeing intranet site was launched in March this year, and the directorate has updated its policy webpage to simplify and improve access to policies, procedures, guidelines and other supporting implementation materials. A range of other initiatives is also underway.

Additionally, as I have previously advised the Assembly, the government has recognised that, alongside ensuring that all children have access to high quality education, all school staff have a right to be safe at work. In July I launched a new nation-leading occupational violence policy and management plan with the Australian Education Union ACT branch to ensure that public school staff are safe and confident in doing what they are doing and what they are most passionate about: teaching and facilitating learning.

The government remains committed to implementing all the recommendations in the schools for all report. Work is ongoing in a methodical way and, even as recommendations are closed, the government is building and improving on its work to ensure that there is enduring change.

I hope that, from this point on, members in the Assembly will be able to make more productive contributions to supporting ACT schools. I move the amendment circulated in my name.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (5.00): The Greens will be supporting Ms Berry's amendment to Mr Wall's motion today. I thank the minister for her ongoing commitment to ensuring that the Assembly and the community are kept up to date on the progress of this important work.

As her amendments speak to, and as Mr Wall's media release today also acknowledged, this was never meant to be a tick-the-box exercise. I think that is a really important point to reflect on. Members will recall that, as the education minister at the end of last term, I had some significant involvement in getting this program underway and putting some of these oversight mechanisms in place.

The complexity of the recommendations is significant, as I will come back to in a moment. To my mind the essence of the Shaddock review and the schools for all report was cultural change. It is clear from the expert panel on students with complex needs and challenging behaviour, both in its clear and tangible recommendations and in the comments that came through from the authors, that ongoing and enduring cultural change is the critical success factor in this report. It is one that is difficult to measure but it is certainly the key change that we need to see. The incidents that prompted this report, which I know the community found abhorrent, speak to this not just being something of which we can simply say, "Yes, this has been fixed." We need to keep driving through: being very clear about community expectations, the minister being very clear about her expectations and the directorate being very clear about its expectations.

It can be a risk for government to simply release milestone implementation reports on such reviews because that can result in point-in-time analyses of whether this has been a successful implementation, and that is not a full account of what this is about. As the person who decided to publish the first implementation update, I was well aware of the risks in doing this, and my colleagues in the government accepted that as well. But we respected the community's need for assurance that the education system was doing all it could to support students with complex needs and challenging behaviours, and I felt that, given the history of this issue, publishing those reports was very important. I am pleased that Minister Berry has continued with the publication of those reports.

Much of the input I intended to make in this debate has been covered by the minister and picked up in the amendment that she has circulated. There has been regular reporting to the Assembly. All three education sectors have had genuine input into

these reports, and that reporting is set to continue. I think that is very positive so that the community can have clarity as to what is going on.

In answer to the main thrust of Mr Wall's motion regarding urgent implementation and immediate action being taken on the recommendations, it has become clear in today's debate that the independent expert oversight group advised the government in November 2016 to progress implementation of recommendations over a longer period of time than initially contemplated, to ensure that the work was rigorous, was of a high standard and did create enduring change. For me, that is the most important thing. The fact that the independent oversight group recommended that should give us all pause for reflection. We have heard a great deal of detail in the minister's response today, so I will not expand on that further. I continue to support her ongoing commitment to improving an education system for all students.

This is a very complex area. I encourage the directorate and our school communities to continue to undertake these fundamental changes to both policy and day-to-day teaching practice in a dedicated and methodical way. This is a challenging area of education policy. The changes required are complex. But we also cannot let that be any excuse for not implementing them. We must be diligent in moving forward.

I am pleased to see that progress is being made. I welcome the transparency that is continuing with these reports. I know that all three sectors, in the time I was minister and having detailed conversations with them, were very committed to delivering on this, and I trust that that commitment is continuing.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (5.05): Whilst we would rather, of course, not have had to bring this matter to this chamber, I take the opportunity to speak in support of Mr Wall's motion on the lack of progress by the ACT government in delivering the recommendations outlined in a report arising out of an inquiry chaired by Professor Shaddock. I was not a member of this Assembly when the incident that was the catalyst for the inquiry occurred. However, there are few people in Canberra who were not shocked at what became known as the boy in the cage incident and that this was happening right here in Canberra. The incident attracted national and international media attention and was the topic of much discussion amongst education professionals, psychologists and parents.

My colleague and fellow member for Kurrajong Mr Doszpot, as shadow education minister in the last term, kept considerable pressure on the then education minister to ensure that the matter was not swept under the carpet and, as difficult as it might have been for all involved, to ensure that such incidents were highlighted and brought to light for public scrutiny so that an incident like this would never happen again.

I commend the government for engaging Professor Shaddock to head the inquiry. Professor Shaddock was eminently qualified and an appropriate choice, having both familiarity with the ACT through an earlier report on disability services and experience in this particular area of education delivery.

It was an unfortunate, dark period in ACT education but it also provided an opportunity for the government to understand the pressures existing in our classrooms

for teachers, students and parents and to address and reduce the tensions evident in our schools. It is therefore disappointing to learn that, while the government was quick to adopt all 50 recommendations in the report, their delivery and implementation have failed to match the rhetoric.

I am sure Mr Doszpot would not be surprised at the lack of progress, because at the time he expressed concern that the government would drag its heels. I understand meetings he had with the government on progress were full of impressive flow charts, spread sheets and action indicators but were lacking in concrete, meaningful improvements.

Mr Wall has outlined the slow progress in infrastructure upgrades in our schools and the slow delivery of specialised training and support for our teachers. In the lead-up to last year's election, Labor made much of its policy to invest \$6.7 million for 20 new school psychologists. This was a key component of the report's recommendations. It was one that the Canberra Liberals had pressed the government on for years and it was good to see the government commit to it. But, like much of what this government does, promises too often remain just that. And we are now well used to hearing excuses why things they promise have not been done.

Fast forward to the 2017 budget and we see an allocation of \$327,000 this year, \$633,000 next year, \$677,000 in 2019-20 year and \$692,000 in the 2020-21 period leading up to the next election. And even then it is \$2.3 million, well short of the \$6.7 million promised. The ratio of school counsellors and/or psychologists to students was dismally inadequate before the report and, at this rate of funding, it will remain that way.

The report outlined the anguish of parents of students with challenging behaviours and also parents of students who had difficulty coping with complex-needs students in their class. The report also spoke about the difficulties faced by teachers, many of whom felt they were inadequately trained to manage some of their students, some even talking of the physical threats they had faced. Indeed, as I understand it, the cage solution came about because the school saw no other support for that teacher and she felt she had no choice indeed to prevent the situation escalating out of control.

We have had the inquiry, we have had the report and we have had the promises. And I acknowledge that Minister Berry outlined some of the work that is currently underway in this space. But we do not have adoption of many of the vital recommendations that would make a real difference in our schools for students, for teachers and for Canberra families.

We presumably still have largely the circumstances that led to this alarming scenario. We do not have the suitable withdrawal spaces, we do not have the school psychologists and we do not have the support and training for teachers. But what we do have is families still needing support and not receiving it. What we do have is our teachers still lacking the appropriate support to manage some of their students.

In my role as shadow disability minister I have heard some concerning stories of how the system is failing our students and families who have children with complex needs

and challenging behaviours. The transition to the NDIS was never likely to be a smooth, trouble-free pathway but, increasingly, as we move closer to the final transition from territory-funded base support to an NDIS plan arrangement, we are seeing an increase in anomalies. We are seeing more people and more organisations falling through the cracks and now we see that our students who need specific support are even falling through the cracks at school.

Only last week I had the mother of a child with autism come to see me because she was struggling to cope under the new NDIS arrangements. Her son is now leaving school but for most of his school life he suffered through a lack of empathy and support. If there had been more school counsellors or other appropriate support at his school I wonder if his experience might not have been so traumatic and his adult life and future prospects now not so compromised.

Yes, the transition to the NDIS means the ACT is no longer the main funding stream for students with a disability but that should not mean that it can abandon any moral responsibility for the vulnerable students in our schools. There is no excuse for allowing schools to continue to be so ill equipped or for teachers to be denied access to the training they need to best support the students in their care. As a caring society we need to do more than say the right words to express concern or, worse, try to shift the blame elsewhere.

In the case of this government's failure to deliver identified and needed support for schools, for teachers and for families dealing with students with complex needs and challenging behaviours, there is no excuse. There is no excuse for inaction by this government. There is no excuse for the education minister to profess to care for teachers and clamour for our schools to be safe while allowing teachers and students to remain exposed and vulnerable because the government is failing to keep its promises.

I thank Mr Wall for bringing on this motion and highlighting the inexcusable lack of action by this government in such a critical part of our community, and I commend his motion to the Assembly.

**MR WALL** (Brindabella) (5.13): In every comment I have made on this issue I have highlighted the fact that it is my core belief that the teachers at the front line of delivering quality education in the ACT are doing the best they can with the resources they are provided. Likewise, I have also said on this issue that implementing these recommendations need not be simply a tick-box exercise but that proper diligence, preparation and implementation are needed to form part of their adoption. It is disappointing that the minister seems to have a tin ear when it comes to listening to the comments I have made in the media about this and instead comes down here and just reads a pre-prepared speech.

There was substantial diversion of resources found from efficiencies under Mr Rattenbury's tenure as the minister for education to work on implementing and adopting these recommendations, which is a lot more than what particularly the Catholic systemic schools got when it came to implementing and adopting the recommendations within their school sectors. For those non-government schools that

have made the progress they have to date, I think we in this place should be applauding them for having been able to do so under the ever-increasing and ever-tightening fiscal situation that they find themselves in.

I will just touch on one thing which relates to the amendment itself. There have been a few amendments from the government today and I have heard colleagues on my side say that they have had good engagement with the relevant minister's offices when it comes to amendments and some discussion around compromise or finding a way forward.

But certainly that has not been my experience and my practice with Ms Berry in her role as minister. The first I hear of an amendment or am even consulted on an amendment to a motion that we are bringing into this place is when she stands to speak on the floor. And on an issue such as this where the focus is tripartisan support in this place to ensure the best outcome possible for children in schools across the ACT, there is an unwillingness to engage with the minister's counterpart on the opposition benches.

The opposition will be supporting the amendment and let it go through. And we will watch keenly as the final recommendations are adopted and implemented in ACT government schools.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Taxation—rates reform**

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (5.16): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the budgeted 12 per cent increase in residential general rates revenue in 2017-18 is imposing serious financial pressure on home owners;
- (b) the increases in rates have hit unit owners the hardest due to the Government's change in its method of calculation;
- (c) this change in the calculation of rates on units comes after a concerted policy by the Government to increase the number of Canberrans living in units;
- (d) the residential rates increases and a budgeted 18 per cent increase in land tax revenue in 2017-18 places serious financial pressure on landlords and tenants as well;
- (e) the pressure from rates and land tax increases is compounded by changes to Lease Variation Charges which increase the cost of residential developments;

- (f) the impact of Government policies on pensioners is further compounded by lower rates, energy and water concessions;
  - (g) a Government spokeswoman has admitted to *The Canberra Times* that no modelling has been done about the impact of residential rate rises on homeowners with a fixed income;
  - (h) the human face of this impact were two retirees in their eighties living on a modest income in a small unit who sat in the public gallery in late August wanting to know how they will pay a 53 per cent rates increase this year; and
  - (i) this relentless imposition on Canberrans by the Labor-Greens Government will continue with budgeted revenue from residential general rates increasing by a further 11 per cent in 2018-19, and 9 per cent in 2019-20, and 9 per cent again in 2020-21; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) stop its unfair and destructive rates reform; and
  - (b) table in the Assembly no later than 21 September the Treasury analysis of the financial and social impacts of the rates reform package.

Today the Canberra Liberals are bringing forward this motion on rates for some simple but very important and wide-reaching reasons. Canberrans are suffering because of this government's insatiable appetite to tax Canberrans. Of course, those who are affected come from all corners of the city. In fact, every single Canberran is impacted by this government's policy: regardless of whether you are a home owner or a renter, this government is slugging you. It could be younger Canberrans attempting to enter the property market for the first time or those leaving home for the first time who are now renting. It could be families who, on a weekly basis, have to meet a whole range of expenses to keep life moving. It could be elderly people who, after a lifetime of work, have to keep paying the government more and more and more.

The fact is that thousands of Canberrans who fit into the profile that I have just mentioned, and more, have to lead tougher lives because of Andrew Barr's decisions with regard to rates. He is squeezing more and more. If the tax hit is not direct, it is indirect, with all these charges being passed on to renters. Increases in rates and land tax on rental properties, like any increases in costs, must end up in either lower net income for a landlord or higher rents for tenants; most likely a combination.

What we are seeing is a squeeze on rentals. Not only is there an immediate impact but, as a result of lower yield for investment properties, there will be less incentive or less reason to invest in Canberra, which means that there will be comparatively fewer rental properties available, which then means that supply relatively decreases and the price goes up.

Right across our city, parents, small business people and pensioners have been opening their annual rates notices again this year only to realise that they need to find hundreds of dollars more each quarter that they do not have.

This issue, the issue of rising rates, has been front of mind for the Canberra Liberals for many years. This is a huge issue, and it is an issue that is not going away. We are not talking about rates rising in line with inflation; we are talking about rates doubling and tripling for people who are not getting anything by way of extra services. Even if you are one of the people who can afford these increases in rates and/or land tax, there is still a question of whether you are getting value for money and there is still a question of fairness.

We on this side of the Assembly continue to raise this issue of rates, but it seems that the message that comes back from the government time and time again is that the rising costs of living in Canberra should be accepted: we should all just shut up and accept that this is the cost of the Labor government.

Members of the government are always harping on about helping the Canberra community, helping those in need. That is, of course, a worthy aspiration. Unfortunately, it is just lip service when you continue to slug Canberrans so much by way of rates and a rent tax, which is what land tax really is. It does not matter how much money you pour into funding one side of the same-sex marriage campaign; you will not fool Canberrans that you are standing up for their best interests. You are treating rates like the elephant in the room, thinking that everything will be okay if we just do not talk about it.

The rates revenue increase for 2017-18 is 12 per cent. This revenue base is going from \$281 million as an estimated outcome in 2016-17 to more than \$315 million this year, and that is certainly not down to a pure increase in the number of rateable properties. For the past few years at budget time, the *Canberra Times* and the ABC have done good work in analysing rates increases in various parts of Canberra. This year, the trend of increases across every suburb was again a constant theme.

Let me just pick one suburb from each region in Canberra, each district. In Ainslie, in the inner north, the increase for houses was 11 per cent, the increase for units 22 per cent. In Griffith, houses are up nine per cent, units up a whopping 23 per cent. In Chifley, in the Woden valley, houses are up eight per cent, units up 24 per cent. In Banks, in Tuggeranong, houses are up four per cent, units up 18 per cent. In Aranda, in Belconnen, houses are up nine per cent, units up 21 per cent. In Jacka, in Gungahlin, houses are up six per cent, units up 11 per cent.

Anywhere else in Australia a council would usually have to apply for a special exemption to increase rates over a threshold. Often the threshold is five per cent. Anything over five per cent for a council is deemed to be a big deal. Yet here in Canberra every single unit owner is getting double-digit increases in their rates. And not only that: this is all compounded. This is not just a one-off; this is not just eight per cent on the base. This is on eight per cent or 10 per cent, on eight per cent, on eight per cent, on eight per cent, on eight per cent, since 2012. The increases are astronomical.

It is no wonder that so many people are choosing to move across the border. It is a great shame when there are people who grow up in Canberra or who have lived their

whole lives in Canberra but cannot afford to buy a house here and also cannot afford the ongoing costs of home ownership.

It is also quite noticeable just how much more the increases are for units rather than for home owners. Home owners have, of course, already received significant increases, but what this government is doing is treating each block where units are located as a single block, calculating the rates at the highest marginal rate which is applicable and then dividing it. It is a technical change, but a significant change.

It is this technical change which has resulted in huge increases. It is somewhat contrary to the government's notion that we want densification, that we want people to live in units, that we want people to live in high-rise or medium-rise developments. The government has been encouraging people to downsize, encouraging people to move into units and apartments. After so many people have done this, they squeeze them with this rates increase.

Then you have land tax as well. The land tax increases are often even more than this. Some rental properties this year are seeing an additional thousand dollars that has to be passed on to renters. An additional thousand dollars! You are going to see rents in Canberra go up \$20 a week as a result of what this government has done.

Unfortunately, there is no end in sight. Hundreds of people with direct concerns about rates have contacted the opposition in recent weeks. They are pleading with us to do something. We can move motions like this in the Assembly, raise the issue in the media and put forward alternatives, but when it comes down to it, it is Labor and the Greens that have brought this on and it is Labor and the Greens who can end this.

It is all very well for the Greens to complain about it now, despite the fact that in 2012 the Leader of the Opposition, Zed Seselja, made it very clear that this was a trajectory that everyone was on. There was denial. But we are very much on that trajectory. The trajectory that we are on may be even worse than what was predicted a few years ago, and that was dismissed as being wrong.

Dianne Peacock from Isaacs wrote to the *Canberra Times* on 30 August this year. She said:

Many townhouse owners, like myself, are retired, have reduced and limited incomes and seek to decrease our cost of living and continue to rely on our own resources. The government's budget measure is inequitable and unfair.

Last sitting week we saw Reg and Naysin Dyett here in the Legislative Assembly in the public gallery. Reg and Naysin, an elderly couple in their eighties from Braddon, came in here because they were so concerned about their rates going up. This year alone their rates went up by 50 per cent. Fifty per cent! Bear in mind that in other councils a five per cent increase is a big deal. Their rates went from \$959 to \$1,464 in one year, a 50 per cent increase. Some \$10 per week of their disposable income, in addition to what they were paying before, is now going to the government. These people between them have given decades of service to the Canberra community. They

are both in their eighties. They were paying about \$20 a week to live in their own house; now they are paying \$30 a week to live in their own house.

This is the two-paced society that I made mention of late last year. There is one pace for Canberrans who can keep pace, can keep up with the cost of living increases in Canberra. There is another pace for those who cannot keep up with the cost of living increases in Canberra. And even for those who can afford to pay the increasing rates, land taxes and fees and charges that this government imposes—perhaps they are on two incomes; perhaps they are both public servants—there is still a question of value. Are Canberrans getting value for money for these increases? And is it fair?

The government will say that it is all because of stamp duty. This government is bringing in record revenue from stamp duty, a government that claimed in 2012 to be abolishing stamp duty. It is the only abolished tax that is still bringing in \$300 million. It is bringing in record revenue. This government has no integrity when it comes to its taxation policy.

Unfortunately, it is not going to get any easier. The take from residential rates is forecast to increase another 11 per cent in 2018-19, nine per cent in 2019-20 and another nine per cent in 2020-21. The government may well say that these figures about the total take also include new properties, and that is true. The total take is going to be a bigger pie, because there are going to be more properties that they are drawing rates from because of the growth of Canberra. But that still does not explain why we have increases like nine per cent in Aranda, eight per cent in Chifley, 25 per cent for units in Stirling or the 50 per cent that we saw for Reg and Naysin in Braddon.

In 2012 the ACT Labor government embarked on a sweeping tax reform package. The Canberra Liberals were sceptical, and we voted against it. We have voted against these harsh increases on every occasion, and we are proud of our position. In contrast, the Greens have voted with Labor on every single occasion when it comes to rates and land tax. On every single occasion, the Greens and Labor have been in lock step. It simply does not add up that the Greens would now be critical of the very policy that they have endorsed and the very policy that they, in effect, have ownership of.

The changes back in 2012 were meant to wipe out stamp duty, but over the forward estimates through 2021 the government is projected to bring in even more residential conveyance duties than before. The forecast is for more than \$217 million, which is 12 per cent higher than the take in 2017-18. The Quinlan tax review recommended that in abolishing conveyance duties the government needed to recognise the significance of the change and consult with the community on the transition plan. In effect, there had to be consideration for people who had already paid stamp duty. This government conveniently ignored the recommendations that were compassionate and accepted all the recommendations that resulted in higher revenue.

Madam Speaker, I urge members to support the motion.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (5.31): I thank the Leader

of the Opposition for raising this issue. I now move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after (1), substitute:

“notes:

- (a) unlike other jurisdictions, general rates in the ACT fund both municipal level services and state government equivalent services, such as our hospitals, schools and transport infrastructure;
  - (b) the changes to the methodology for calculating general rates on units are intended to bring more equity into the tax system, as previously unit holders with very valuable properties were contributing significantly less in rates than owners of freestanding homes with lower values;
  - (c) even after the change in rates calculation methodology for units, over 90 per cent of unit holders pay rates as if they were in the lowest two marginal rating categories;
  - (d) average rates on units across the ACT are \$1352 per year, compared with \$2295 per year for freestanding homes; and
  - (e) the ACT Government models the impact of tax policy changes based on property values rather than incomes because:
    - (i) the Government does not have access to comprehensive data on the incomes of Territory residents; and
    - (ii) land-based taxation protects the progressive nature of the ACT’s tax system;
- (2) further notes that the ACT’s rates system includes a number of concessions and deferrals supporting more than 18 000 people, and that:
- (a) these concessions were last examined as part of the Government’s major Concessions Review in 2015-16;
  - (b) this review resulted in the Government allocating an additional \$35 million over four years to the concessions program in the 2016 Budget;
  - (c) further reforms from that review have recently taken effect in the 2017-18 financial year; and
  - (d) eligibility for the current concessions program is assessed according to varying criteria and these need to be reviewed regularly to make sure they provide adequate support for low-income households;
- (3) acknowledges that, while the tax reform process is widely supported as an economic reform:

- (a) the impact of major changes to the taxation system on the community need to be closely monitored;
  - (b) equity and social justice are important aims of the taxation system; and
  - (c) taxation is one important element of housing affordability, particularly for residents with low or fixed incomes; and
- (4) further acknowledges that the Government will:
- (a) monitor the impact of the recent tax and concession policy changes as these roll out, including their impact on:
    - (i) cost of living for Canberrans;
    - (ii) Canberra property owners who are on low or fixed incomes; and
    - (iii) Canberrans who are both income and asset poor; and
  - (b) conduct financial and social impact analysis on the adequacy of concessions and the eligibility criteria for these, and provide this analysis to the Assembly not later than Budget Day 2018.”.

It is always good to talk in this place about tax reform and the important changes that the government is making to ensure that we have a stable and adequate revenue base to deliver the high quality services that Canberrans deserve. So I would like to take this opportunity this evening to again step through the rationale for the current changes that we are rolling out in the 2017-18 budget.

From the outset, I think that it is important to note the ACT has a unique governance structure in that we are responsible for the delivery of both local government and state government-equivalent services like hospitals, schools and other community services, so that when each household in this city pays its rates, it does not go to fund just local government services like emptying bins and filling potholes, it also contributes to the state-level services that we rely on day-to-day in our lives in this city.

The ACT government spends \$33,400 a year on average on each Canberra household, with around 14 per cent of this going to local government, municipal-type services. By far the largest share of that \$33,400, some \$10,300 a year, goes to delivering high quality healthcare services where our citizens need them through hospitals, walk-in centres and local clinics. The second largest share, \$7,600 per household, goes to delivering education services through our great local schools.

I acknowledge that we are of course partly funded by the commonwealth government to deliver some of these services but that funding represents just 41 per cent of the territory's total revenue, which is not sufficient to deliver local hospitals, schools and other services to the standard that Canberrans expect. In fact, at just 41.5 per cent, the commonwealth's funding of its share of the total territory budget is the second lowest share that the commonwealth provides of any state or territory budget in this country. Only Western Australia has a lower commonwealth contribution to its total state budget.

In this context, it is important that Canberrans contribute equitably to our city's overall revenue base, and that is why the switch from stamp duty to a broad-base land tax levied through general rates is a good example of that equitable collection of taxation. When stamp duty is a dominant source of government revenue it means, in effect, that our hospitals and schools are funded only by those who move house in any given year. Moving to a broad-base land tax means that services that are used by all of us are funded by all of us.

Similarly, when we announced in the 2016 budget, before the last election, that we would be revising the methodology used to calculate rates upon units, this was also an equity measure. Under the previous methodology someone with a unit worth half a million dollars in the city was paying \$400 a year less in rates than someone with a freestanding home worth the same amount in a suburb like Charnwood. There were instances where very valuable apartments in suburbs like Kingston had much cheaper rates bills than much more modest homes in areas like Tuggeranong, and that is not fair and it is not equitable.

General rates calculations for multi-unit dwellings are now based on the total average unimproved value of the block a complex sits on rather than the average unimproved value of each individual unit. This change is being phased in over two years. As a result, general rates for units are increasing at a higher rate than for freestanding properties during the two-year period that the change takes effect. We appreciate that for some property owners this change in methodology has resulted in a change, and a noticeable change, in their rates liabilities. That is why the government has provided a \$100 rebate this year to assist with the transition.

It should be acknowledged, however, that, even after this change is fully implemented, over 90 per cent of unit holders pay rates as if they were in the two lowest marginal rating categories. And, overall, across the city, average rates on units are currently \$1,352 per year compared with \$2,295 a year on average for freestanding homes.

The government is very conscious that rates make up a relatively higher share of income for Canberra pensioners and others on low or fixed incomes. And that is why we offer a wide range of concessions and deferral options to help people manage these costs. For pensioners a rebate of up to \$700 a year is available on their rates, and this concession has knocked collectively \$31 million off rates bills for older Canberrans in the past three years alone. There are, of course, payment plans and deferral arrangements that are available for those who are not on a pension.

But, in this context, I would like to reiterate a point I made during the budget estimates hearings earlier this year: being asset rich but income poor is undeniably a challenge and is something that particularly affects older Canberrans, and the government is very conscious of the need to have appropriate concessions and programs in place to support people who are in this situation. But I also made the point that there are many Canberrans who are both income and asset poor, that is, they do not even own a house and do not pay any rates at all. And we are not going to scale back or cut services and programs and supports like public housing and the many other programs that we provide for those most vulnerable Canberrans. We are not

going to be cutting back on those supports, and that is why taxation reform is important, because it shares the burden more equitably.

The alternative arrangement would be just to continue along the journey of ever-increasing stamp duty and ever more unaffordable housing for Canberrans. If we had not undertaken stamp duty reform, we would have seen stamp duty increase considerably. The national average growth in stamp duty revenue has been 15.3 per cent a year. In New South Wales it grew by 22.1 per cent a year. In the ACT it has grown by only 4.6 per cent and that has been entirely driven by the commercial property sector where revenue has increased significantly as we have sought more international investment into Canberra's commercial property market.

Residential stamp duty revenue has, in fact, declined by 0.6 per cent over the same period. Across the border in New South Wales stamp duty has been rising by 22.1 per cent a year and residential stamp duty in the ACT has been falling, both in terms of the rate applied to each house that is sold and in the global amount collected by the territory government.

Mr Coe made some other comments in his speech about people leaving the ACT as a result of taxation reform. The statistics as issued by the Australian Bureau of Statistics do not back up that assertion because the ACT was the fastest-growing state or territory in the past five years from when tax reform began. Our population increased from 357,222 to 406,403 people in that period of the first five years of tax reform, an 11.2 per cent increase, the largest increase of any state or territory.

I can also report that, because stamp duty has been coming down, people have not had to borrow their stamp duty and put that onto their mortgage and that mortgage repayments in the ACT have dropped in the period 2011 to 2016. In 2011 the average mortgage repayments in the ACT were \$2,167. Now they are \$2,058, and one of the contributing factors has been that stamp duty has been less and people have not had to borrow it and have not had to pay interest on their stamp duty payments as part of their mortgage. And that is an important reform.

I know it is particularly pertinent in the Dunne household, as she has a number of children who, I am sure, will be wanting to get into the housing market and stamp duty is a real barrier to people entering the housing market. If they are looking over the border at New South Wales then they will be paying a lot more stamp duty than they do in the ACT.

It is interesting also to observe what has happened in terms of the total number of dwellings in the territory. We have seen a 15 per cent increase in the number of residential dwellings in the ACT in the past five years. The growth in the number of dwellings has outstripped the population growth increase. We have gone from 137,792 dwellings in 2011-12 to 158,195 dwellings in 2017-18, a growth rate of around 15 per cent. That is very significant over that time period.

The assertion was made by the Leader of the Opposition that there are fewer rental properties. Again, the facts do not bear out that particular statement. And what we have seen is that rental properties have increased as a share of the total amount of

properties from around 21 per cent when tax reform commenced—21 per cent of the 137,792 properties were rental properties in 2011-12—now to 26 per cent of all properties in the ACT, 26 per cent of those 158,195 properties. Far from tax reform driving residential property investors out of the market, we have in fact seen a significant increase in the number of rental properties in the ACT over this period, moving from 21 per cent of all properties in the territory to 26 per cent.

It would come as no surprise to those who understand market economics that when you go back and look at what residential rental costs were for units and houses in the period around 2010-11 and 2011-12 and then compare them to now, you have seen either reductions or stability in rental prices in the ACT, certainly in real terms and in many instances even in nominal terms, in spite of five years of price inflation. This demonstrates that the increase in supply of new housing into the market outstripped the population growth rate—population growing by 11.2 per cent but the number of properties growing by around 15 per cent over that period, a big increase in the number of rental properties—and demonstrates that the government's taxation policies are in fact assisting in building housing supply, assisting in keeping costs lower than in other jurisdictions. When you compare stamp duty now in the ACT to the other states and territories and compare it to the national average, we are much lower than every other jurisdiction—except Queensland that at the moment has a special rate for owner occupiers—and by 2020-21, on the current trajectory, we will move largely into parity with Queensland and have the lowest amount of stamp duty collected.

In the end, this issue has been now to two territory elections, 2012 and 2016. This debate has been run extensively, and I think everyone's position in relation to the best way to raise taxation revenue in the territory is pretty well known. I make the simple proposition that it is better, more equitable, simpler, fairer and more efficient for the territory government to collect its revenue by way of a broad-based land tax than it is to rely on stamp duty, and that is why we are making the transition from stamp duty and it is also why, as part of tax reform, we abolished all taxes on insurance products in the ACT. That means that every Canberra household with home contents insurance, with motor vehicle insurance, with building insurance, with life insurance, is saving either 10 per cent or five per cent on their premiums as a result of that tax being abolished, depending on which type of insurance tax it was, and why in the commercial sector we made changes to payroll tax in order to have the highest payroll tax-free threshold in this nation, to encourage the growth of small and medium-sized enterprise in the city.

In the end, any government has a choice as to how it raises its revenue. We have chosen the simplest, the fairest and the most efficient mechanism to do so. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (5.46): I will not be supporting Mr Coe's motion. It is quite clear from his motion that it was not really a serious attempt to work through the pluses and minuses of tax reform. Instead it was clearly a political attack on the Greens and the ALP, which is fair enough in this context, but it completely misses the real issues that we need to consider about the taxation reform

process. After extensive negotiation with the ALP, I will be supporting Mr Barr's amendment.

I want to start with a broad point about taxation. The ACT Greens support the government raising revenue because there are many things that the community and the Greens—the community as a whole—want the government to do. The community wants a decent public health service. They want a public education system that works. They want parks and playgrounds. These things require money, and that requires government revenue, which requires taxation. Indeed with respect to the debates earlier today, on private members' day, an awful lot of them talked about government spending more on different things.

The ACT Greens also support a taxation system which is economically efficient—which is the big reason why we supported the move out of stamp duty—as well as being fair and equitable. Economics and social justice are both important, and we need to make sure that we do both simultaneously.

The Greens have supported, and we continue to support, the ACT government's taxation reform program. It is a long-term tax reform program that is replacing economically inefficient taxes like stamp duty and insurance duty with more economically efficient taxes. The shift from economically inefficient taxes to land-based taxes is not something that was plucked out of the air. It is based on the comprehensive Quinlan review of the ACT's taxation system conducted between 2010 and 2012. It is consistent with the federal government's Henry tax review, which recommended the abolition of insurance and property transfer taxes, amongst others, in favour of more economically efficient taxes, including broad-based land taxes.

It is supported by most economists and business groups because of its economic benefits. The tax reform process is making progress on economic efficiency. Insurance duty has been abolished. There have been substantial cuts to stamp duty, which is now charged at a significantly lower rate than the national average for most residential properties, as Mr Barr expanded on at some length.

As I said earlier, the Greens are focused on more than just economic efficiency. While the taxation reform process is widely supported as an economic reform, social justice and fairness are just as important, and the Greens are focused on making sure that these reforms do not have unintended consequences for vulnerable people in our community.

Any major change to the taxation system can have unintended impacts on some parts of the community. And this is a major reform: it is major and it is long term. We need to constantly pay attention to the social impacts, not just this year or next year but looking at what is going to be happening over the next decade, or what could be happening if we do not look carefully at how we should do this.

I would like to illustrate the issues with a fictional example of a pensioner who is 65 and has just retired. Let us call her Susan. She is living in an older house in an average suburb. Susan's age pension will go up a little each year to cover general cost of living increases. She will be able to afford her living expenses, but she will not be

having an overseas holiday, a new kitchen, a new car or anything like that anytime soon. Susan is very lucky that she owns her home because the pension assumes that you are not a renter. There is no way, on the age pension, that she could afford to privately rent in the ACT. Anglicare on a regular basis does that analysis and finds that to be true.

However, for Susan, downsizing is not a very good option because after transaction costs she will not come out ahead financially. In Susan's area, like many parts of Canberra, older houses like hers are worth the same or, in many cases, less than townhouses and apartments because the multi-unit homes are generally all new. Taxation reform means that Susan's insurance costs less than it did before and it does mean that if she did decide to move, if she did manage to find somewhere to downsize to, she would pay less stamp duty than she would have a few years ago. But on the other hand her rates are going up faster than her pension. This is probably affordable now, particularly as she does qualify for a concession—and I do applaud the recent work on rationalising concessions more—but at a fixed concession what is going to be the situation in 10 years time, given the likelihood that rates will be rising faster than her income?

The Greens are saying that, from a fairness and equity point of view, the government needs to monitor this situation and make sure that taxation reform is not having unintended consequences for vulnerable, fixed-income Canberrans like Susan. It is fine for us in the Assembly. We are all well paid. It is also fine for the public servants who provide tax advice to the Treasurer. They have secure professional incomes. The point that I am trying to make is that we cannot assume that it will be fine for everyone in the community just because it is fine for us.

The Chief Minister and I had a long discussion about this topic in estimates. I must admit that it did annoy me. He repeated the same comments in his speech just now. I will quote what he said in estimates because I did not transcribe what he said just now:

I am stunned that no-one asked the question: "What are the age implications of the status quo?"

I was the person who asked that question. He continued:

I turn that question right around and say: "Do we want to become a society that locks young people out altogether because we are mostly concerned about the situation of asset-rich, income-poor people? What about asset-poor, income-poor people? Why do we not focus on them a little?"

With all respect, Chief Minister, this is the point. We need to make sure that our taxation reform is fair and equitable for all the vulnerable people in Canberra. It needs to work for people who are asset-poor and income-poor who struggle to get a home at all. It needs to work for people like Susan, who may count as asset-rich but who are on low and fixed incomes. And it needs to work in some way for people who bought a house when they had a good job but have now been forced into insecure work that barely covers mortgages.

Rates are not the only issue, of course, for affordable housing in Canberra, and I am not trying to suggest for one minute that they are, but we need to make sure that they are equitable and that they do not inadvertently add to housing insecurity in Canberra.

A critical part of making this work for all vulnerable people is making sure that the concessions and deferrals available capture everybody who needs support in a fair way. The rates system has a number of concessions and deferrals that support in excess of 18,000 people, including pensioners and people suffering from financial hardship. Most of these people come under the pensioners rebate scheme.

There are also some very generous rates deferral schemes available. However, they have very narrow eligibility criteria. For example, one deferral scheme is only available for those older people who live in the top 20 per cent of the most valuable blocks, not people in average blocks. I asked a question on notice about this, and only two people have accessed this.

My understanding is that this was intended to help older people who did not qualify for the standard pensioner deferral and who had lived for many years in a suburb which has suddenly become expensive. As a result their rates have gone up much faster than for people in other suburbs but their superannuation income has not. This probably made sense a few years ago, but as taxation reform continues rates are going to be an increasing proportion of income across Canberra. I have had letters about this from people in Tuggeranong and Belconnen, who do not live on expensive blocks.

Should the threshold now be lowered to the top 30 per cent per cent or should it be available, possibly with some changes, to any of the older people who earn less than \$50,000 per year? This is the sort of thing we need to look at in terms of how we design our rates system to be equitable and supporting everybody.

I will briefly address the issue of units because that is touched on in both Mr Coe's motion and the amendment. The Greens have supported changing the way rates are calculated on units because the previous system meant that unit owners were not paying a fair amount compared to house owners. The old system meant that if a block of land was developed from a house into units, the land value based component of the rates would fall. That is because each unit was charged as a separate, small piece of land and, of course, each of those sat at the lowest—almost certainly the lowest—marginal rate. Now, the block of land will pay the same land value based part of the rates regardless of whether it is a house block or a block of units. Of course, for a block of units, the rate is divided up between the different units, so each unit owner will still usually pay much less than a typical house owner.

However, we have been hearing concerns from the community that the jump is causing problems for some people. Some of these people are on fixed incomes and others are first homebuyers. This emphasises what I have been saying about needing to constantly check the equity impacts of tax reform. Regardless of where we live, we all use government services and we need to contribute fairly to government revenue.

With this in mind, the Greens have spent much of the last two days in negotiation with the government on an acceptable amendment to Mr Coe's motion. While the government is making its budget decisions, it needs to have in front of it an analysis of how all the vulnerable groups are likely to be impacted by tax reform and how they will be affected by the changes. It could be that we need to make tweaks to deferment eligibility. There might need to be an increase to the pensioner rebate or there could be something else, some other way of looking at things that I cannot, with my very limited amount of information, think of.

What we are saying is that consideration of this needs to be built in at the start of the process. I am really pleased that through negotiations the Greens have been able to work with the ALP to get an outcome whereby the government will step up the work it is doing to make sure tax reform is fair and equitable.

Mr Barr's amendment does three key things. It acknowledges that tax reform needs to consider equity and social justice as well as economic efficiency. It commits to monitoring the impact of tax reform and concession changes on property owners who are on low or fixed incomes. It commits to a social impact analysis on the adequacy of the concessions system and providing this to the Assembly as part of the budget process next year. This is a good start, and it is something that the Greens will continue to work on and monitor to make sure that our taxation system is equitable and efficient.

*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 COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (5.59): Once again we have a situation where the Chief Minister is stubbornly and blindly going ahead with his heartless tax regime and we have the Greens pretending to have a bob each way, but in actual fact they are in full endorsement of what the Labor government is doing. Ms Le Couteur may well be able to fool some people; she may be able to fool some constituents with this amendment, but I think we all know that nothing is going to change as a result of this amendment—nothing.

I refer to this example that Ms Le Couteur mentioned of Susan. Susan could be one of thousands of people in Canberra who are suffering because of the policies that the Greens and Labor have put in place. Thousands of people are suffering as a result of this. Unfortunately, Susan's needs are not going to be addressed by this amendment. Susan's disposable income is still going to take a hit because of what the Labor Party and the Greens are doing.

What the government is doing with units is unfair. Whilst the Greens may say that it is right that they should be charging unit owners an extra 20, 25 or 50 per cent, as is the case for Reg and Naysin in Braddon, we on this side do not think it is right. We do not think it is fair. For years the government has been encouraging people to move into these complexes, and for the people who were the suckers who did, they then cop a 50 per cent increase in their rates.

I do not think it is fair because, quite frankly, the services that you require from the government while living in an apartment are considerably fewer than the services that you require while living in a house. It just does not stack up. It does not stack up that a 2,000 square metre block that has four or five units on it should have four or five times the rates. You still have the same amount of footpath out the front; you still have the same streetlight out the front; you still have the same road out the front—except you have five people paying the bills. It should not simply be multiplied five times, which is what the government and the Greens seem to be suggesting. It should not just be that the cost of a single dwelling should then be multiplied five times. That is, in effect, the principle that the government is putting forward.

Of course, the other thing that the government will cling to is this tax reform, that somehow, we are all better off because we are not paying insurance duty anymore. If you look at the components of this tax reform package—rates, land tax, stamp duty and insurance and, of course, you have the safer families levy and the fire levy in amongst the rates bills as well—in 2013 the total of all of these was \$663 million; the total. Now, in 2017, the total is \$928 million. That does not sound too tax-neutral to me.

If each of these were increasing at three per cent a year, it would be at \$746 million as a total. Instead we are at \$928 million for 2017. In 2013 stamp duty brought in \$225 million. This year, it brought in \$306 million. In 2013 rates brought in \$291 million. This year, the figure is \$444 million. In 2013 land tax brought in \$69 million. This year, it brought in \$110 million. So whilst there has been a saving of \$45-odd million by way of the insurance levy, that has well and truly been gobbled up, and then some—hundreds of millions of dollars, in fact—by the combination of all the others.

This is not tax reform; this is just a tax hike. The government wants to make it complex and the Greens want to somehow make it look like it was inadvertent or there were unintended consequences. No, these are all intended consequences. This is exactly what the policy was meant to do. The policy was meant to squeeze Canberrans more. The policy was meant to triple people's rates, and that is exactly what it is doing. And that is exactly what the Canberra Liberals said would happen back in 2012—exactly.

Those opposite, including the Greens, refuted the proposition. They said it was not so. When you consider in 2012 you had rates of \$209 million and now it is \$444 million, you can see that we are well on the way. For Reg and Naysin, getting a 50 per cent increase in their rates last year alone, I think they are in no doubt as to the consequences of Labor and the Greens' tax reform.

There are so many other examples. Roger in Bruce contacted us. He lives in a single-level townhouse and he has an increase of 34 per cent, from \$1,745 to \$2,339 in this year alone—34 per cent in this year alone. Irena in Palmerston has a rates bill of \$1,971—an increase, again, of around 30 per cent. Steven in Kambah lives in a strata villa and, again, it is another 33 per cent increase—\$1,400 to \$1,970. For David in Braddon, it has gone up from \$2,150 to \$2,700—a 25 per cent increase this year alone. These are the real consequences.

It is all very well for those opposite to approve an amendment; I do not think they would be too distraught about compromising on this amendment with Ms Le Couteur. I do not think Mr Barr feels that he has sold out on the old reform package by agreeing to this amendment because it is not going to achieve anything. It is not going to achieve anything for Susan, David, Steve, Roger, Irena or the thousands of other Canberrans who are struggling. And this is from a government that is meant to be about social justice.

This is a government that governs for those who can afford to live here and nobody else. It is a government that governs for special deals by way of land rorts. It is a government that governs for the CFMEU, for giving \$3.9 million of ratepayers' money to a secret deal that happened a week after Andrew Barr became Chief Minister. That is where your rates money goes. It is one thing if you are getting good value for money and you can afford it, but it is another when you are getting rorted because you are paying more and getting less, and that is what is happening in the ACT. That is why so many Canberrans feel like they have been sold a pup with this government.

This government and this Treasurer looked people in the eye and said, "I won't triple your rates." This year alone, Reg and Naysin got a 50 per cent increase. It is simply unfair. This is a government that will continue this trajectory. As long as Labor and the Greens are in lock step, this will continue. There is no relief in sight. It is a shame that we have to talk about concessions because concessions are actually the symptom. Concessions are not actually the core issue; the core issue is why a concession is needed. It is a travesty that this government that claims to be about workers is leaving so many workers behind. That is why the Canberra Liberals will not support the words that Ms Le Couteur has circulated, because they will not achieve anything. They will not achieve any tangible outcome for the thousands of Canberrans who are struggling.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Mr Barr  
Ms Burch  
Ms Cheyne  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Le Couteur

Ms Orr  
Mr Pettersson  
Mr Ramsay  
Mr Rattenbury

Noes 6

Mr Coe  
Mrs Dunne  
Mrs Kikkert  
Ms Lawder  
Ms Lee  
Mr Milligan

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

### Mr David Rymer

**MR RAMSAY** (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for Regulatory Services, Minister for the Arts and Community Events and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (6.13): This afternoon I rise to pay tribute to Mr David Rymer. David worked tirelessly and selflessly to further the interests of seniors living in the ACT. I regret to inform the Assembly that David passed away on Friday, 14 July this year. I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of David's family, friends and colleagues here this evening.

David served on the Ministerial Council on the Ageing for three years, providing high quality strategic advice to government on issues affecting seniors living in the ACT. In this role he was instrumental in the organisation of the territory's age-friendly city seminar, as well as the first and second ACT older persons assemblies. It was through this work that the government was able to develop its ACT active ageing framework 2015-18, the ACT government's current policy to continue developing Canberra into an age-friendly city.

David was also an active contributor to the ACT community through a number of other voluntary roles. He joined the Canberra Seniors Centre 10 years ago in the position of treasurer. He was elected president in 2009 and remained in this role, except for a short period time, until he passed away this year.

David was involved in the Heraldry and Genealogy Society of Canberra, where he served as treasurer, convened a London special interest group and spent considerable hours manning the library.

David was a member of the ACT Apple Users Group for nearly 30 years, providing free support for people using Apple computers in and around Canberra. He served as treasurer and committee member, taking an open university course in accounting to help set up the group's bookwork practices.

In his earlier days, David was an active contributor to the Ginninderra High School P&C and the school's board. He was recognised in 1981 for his untiring efforts over many years of service for the P&C, the school board and the high school.

David received a number of awards for his community service. In 1999 he was awarded a commonwealth recognition award for senior Australians for his significant contribution to the community of Canberra. In 2004, he was awarded an outstanding commitment award from the Council on the Ageing in recognition of his valued contribution over many years.

In his many volunteering roles, David was universally noted for his willingness to lend a hand, his respectful approach and his good humour. He was someone who touched many throughout the community with his incredible generosity.

Pat Gration, the CEO of Canberra Seniors Centre, said:

David treated members and staff with respect and inclusiveness. His ever-present sense of humour lifted spirits during times of pressure.

Fiona May, the current chair of the Ministerial Advisory Council on the Ageing, whose presence I also acknowledge here today, reflected:

David was a committed and active member of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. He always brought a considered perspective to our business and could be relied upon to lighten our meetings with humour as well. I will certainly miss his presence when the new council meets.

I extend my own thanks to David as well as my condolences to his family—his wife, Peggy, and his daughters, Sue and Angela—and his many friends. And I extend my condolences to people who worked with David in his very many community roles.

David's committed and generous work, to which he brought grace, expertise and good humour, is appreciated, and he will be dearly remembered by many in the ACT community. He provided an example many now seek to follow, and his work, his advocacy and his care for the community will be sorely missed.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Ramsay. There are many, can I say, who knew David. On behalf of the Assembly, our wishes go to the family here.

### **Latin American Cultural Centre**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (6.18): Amongst the many enjoyable things that I got to do this past Sunday, one of the highlights was a visit to Canberra's new Latin American Cultural Centre. This facility is the first of its kind in the ACT, and Canberra's Latin American community members are thrilled to have it.

The new centre will promote Latin American culture by providing a space where a number of cultural groups and activities can thrive. Spanish language classes are already being taught, and dance lessons are available for tango, bachata, salsa, and zumba. Here, Canberrans can also find Mexican cooking workshops and handcraft markets. Visitors can watch Latin American movies and find books. Latin American artists will be using the space to showcase their works, and the Spanish Pioneros scouts meet in the centre. Older Latin Americans in the Canberra community will also be able to enjoy this venue as a meeting space where they can spend time together.

The Latin American Cultural Centre is supported by the Spanish Speakers Association, a non-profit organisation run by a volunteer committee of parents, and will be the home of the association's Spanish language school, called Ositos Cool. One of the central goals of the organisation is to encourage younger generations of

Spanish speakers to maintain their parents' and grandparents' culture and language, a point given much-needed emphasis by the motion that opposition leader Alistair Coe successfully brought to the Assembly earlier today in support of mother languages. People included "cool" in the name of their school because they want their Spanish language instruction to be just as fun as dancing, singing and playing.

My host at the new cultural centre was Carlos Torres, director of the Spanish Speakers Association and winner of the territory's 2015 volunteer of the year award in the education, science and technology category. Carlos started Ositos Cool with just one class of four children and has overseen the program's growth to four classes with about 40 children and eight childcare centre classes with 12 students each. He also started the Spanish-speaking scout group mentioned earlier.

Carlos embodies many of the values that guide the Canberra Liberals, including our belief in the worth of the individual and in the right to be independent and to achieve, as well as our belief in the need to foster initiative and personal responsibility and to emphasise the importance of voluntary effort and volunteer organisations. I wish to thank him for so graciously hosting me on Sunday and, more importantly, for all that he has done to drive the Spanish Speakers Association, to grow Spanish language instruction in the territory and to help secure this new cultural centre. Well done, Carlos.

Before I conclude, I wish to mention that the association will be hosting a fundraiser on Sunday, 8 October. Excess funds generated on the day will go towards financing the new Latin American Cultural Centre. I wish them much success with this event and with all of their future endeavours.

### **Voluntary assisted dying**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (6.21): It is well known where I stand on issues regarding voluntary assisted dying. In the almost year since I have been elected many people have contacted me about the desire for the federal law to be overturned so that we can properly debate the matter in the community and in this place and not be beholden to outdated legislation made by people who do not represent us.

A constituent contacted me recently and shared a story that I think is so important that I want to put it on the record. My constituent is anonymous for reasons which will become obvious:

My mother developed emphysema and was suffering from chronic back pain. She made the decision to end her own life and began researching how to do it. She spent some months meticulously planning her death, discussing it frequently with me and my father. I found this distressing, and spoke to my doctor and hers to see if there was some way we could help her feel comfortable with her life. They could offer no solutions other than having her committed and placed on suicide watch. Her death from emphysema was not imminent enough for her to be placed in a hospice.

My mother asked me to obtain the book 'Final Exit' for her. I did so, because I knew she was determined to end her life with or without it. If I had failed to support her, she would have died alone, feeling unloved.

She ended her life in the presence of myself and my father. The method she chose was uncomfortable for her and traumatic for us. She had left a note for her GP and asked us to contact him after she was gone. The note requested him to quietly record the cause of death as heart failure.

The doctor stood by the ethics of his profession and reported my mother's death as a suicide to the police. My father and I were taken to the station the same day and interrogated separately for some hours. My father's computer was seized as was my mother's address book. The police used the address book to contact my mother's friends and questioned them. Mum had been concerned about the stigma of suicide and wanted my father and I to tell no-one what she had done.

Dad and I lived under the shadow of prosecution until our case came before the coroner two years later. We were both open and honest about what we had done and why. I was prepared to go to prison for it. Thankfully, the coroner ruled that although I had a case to answer for when I obtained the 'Final Exit' book, it would not be in the public interest to prosecute me. I supported my mum when she ended her life because anything else would have been a betrayal. She would have died anyway, feeling unloved and alone.

Madam Speaker, no-one should have to be put in that position; not the person suffering and not the family member, friend or carer. And while ever voluntary assisted dying is illegal, families and people suffering are forced to make these types of choices and decisions and are put in these positions. These sorts of stories further underline my resolve to have the federal law changed so that we can have a real debate in the ACT community and in this place. It is for this reason that I will continue to ask all Canberrans to sign my petition to restore the ACT's right to determine its own laws regarding voluntary assisted dying. I want to express my thanks to the constituent who gave me the permission to read out her story today.

### **Wattle Day citizenship ceremony**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (6.26): Last Thursday, 7 September I found myself transported back to May 1989, when I stood as a 10 year old in my Sunday best, holding my sister's hand as we pledged our allegiance to Australia. Last Thursday I was privileged to be a guest speaker along with President of the Wattle Day Association, Mr Terry Fewtrell, at the very special Wattle Day citizenship ceremony presided over by Mr Pettersson.

Wattle Day celebrates the first day of spring and symbolises looking forward, good humour, generosity and democracy, and it was a special experience to share with our newest citizens the appreciation of our national floral emblem. It was fitting that the ceremony took place at Albert Hall, the venue of the very first citizenship ceremony on 3 February 1949. As always, the Wiradjuri Echoes Consultancy were on site to introduce our newest Australians to our oldest Australian culture, and we were treated to heart-warming performances by the ACT Primary Concert Choir, including a rendition of *Waltzing Matilda*, a song that makes me smile each and every time I hear it.

The great diversity we saw represented at the ceremony is yet another testament to the cultural depth of our community. As a proud Canberran it made my heart lift to see

how many citizens were choosing Canberra as their new home. A special treat was when one of the newest citizens gave me a huge hug after the ceremony and said to me in Korean, “I have been wanting to meet you for a long time.” This Korean family was one of many families from all over the world choosing to settle in Canberra.

I took the opportunity to thank all new citizens for their courage. Packing up your bags and moving to a new country is nothing short of brave. I know, because my parents did it at around the age that I am now and I do not think I could do it, and certainly not with two young daughters.

I also took the opportunity to encourage all new citizens to get involved in their local community to create the future they want in their new home; to respect the country that our Indigenous Australians have looked after for so long; to admire the unique beauty of our flora and fauna that they will not see anywhere else in the world; to teach other Australians the rich history and culture of their home country; and to actively participate in our democratic process because they have earned the right to have their voices heard and keep our leaders accountable.

The opportunity to share such a special day with our newest citizens is certainly a highlight amongst many of the roles we are asked to play as members of this Assembly. I understand, Madam Speaker, that you have issued a special invitation to a reception for these new citizens next week in this very building, and I look forward to seeing them again as fellow Canberrans.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.29 pm.**