



Debates

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Wednesday, 15 May 2019

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The Assembly met at 10 am.

(Quorum formed.)

MADAM SPEAKER (Ms J Burch) took the chair, made a formal recognition that the Assembly was meeting on the lands of the traditional custodians, and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Restoration of Belconnen bus services—petition 12-19

By Mrs Kikkert, from 591 residents respectively:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that bus network changes substantially inconvenience Belconnen residents by:

- removing the 712, 714, 717, 743 and 744 Xpresso buses;
- eliminating school buses taking Belconnen students to and from Canberra Grammar School, Canberra Girls' Grammar School, St Clare's College, St Edmund's College and Daramalan College; and
- reducing the frequency of the 40 bus in the Aranda area during both morning and afternoon peak hours despite requests for increased service.

For many students, workers and families, this means significantly more time spent commuting from 29 April 2019.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the ACT Government to restore these bus services or provide an equivalent or better alternative.

Restoration of Belconnen bus services—petition 9-19

By Mrs Kikkert, from 589 residents respectively:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly that bus network changes substantially inconvenience Belconnen residents by:

- removing the 712, 714, 717 and 744 Xpresso buses;

- eliminating school buses taking Belconnen students to and from Canberra Grammar School, Lyneham high school, Brindabella College, Canberra Girls' Grammar School, St Clare's College, St Edmund's College and Daramalan College; and
- reducing the frequency of the 40 bus in the Aranda area during both morning and afternoon peak hours despite requests for increased service.

For many students, workers and families, this means significantly more time spent commuting from 29 April 2019.

Example - 712 takes 40 minutes to Northbourne and instead it will take bus# 43 and 9 approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the ACT Government to restore these bus services or provide an equivalent or better alternative.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petitions would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having more than 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services.

Ministerial response

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

Canberra sexual health centre—petition 2-19

By **Ms Fitzharris**, Minister for Health and Wellbeing, dated 14 May 2019, in response to a petition lodged by Ms J Burch on 12 February 2019 concerning support for the Canberra Sexual Health Centre.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 12 February 2019, regarding petition 2-19 lodged by Ms Joy Burch MLA, about ACT Health to provide increased support for resource and infrastructure improvements at Canberra Sexual Health Centre. In response to the petition, I offer the following information.

The Canberra Sexual Health Service has an essential role in supporting the health of Canberrans and focuses on safe sex promotion, the testing and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and the long-term management of HIV infection among other important functions.

The ACT Government is currently planning for the relocation and enhancement of infrastructure supporting the Canberra Sexual Health Centre, as part of the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency (SPIRE) Centre Project. The location of the SPIRE Centre will displace the existing Canberra

Sexual Health Centre at Canberra Hospital, requiring an investment in new infrastructure. This investment will see the centre relocated and expanded to meet contemporary health design and clinical safety requirements, as well as to meet changing and increasing demands for the service.

Additionally, Canberra Health Services is focused on continued improvement and innovation in the delivery of their clinical services. To this end, work is underway improve the way in which Canberra Sexual Health Centre provides out-reach services, including the use of our community health centres and Walk-in Centres (WiCs) to deliver services closer to home and provide consumer advice and education. Most recently, this has included the promotion of access to chlamydia screening for young people at WiCs.

In addition to these new approaches, the Canberra Sexual Health Centre has a significant program of out-reach and in-reach services delivered in partnership with community organisations and other ACT Government partners, including the Aids Action Council, Karralika Programs Inc, Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, Hepatitis ACT, University of Canberra Medical Centre, the Education Directorate, the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and the Sex Workers Outreach Project.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the ongoing and hard work of clinicians and staff from the Canberra Sexual Health Centre and extend my thanks to petitioners for bringing this important matter to my attention.

Thank you for raising this matter. I trust this information is of assistance.

Motion to take note of petitions and response

MADAM SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing order 98A, I propose the question:

That the petitions and response so lodged be noted.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (10.03): I have presented petitions signed by 1,180 Canberra residents who want this Assembly to understand how frustrated they are with recent changes to the bus network in the Belconnen area. We often hear the Minister for Transport assure us that her new transport network is better for almost everyone. The more than 1,000 people who have signed these petitions disagree, and I am pleased to make sure their voices can also be heard.

Each person who signed this petition has a story. I have not heard all of them but I have heard many. Here is an account from one Aranda resident, in her own words:

I arrived at my nearest bus stop at around 8.20 am to catch a bus due at 8.28 am. At 8.35 am, the bus went past—it was full. I later found out that it had been full since Cook and that no one had been able to get on at any of the stops in Aranda. The next bus was due at 8.50 am. It arrived at 9.05.

Another resident related the following to me, also in his own words:

Everyone at the stop let me know that the bus had already gone past, completely full. One woman was ringing her husband to come get her with his car. “I don’t

know why I keep trying,” she said. Three others were arranging an Uber. A school student explained that losing his school bus had added 30 minutes to his travel time each way. “This government has stolen an hour of my day,” he said.

Residents in Evatt have reported similar issues with overcrowded buses not stopping for passengers. What was once a 30 to 40-minute commute now takes them over an hour. Hundreds of Belconnen residents have reported similar blowouts. An extra half hour each way seems to be the most common account, but some former Xpresso users in the Belconnen area say it now takes an extra 40 minutes each way to get to and from work. As one resident explained:

The short-sighted decision to remove the Ginninderra Drive/Northbourne Avenue [Xpresso] route is the biggest step backward in my 19 years of bus usage.

Parents who live in west Belconnen have related how their children could formerly travel to school in Canberra’s south on a single bus that took 30 to 35 minutes. Now the quickest route for these kids involves three different buses and takes over an hour. Ironically, students who attend the same school but live well across the border in Yass and Murrumbateman still have a dedicated school bus and can get to school in about the same time it takes their Belconnen classmates, with far greater safety and far less difficulty.

In the case of Aranda residents, they have been asking this government for some time to increase bus services to their suburb during the morning and afternoon peaks. Many of them felt certain that their request would be reflected in the new bus network. Instead, the peak hour frequency of the former No 40 bus, which residents have said was already too crowded, has been reduced by one bus in the morning and one in the afternoon with the new 32 bus. I have heard from those who catch the bus in Aranda that fewer people have been left waiting on the side of the road lately, not because the bus is no longer too full to stop but because so many have simply given up trying. In his own words, here is the experience of another resident.

I used to be able to use the number 40 and number 80 to get to work ... in 35 minutes. It now takes three buses and around 70 minutes. Even if I catch the first bus in Cook at 5.59 [am], I’ll be late for work. So now I drive to work. Because these changes were aimed at getting more people out of their cars and onto public transport, right?

On behalf of these deeply frustrated and angry Belconnen residents, I commend to the Assembly these petitions with their 1,180 signatures.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Lee and Mr Hanson for today’s sitting for medical and family reasons, respectively.

Health—sexual health outreach

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (10.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) recognises that sexual health is a vital component of a person's overall health and wellbeing;
- (2) recognises that sexual health encompasses many inter-related areas, including reproductive health, relationships, identity, sexually transmissible infections (STI) and blood borne viruses (BBV), safety, education, prevention, testing and treatment;
- (3) notes with concern the prevalence and rise of STIs and BBVs across Australia, including in the ACT, with:
 - (a) ACT notifications of infectious syphilis significantly increasing in 2017, with 33 notifications that calendar year compared with 13 in 2016 and 14 in 2015;
 - (b) chlamydia remaining one of the most common infectious diseases in the ACT and notifications steadily increasing since 2007, with 1457 cases reported in 2017 and 1576 cases in 2018;
 - (c) ACT notifications of gonorrhoea increasing each year since 2015, with the rate of gonococcal disease increasing from 36 per 100 000 population in 2015 to 78 per 100 000 population in 2018;
 - (d) 171 notifications for hepatitis B between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2016, one newly-acquired and 84 unspecified notifications in 2017, and in 2018 there were 81 notifications of hepatitis B of unspecified duration;
 - (e) the notification of 29 newly-acquired and 343 unspecified cases of hepatitis C in the ACT between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2016, nine newly-acquired and 129 unspecific cases in 2017, and seven newly-acquired and 132 unspecific cases in 2018; and
 - (f) the notification of 43 HIV cases in the ACT between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2016, of which 24 were newly diagnosed, plus 13 new infections in 2017 and eight new infections in 2018;
- (4) recognises that community-based outreach provides further opportunities to build sexual health literacy and awareness and increase rates of testing, particularly with at-risk communities and communities which might not otherwise be engaged;
- (5) notes the sexual health promotion, testing and support services currently available in the ACT and the impact of these, including but not limited to:
 - (a) the Canberra Sexual Health Centre, Canberra Health Services, in Garran, which provides free STI and BBV testing, related sexual health concerns and HIV outpatient care, and outreach activities providing education, STI and BBV testing in a range of settings across the ACT, some of which are delivered with sexual health sector partner organisations;
 - (b) services provided by AIDS Action Council including health promotion, counselling, peer support programs for impacted communities, and advice on measures to prevent HIV;

- (c) reproductive and sexual health clinical care and counselling, including STI testing and treatment, and sexual health and relationships education provided by Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT; and
- (d) Hepatitis ACT which provides prevention, health promotion, and peer education programs, and treatment support for people affected by hepatitis;
- (6) encourages the ACT Government to work with stakeholder groups and sector leaders to establish a framework for a collaborative community-based sexual health outreach model which:
 - (a) aims to further increase the sector's collective impact; and
 - (b) could include an annual Sexual Health Week to increase rates of awareness and highlight the ongoing availability of location-based and outreach services; and
- (7) requests the ACT Government to report back on this work to the Assembly in March 2020.

Let's talk about sex or, more specifically, sexual health, a vital component of our everyday health and wellbeing. It is something that, as policymakers and as community leaders, I do not think we speak about enough, particularly in this place. That is funny because sexual health encompasses so many interrelated areas: reproductive health, relationships, education, safety and prevention, infections and bloodborne viruses—and the testing and treatment of those—and support offered around that testing and treatment.

But sex and bodies remain confronting, challenging and even taboo subjects in some parts of our community, including some parts of the healthcare and social support system. There should be nothing taboo about being healthy and nothing taboo about being sexually healthy. It is something we should celebrate, support and promote as a community, from the way we speak about it, to the way we normalise it, to the policy decisions we make and implement. I am proud to speak candidly about sexual health in this chamber today.

Madam Speaker, the impetus for me to speak about sexual health today is some startling statistics. At a time when you would think we should be a pretty enlightened community when it comes to sexual health, we are instead dealing with the prevalence, and in some cases the rise, of rates of notifications of sexually transmitted infections and bloodborne viruses across Australia, and the ACT is not immune.

These infections and viruses are serious. The longer diagnosis and treatment take, the greater the issue. Medication effectiveness can be reduced and lasting or permanent damage can be done to sex and other organs. Rising STI notification rates and rising BBV rates are both a troubling sign and a good sign. When they result from increased testing, we may be detecting infections that were already in the community but unknown, which can be treated and then further prevention work can be undertaken.

However, evidence is emerging in some areas that rates are rising above testing rates. Chlamydia remains one of the most common infectious diseases in Canberra. Notifications have steadily increased since 2007 with 1,576 cases reported last year

alone. Notifications of infectious syphilis have also increased significantly in recent times, jumping from 13 notifications in 2016 to 33 in 2017.

Notifications of gonorrhoea have also increased each year since 2015. The rate of gonococcal disease was 36 per 100,000 people in 2015. Last year it was 78 per 100,000 people. To quote the ACT's former Chief Health Officer, Dr Paul Kelly, gonorrhoea is increasing and worryingly so. In parts of Australia, gonorrhoea is increasingly becoming drug resistant.

Bloodborne viruses also remain prevalent in our community. Last year there were seven newly acquired cases and 132 unspecific cases of hepatitis C in the ACT, plus 81 unspecific notifications of hepatitis B. In 2015 and 2016, 43 HIV cases were reported, with 13 new infections in 2017 and eight new infections in 2018. We also know that across the board there are a significant number of people who are not diagnosed. "Not diagnosed" means that they are not being treated, and this has consequences for themselves and potentially for others. These are all issues which are not going away.

Madam Speaker, we are very lucky that the ACT is well-served by a collaborative, engaged NGO and government sector in this space which delivers extraordinary bang for its buck in its efforts to improve awareness, to better educate, to achieve high rates of testing and simply to get positive outcomes for people from all walks of life.

The ACT has a good track record over decades of collaboration and innovation among all of these organisations, in addition to their individual achievements. These organisations include the Aids Action Council, which provides a range of services including health promotion, counselling, peer support programs for impacted communities, and advice on measures to prevent HIV.

It includes Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, or SHFPACT. It delivers a diverse set of services in sexuality and relationships and reproductive and sexual health. It does this in a complex funding environment that includes direct clinical care; individual and group counselling; workforce development and training for the health, education and community service sectors; schools and community education; health information; and health promotion projects. SHFPACT's strength is in this integration of services and the breadth of its perspective on these issues.

Organisations like Hepatitis ACT provide a range of prevention, health promotion and peer education programs, as well as treatment support for people affected by hepatitis. There is also the Canberra Sexual Health Centre in Garran, which provides free STI and BBV testing on an appointment or walk-in basis, plus a range of other important services and outreach activities.

The startling statistics that I mentioned before are not a reflection of the existing services in the ACT. I think it is pretty clear that these services are extraordinary and without them the situation would be much worse. But sexual health is a challenging space and one in which those challenges are, paradoxically, both constant and changing.

The thing is that outcomes reflect inputs. You get what you put in. It is apparent that we need to enhance what we are putting into this sector so that we can arrest these trends. To that end, I am moving today that the ACT government work with stakeholder groups and sector leaders to establish a framework for a collaborative community-based sexual health outreach model.

It is a bit of a mouthful; so let me explain. Outreach means exactly that: reaching out, going out to communities rather than relying on communities to approach the sector. This model provides further opportunities to build sexual health literacy and awareness and to increase rates of testing. It allows for a focus on communities, which includes at-risk individuals, priority populations and/or communities which might not otherwise be engaged. It allows for targeted approaches for some communities, such as ensuring that sexual health promotion and testing are culturally appropriate.

Outreach also helps find and refer people who may have been diagnosed but not be actively treating or managing their condition. It helps further conversations and awareness about sexual health more broadly, such as abortion access, health education, safety in relationships for women, children and men, or body image. I will be clear that this model would not be replacing what is already being done, but would be in addition to—complementing what already exists.

The data tells us that this is where we need to be improving our efforts. We know that this model is effective because it has been effective in the past. Back in 2006 to 2009 and 2010 to 2013 there was a collaborative stamp-out chlamydia project in the ACT. It demonstrated that extra health prevention and testing activity contributed to a stabilising of chlamydia infection notifications in the ACT, despite increased testing, and this was while the trend was increasing nationally.

There was ACT testing month in 2014 and 2015 when the Canberra Sexual Health Centre, SHFPACT, the AIDS Action Council, the Sex Worker Outreach Project, the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy, Hepatitis ACT and the Capital Health Network came together to raise awareness about the importance of testing for BBVs and STIs, provided additional opportunities for testing through innovative outreach clinics, and focused on priority populations.

In 2015 a mobile van was used for promotion in clinical outreach, extending to places like brothels and beats. A significant amount of advertising was conducted. A significant number of new people were reached and tested. It was evaluated as a great success. Initiatives like these and others have demonstrated that the sector can enhance and amplify its impact through collaboration and that having a specialised focus is critical to meeting community needs, access and engagement, and the workforce development of others in the front-line.

However, these outreach initiatives were not ongoing. There is recognition across the sector that we need to be doing this sort of outreach all the time. That is exactly why I am proposing the establishment of a framework for an outreach model, in partnership with the ACT government sector and the NGO sector, so that this can result in the

infrastructure and the appropriate resourcing to deliver this long term in a way that complements what is already being done.

An appropriately resourced model will allow for the greatest collective impact of this sector. Again, Madam Speaker, you get what you put in. Given the already strong collaborative nature of this sector, I am confident that this approach will further increase its collective impact. It will make a difference. As a jurisdiction, we can be and we should be leaders in this space.

Madam Speaker, I know that I have just banged on about how we should not do things that are a one-off; so proposing a dedicated annual sexual health week might seem a little odd, but I make clear that I am proposing that a sexual health week would be within the broader, more permanent outreach model. Like National Condom Day, it would be an opportunity to turn the spotlight on sexual health across its many interrelated areas.

A dedicated annual sexual health week would serve to get people talking about sex and sexual health more openly. It would be used to highlight the ongoing availability of location-based and outreach services, attract new people to engage with these services, whether during that week in the future or, indeed, regularly over the longer term, and provide an opportunity as a community to come together to reflect on the importance of, and to celebrate, good sexual health.

Madam Speaker, I have said quite a bit today about reducing the stigma around sexual health, that the conversations we have about it should be normalised. I am not saying that everyone should be going around talking about when and if they are getting tested and what those results are or how many boxes of condoms they might be buying a week. It is an individual's business what they want to reveal.

However, I am of the firm view that there should be no shame in it. So I am going to walk my own talk. I have made it no secret publicly that I get regularly tested, and I sincerely thank the Canberra Sexual Health Centre for their consistently excellent approach and how smooth they make the whole experience. The health professionals within that centre are second to none.

Madam Speaker, I am also happy to put on the record that I have had chlamydia. It happened; I was 21; I got diagnosed; I got treated; it was incredibly straightforward; it was not a big deal. What would have been a big deal is if I had not gotten tested and if I had not been treated. I hope that by being open about it in a public way it might encourage someone who is feeling unsure about getting tested to take the step, now or in the future—but hopefully now—by going to one of the many excellent services or perhaps when those services are reaching out to them.

It is pretty plain that we have a serious problem on our hands. Without the current strength of our sector, things would be much, much worse. I really do want to commend again the organisations for the support we have here in the ACT. It is genuinely first rate, and I can speak to that from personal experience. But that sector could be doing more. Importantly, it wants to be doing more—with the right model and with the right resourcing—to complement what they are already providing to

ultimately increase their collective impact. I move this motion with the strongest encouragement and endorsement and I look forward to the support of this chamber and the government in prioritising this issue.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Disability, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety, Minister for Government Services and Procurement, Minister for Urban Renewal) (10.22): I thank Ms Cheyne for bringing this important motion to the Assembly today and for giving us an opportunity to reflect on the importance of sexual health to our community. I support the motion, particularly to the extent that it seeks to improve the sexual health outcomes for Canberra’s young people. In particular, it gives me an opportunity to talk about some of the great work being done by the government’s youth advisory council, or YAC, in this space.

As members will be aware, YAC is an independent voice for young people in the ACT. It enables young people to take a leading role in participation and consultation activities on issues that affect their lives. YAC stands up for Canberra’s young people and advises the government on issues that affect them. For those who need a little reminder, it comprises up to 15 members aged between 12 and 25.

Last year the young people who sit on the YAC identified sexual health and wellbeing as an issue worthy of their effort and attention. As Ms Cheyne has touched on, we know that sexual health is an issue young people care about but may also feel uncertain or embarrassed to talk about. We know that sexual health is an issue that a lot of parents and carers worry about on behalf of the young people in their lives but, again, they may not always feel comfortable in discussing the issue.

Young people may also face particular challenges in feeling secure to access sexual health services. As Ms Cheyne’s motion notes, there are some fantastic sexual health services operating in the ACT. Among young people especially, raising awareness of these services is crucial to improving outcomes. Ms Cheyne’s motion touches on some of the statistics that speak to why it is so important that we improve sexual health outcomes in our city.

That is why it has been absolutely fantastic to see YAC undertake its very own youth-led awareness campaign, in partnership with Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, or SHFPACT, to help ensure that young people understand how to stay safe and healthy in their sexual lives. The YAC and SHFPACT partnered to produce postcards which provide tips for young people to, in their words, “stay safe in the wild”. The YAC’s campaign is an example of young people using their own language to talk to other young people about sexual health.

I always enjoy my meetings with the YAC co-chairs but a particular highlight was the time they first showed me their postcards which eye-catchingly displayed the letters DTF in large, bold font on the front followed by a question mark. For those who are unfamiliar with this initialism spelling it out would, I fear, be unparliamentary so I instead advise interested members to use their favourite search engine or simply ask a young person.

The YAC has also been focused on inclusive sexual wellbeing and respectful relationships. Indeed, all of its work is conscious of diversity, including diversity in gender and sexual orientation. Members would be aware that this Friday is the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia, better known as IDAHOBIT. The YAC has been working to endorse and promote IDAHOBIT as part of its broader focus to address the unique experiences of young people in non-traditional relationships.

The YAC is working to increase the inclusiveness of information available to young people and ensure that sexual health information reflects the diverse relationships and cultural needs of all young people.

The YAC has also undertaken to engage with the Women's Centre for Health Matters in order to promote information and advice on how to safely access abortion services. These initiatives represent the frank, up-front and enthusiastic approach so many young people take in promoting a sexually healthy lifestyle.

At our most recent meeting the YAC co-chairs outlined some of their priorities and their new work plan for 2019-20, which continues their focus on sexual health and wellbeing. Over the next year the YAC will be working to engage with ACT schools about the sexual health education they provide as well as continuing to work to promote healthy relationships practices among young people and consistent understanding of consent.

I look forward to seeing this work progress over the coming months. Our conversations about young people and sexual health are too often focused on anxiety and fear. The work of YAC in this space is a perfect reminder of the positive role that young people can play in our discussion about health and about sex. Young people want to be responsible in their approach to sexual health. Young people want to stay safe. And as with all things, young people are unrelentingly enthusiastic about standing up for what they think is the right approach for them and their peers.

I support any efforts that seek to improve the effectiveness of sexual health services in our community. In the spirit of transparency and openness, I can also say that these are services I have accessed and found, as Ms Cheyne as said, to be incredibly professional and supportive. I support Ms Cheyne's motion wholeheartedly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.28): I am pleased to speak on the importance of community education and awareness of sexual health issues and the provision of sexual health services. This may not be the most comfortable topic in the world, but it is crucially important, especially when so many sexually transmitted infections—STIs and bloodborne viruses, BBVs—can be prevented by following safe sexual practices.

Despite progress in some areas, we know that sexual health, particularly combatting STIs, remains a public health challenge in Australia, and the data from the ACT seems to be largely consistent with this. According to the fourth national sexually transmissible infection strategy released last year the prevalence of some

STIs has continued to rise in recent years, in particular: increased rates of syphilis in gay men and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; gonorrhoea in gay men and other men who have sex with men; and gonorrhoea and chlamydia in young people. These areas of significant concern are reflected in the figures in Ms Cheyne's motion, particularly the significant increases in notifications of syphilis and chlamydia infections.

These changes may at least partly be the result of changing social environments and behaviours with social media and other platforms leading to changing patterns of sexual behaviour. This, alongside what might be considered complacency or a general lack of awareness around sexual health, especially compared to a few decades ago, has resulted in our rates of STIs and BBVs starting to creep back in the wrong direction.

In order to respond to this concerning trend, the key aspect of the strategy and echoed in Ms Cheyne's motion is the redoubling of our efforts to improve knowledge and awareness of STIs and BBVs and re-emphasising the importance of prevention. This includes education initiatives around the essential role of condoms, the need for timely testing and treatment and the potential long-term consequences of infection.

We must also ensure that any community education is done in a way that breaks down stigma, which is a known barrier to people accessing prevention, testing, treatment and support. In Canberra we are lucky to have a range of excellent community sexual health services who provide education, advice, testing and treatment at no or minimal cost. The motion specifically mentions the Canberra Sexual Health Centre, the AIDS Action Council, Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, and Hepatitis ACT, all of which provide fantastic services at a range of locations across the territory.

I also want to mention Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal health services which provides sexual health services for Canberra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This is a particularly vital service as we know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to be disproportionately impacted by BBVs and STIs. As we often speak about in this place, the reasons for this disproportionate impact are many and complex. The base of this is the traumatic legacy of colonisation and the profound consequences of the stolen generations, racism and other past discriminatory practices which have created historical disadvantage passed on from one generation to the next.

On top of this, lower health literacy, a lack of culturally respectful health education and prevention services, over-representation in custodial settings, shame, stigma, and discrimination mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience heightened risks and burden of BBVs and STIs. Given these high-risk factors, having culturally appropriate services like Winnunga available and accessible is crucially important.

It is clear that this is an important issue, and I thank Ms Cheyne for raising it for discussion today. The more we have these kinds of conversations the more we can reinforce the message that sexual health is a normal part of healthcare. That means

encouraging people to seek advice and get tested, just as they would for any other health concern.

The motion also calls for a collaborative approach to expand community outreach, including the idea of a sexual health week to give dedicated focus to this issue. Of course, any decision on this proposal must be informed by and made in conjunction with the sector to make best use of their expertise and resources.

We are pleased to support this motion today as we recognise the value of sexual health promotion, prevention, testing and treatment to the overall health of the ACT community.

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport and Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (10.32): I am also pleased to rise today in support of this motion. I thank Ms Cheyne for bringing it to the Assembly and particularly note her longstanding interest in this. It is a real reflection of the great work that members of the Assembly can do over time. Ms Cheyne has raised these issues in the last estimates hearings and also, I believe, in annual reports, and has been working very closely with a number of our community partners on these matters over a long period. So it is great to be able to have the opportunity to speak to this today.

As others have noted, sexual health is an important area of health. It is a matter that has not previously been talked about in this place. I noted the delight of the previous Chief Health Officer in having the opportunity to talk about it during estimates, because it is something we need to bring into the light. We need to highlight and showcase the great work that is already happening and also, as the motion notes, find new ways of improving and addressing these issues, because there are some signs of increases in certain diseases that should cause us all some concern.

For a long time the ACT government has prided itself on its approach to preventive health. This is about helping people to maintain a good quality of life and to prevent avoidable illness. As we often say, prevention is better than cure. When it comes to sexually transmissible infections and bloodborne viruses, preventing a transmission can be challenging. People in any community can be exposed to a sexually transmissible infection or bloodborne virus. It can be a difficult conversation to have with our community, because talking about sex, sexuality, sexual health and sexual behaviours can be sensitive. This is partly due to some of the stigma that still exists around STIs and BBVs and the challenges, as a result, of encouraging people to seek out testing services and appropriate treatments. But we have been, for a number of decades now, on a good trajectory.

Again I thank Ms Cheyne for her advocacy in this area, particularly around starting these public conversations about the issues of testing and treatment. There are other challenges in this area, including raising awareness about STI and BBV screening in priority population groups and identifying those who are unknowingly living with the disease. Of course government has a role to play here. We have a long and positive history of working in partnership with community stakeholders to address STIs and BBVs in our community. We know that we need to continue together to deliver a

comprehensive range of services to ensure that affected individuals receive the appropriate care, management and support. So, too, we must work to eliminate stigma and discrimination and encourage the conversation in the community about the importance of sexual health.

The transmission of BBVs continues to occur in the ACT. Notification rates for hepatitis B and C and HIV have remained relatively stable in the ACT. However, following national trends, it has been noted that we are seeing the rates of notifications of some STIs increase in the ACT. Chlamydia is the most commonly diagnosed STI in the ACT, and notification rates have been steadily increasing since 2007. While gonorrhoea and syphilis are diagnosed less frequently, notification rates have shown a marked increase since 2015. I am aware that there are other jurisdictions with increasing prevalence of some of these diseases, notably in the north of the country, which is causing concern.

If not diagnosed early and treated appropriately, STIs and BBVs can cause long-term health complications, which in the case of bloodborne viruses can be life threatening. Prevention, alongside early detection and treatment, of STIs and BBVs is important to achieving good health outcomes overall for individuals and our community. Improvements in treatment for HIV mean that today the life expectancy for someone who is living with HIV on antiretroviral treatment and responding to treatment is no different to that for the general population. It is only in recent years that there has been a significant breakthrough with new, highly effective medicines that can offer a cure for people living with hepatitis C. This has been a really remarkable improvement in the past couple of years and one that I know Hepatitis ACT has been working very hard in the community on.

Prevention is a very good option, followed by early detection. That is why it is important that we collectively work as a community to mitigate these infections and viruses. The ACT government takes a proactive approach to offering sexual health services and preventive health programs. Through the Canberra Sexual Health Centre, people can access free and confidential STI treatment and testing. The ACT government also supports various community organisations to provide counselling and advice services and specialised testing, many of which are specifically noted in the motion and have been spoken about today.

I will outline briefly the services we provide and support. They include the Canberra Sexual Health Centre in Garran, where people can get access to free STI treatment and testing. It serves as the region's largest HIV outpatient service. The Canberra Sexual Health Centre has a well-established outreach program at venues right across Canberra to support priority population access to the service, including for young people, LGBTIQ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, sex workers and people who inject drugs.

Services are provided by the AIDS Action Council, where members of the community can receive information, STI testing, counselling and advice; and Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, or SHFPACT, where users of these services can receive testing, treatment, counselling, and advice on general sexual and reproductive health issues. Hepatitis ACT provides information and resources to help people in the

ACT with hepatitis, and their families or carers, to better understand how to manage this lifelong condition. The Capital Health Network HIV program provides nursing, education and counselling services, and of course there is the work done through Winnunga Nimmityjah.

In addition, ACT Health has funded a number of specific projects over the past two years to help in delivering the hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV and sexually transmissible infections ACT statement of priorities, which I launched in 2016. This strategy is also aimed at addressing emerging issues in the sector. One of the projects was an enhanced outreach testing project that delivered testing and education sessions to university students, as well as testing sessions at the Tuggeranong and Belconnen walk-in centres from February to July last year. This program was jointly delivered by the Canberra Sexual Health Centre, the AIDS Action Council, SHFPACT and Hepatitis ACT. Another initiative was the investment the ACT government made in a trial of the HIV prevention drug pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, in the ACT, an important preventive health step.

Ms Cheyne recognises the role of community-based outreach programs that provide opportunities to engage with priority populations. I agree with that. Outreach aims to build sexual health, literacy and awareness within communities. I welcome her suggestion to develop, with collaboration from stakeholders and affected communities, a framework for a collaborative community-based sexual health outreach model. Better connecting priority populations to prevention education and services, including through outreach and peer-based approaches and priority settings, is a key area for action in the most recent national sexually transmissible infections strategy. There is value in such a comprehensive approach to a wide-sweeping social and health issue.

We know that to progress and to overcome the barriers requires detailed, methodical work with our stakeholders. We need to share our priorities and ensure that we respond to high-risk behaviours without gaps or duplication. Equally we must also ensure that any progressive social health actions we undertake eliminate stigma and discrimination.

Ms Cheyne also proposed an annual sexual health week to increase awareness of STIs and highlight the ongoing availability of location-based and outreach services, which I think is a terrific idea. We support strategies to increase awareness and testing as part of a comprehensive health promotion campaign to reduce the number of undiagnosed STIs and prevent further transmission in the community. I have already asked ACT Health to consider a sexual health week as part of the forward program of work, to address the issues we have debated and discussed in the Assembly today, and to seek the input of sector stakeholders, who will be key to our success in any outreach and prevention goals we need to achieve in our community.

In the coming months ACT Health will further consult with key stakeholders to build upon the current statement of priorities and plan further actions to address unmet and emerging needs relating to STIs and BBVs in our community. On that note, this is a very timely motion. I look forward to working with community partners and the highly qualified clinical staff, who are very passionate about the work they do:

providing specialist, professional and non-judgemental sexual health care to those who need it.

Again, I thank and congratulate Ms Cheyne for her work in this area, including on the motion debated today.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.42): I thank Ms Cheyne for bringing forward this motion today regarding the work that has been done by the Canberra Sexual Health Centre and Canberra sexual health services across Canberra. Members have spoken about the service provided at the Sexual Health Centre at building 5 of the Canberra Hospital complex but I want to put on notice that this building is earmarked for demolition to make way for the SPIRE complex and that all the current occupants of building 5 are waiting to hear where they will have to move to. Sometime over the next 12 to 18 months the Sexual Health Centre will have to close their current site and move to the new site, and I hope that this is done with as little disruption as possible. It would be good if the ACT government could give all the occupants of building 5 notice of what will be happening so that they can start to plan for their future.

Ms Cheyne calls for the ACT government to work with stakeholder groups and sector leaders. And to some extent this is already happening but there is no reason why we cannot do more in this space. Ms Cheyne's motion in effect calls on the government to develop a sexual health strategy. Unfortunately this government does not have a very good track record in developing health strategies. For example, the drugs strategy was five years out of date before it was finally replaced. And the government has had problems updating its policies in a timely manner. It did impact on its accreditation last year, and this is mainly due to the ongoing chaos in the health portfolio. This has happened under not only this minister but previous ministers as well.

Queensland and New South Wales have sexual health strategies. The government could probably begin by looking at what those states are offering as the jumping off point. Last year, the federal government published its own bloodborne viruses (BBV) and sexually transmissible infections (STI) strategy 2018-2022, and this strategy has been endorsed by all Australian health ministers including Minister Fitzharris. The federal government strategy could also form part of the basis of a strategy to be adopted in the ACT.

Ms Cheyne suggests that we should look at the issue of a sexual health week, which is laudable, but in my view sexual health weeks should be adopted on a national basis. I think that you would get more bang for your buck. Ms Cheyne has talked about the effectiveness of the sexual health promotions here and how they would be made more effective with an integrated sexual health week. I think that you would do even better if you had a national approach to such ventures. This would ensure that there is consistent promotion across the nation and ensure that the messages get through. Otherwise you potentially end up with a hodgepodge of health weeks across the country with little consistency of message.

In conclusion, I think the most important thing that the minister for health can do in this area is give certainty to the Canberra Sexual Health Centre about its ongoing accommodation needs.

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport and Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (10.46), by leave: The response to the petition that you, Madam Speaker, brought to this place regarding the Canberra Sexual Health Centre which the Clerk tabled this morning responded to Mrs Dunne's comments regarding the future of the location of the Canberra Sexual Health Centre and indicated that ACT Health and Canberra Health Services, including the Canberra Sexual Health Centre, are in very close conversation about the future location to ensure a seamless transition of those services, as has all other occupants of building 5.

Of course, given that Canberra Sexual Health Centre is a clinical service, it is a very high priority to ensure continuity of access and we are working very closely with them. There has been a clear allocation of funding to make sure that they can be relocated seamlessly when demolition of building 5 begins in the very near future.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (10.47), in reply: I will speak very briefly and thank members in this chamber for their support of and, in large part, their candidness in bringing attention to this issue. As I mentioned, sex and sexual health are not things that are regularly spoken about in this place, whether it is in our committees or in the chamber, and I think bringing more attention to it and all its interrelated areas can only be a good thing. I am proud to continue to lead the conversation in this space and very much appreciate the support of the minister and the government.

I am a bit disappointed at what I would take to be the lack of effort put into Mrs Dunne's speech in that she hijacked the motion to take cheap pot shots at the government and in doing so largely missed the point of the motion. The motion is about further enhancing what we are already doing in the area, which has been a strategic approach. We did talk extensively, at least on this side of the chamber, about how all the organisations have been working very closely with the government on their impact and on increasing their impact.

This is about complementing what they are already doing by engaging with an outreach model. I think Mrs Dunne missed that entirely. I am very disappointed because she has previously been quite supportive of the sexual health conversation in committees, and her contribution was not the level of effort that I expected today.

I think that we have made the point that community outreach programs are great but they are not enough. It is not enough to just put out spot fires and do one-offs. What we need to have is a community outreach model, something that is ongoing, something that has appropriate resourcing, so that we can arrest the trends and we are not talking about increasing rates of notification and we are not talking about prevalence as much as we are right now.

But the fact is: this is where we are at and we need to continue to be open, continue to reduce the stigma and continue to ensure that people know of these services, can reach these services and make sure that we are doing whatever we can to ensure that these services are reached.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Health—hydrotherapy services

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.50): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) hydrotherapy is an important health and rehabilitative treatment for those suffering injury, arthritis, chronic pain, sports injury and other health issues;
- (b) hydrotherapy is proven to be able to save the public health system significant cost;
- (c) the ACT Government intends to close the hydrotherapy pool at The Canberra Hospital in, or about, June 2019;
- (d) the Government has no plans for a replacement pool in Canberra's south, thus limiting the availability of suitable hydrotherapy facilities in the south;
- (e) there is a high and growing demand for hydrotherapy treatment services;
- (f) the hydrotherapy pool at the University of Canberra Public Hospital is unable to satisfy the demand for hydrotherapy treatment services other than for patients of the hospital; and
- (g) there is an opportunity to include a hydrotherapy pool in the planning and design of the Stromlo Aquatic Centre; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) keep The Canberra Hospital's hydrotherapy pool open and operational until a dedicated replacement, with appropriate specifications, and with relevant associated access, equipment and change facilities, is provided in Canberra's south;
- (b) begin planning for a new hydrotherapy pool as part of the Stromlo Aquatic Centre; and
- (c) report to the Assembly on the status of the plans and design work for a Southside hydrotherapy pool, by the last sitting day in August 2019.

Madam Speaker, I am very proud to bring forward this motion today. I compliment my colleagues, particularly Mrs Jones for the work that she had done in this space with her constituents and Ms Lawder for the work that she has done in the ageing space as well. Hydrotherapy is an increasingly important element of healthcare with an ageing population.

We also need to remember that this is not just a matter for older people. It is a matter for people with all sorts of injuries. This morning I had an interesting discussion with Michael, the work experience boy. He said that fairly soon he will have knee surgery because of injuries and the like. He is in Year 12 and young. He had not understood the important of hydrotherapy until he came into the office this week when it has been the topic of conversation in our office. Because he is a bright boy he has very quickly

come to appreciate how important this is not just for older people but also for young people, for people recovering from injury, and for people to build up their strength to prepare for their surgery so that their recovery is better.

Hydrotherapy is an important element in our healthcare provision in the ACT. We are seeing a huge uptake in the number of people coming forward looking for hydrotherapy services at a time when the government is proposing to close down a facility. This motion here today is calling on the government to not close yet—I emphasise “yet”—the hydrotherapy pool at the Canberra Hospital.

I made it clear on the radio this morning when I was speaking on the ABC that I do not see a long-term future for the current hydrotherapy pool at the Canberra Hospital. The Canberra Hospital site is constrained. Eventually we will have to give up that space for other acute service. I want to make it very clear: this motion does not call for the hospital to keep that hydrotherapy pool open indefinitely; it is asking that the hydrotherapy pool be kept open to provide hydrotherapy services until we can find sufficient substitute services to service the people on the south side of Canberra.

I note that the minister has proposed an amendment, which the opposition will be looking very favourably at. One of the issues that the minister still does not understand is that, if you live in Tuggeranong or Weston Creek and you have limited mobility, a trip to the University of Canberra Public Hospital is not necessarily viable.

Over the last little while we have had a lot of on again, off again discussions about hydrotherapy. Since I became the shadow minister it has been one of the persistent issues that people have raised with me. We have been through this process a number of times here. We were told that, once we had the University of Canberra Public Hospital, we would not need a south-side facility; everyone could go to Belconnen.

What we were doing was substituting disadvantage. In the past, people who lived in my electorate, people who lived in Charnwood and Evatt—which is not in my electorate—had to travel a long way for hydrotherapy services. We are now substituting disadvantage by saying, “It would be a really good idea if everybody just went to Belconnen.”

When it became clear that that was not possible, the government agreed at the time of the opening of the University of Canberra Public Hospital that the Woden site would remain open. It has now been announced that the minister is proposing to close it by 30 June, which is what prompted this motion here today.

In the meantime, there has been a lot of backwards and forwards. I have to speak very critically about the minister in relation to the answer that she gave in estimates last year when, at the height of a fairly intense backwards and forwards about the future of the hydrotherapy pool, she successfully closed down discussion by saying that the Stromlo Leisure Centre would provide hydrotherapy facilities. That basically closed down the discussion. I was sitting there thinking, “Gee, why didn’t I know that? How come I didn’t know that?”

So we went looking. I came out and said to my staff, “How did we miss that there was a hydrotherapy pool at Stromlo? We went looking. There was no hydrotherapy pool. I wrote to the Minister for Sport and Recreation to ask her about the plans for a hydrotherapy pool. I waited a long time for the answer. While I was waiting for the answer—there is the old saying that a lie is halfway around the world before truth puts its pants on—that lie was repeated. Over and over again it was repeated on radio by the Chief Minister, it was repeated by Minister Steel on social media and, as a result, it was eventually—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, sorry for the delay. Did you just use the word “lie”?

MRS DUNNE: I did.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think that is unparliamentary. I ask that you withdraw.

MRS DUNNE: I did not say it was a lie used in this place, but if you wish me to withdraw it, I will.

MADAM SPEAKER: Please. I would prefer it. Thank you, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: I withdraw. The inaccuracies of that were allowed to propagate for some time. Eventually I received an answer from Minister Berry, who said the “Stromlo Leisure Centre does not include a stand-alone hydrotherapy pool, but will include a multipurpose pool that will cater for all types of aquatic based hydrotherapy”.

The trouble is that the pool will not be heated sufficiently. The minister went on to provide some specifications for the pool, including that it will be heated to 31 degrees, which is not hot enough. It is not a hydrotherapy pool. We had probably six or so months of hiatus while this inaccuracy was allowed to fester. The Chief Minister went on to say that the hospital hydrotherapy would not close down until the replacement hydrotherapy pool at Stromlo was put in place. But there was never going to be a replacement hydrotherapy pool at Stromlo.

Essentially this motion today makes good what the Chief Minister promised the people of the ACT on *Chief Minister Talkback* and on other occasions: to not close the hospital pool until we have the proper hydrotherapy facilities on the south side.

Let us think about what hydrotherapy should look like and what the minister has been trying to fob off. There have been lots of discussions over the years about hydrotherapy. Arthritis ACT is the principal player in this space. They have been operating hydrotherapy programs for approximately 25 years. While I say the principal player, there are other people who access hydrotherapy through different mechanisms other than Arthritis ACT.

Currently Arthritis ACT use five pools across Canberra and have about 35 sessions a week. As population grows, demand has grown. There are now 623 people who use

Arthritis ACT's therapeutic hydrotherapy program. This is a huge increase from last November when the figure was 383. There is a very rapid growth in demand, Madam Speaker. We need to understand what is causing this. We are not getting old at that rate. There are many other mechanisms at play.

All the therapy staff operating under the aegis of Arthritis ACT are Allied Health trained and a supervisor is trained in pool rescue and CPR, at a minimum. All supervisors and staff have working with vulnerable people authorities. For personal safety, no more than 12 people are in a session, and that includes carers who might need to be in the pool to be with someone who needs more assistance. In the case of Arthritis ACT, the pool is used for 20 hours a week. This is the Woden Hospital site pool.

The minister knew this and has known this for some time, but she said on radio on 9 April that it was needed only for 10 hours a week. When Arthritis ACT sent a text to the presenter for the program to correct the figure, the minister dismissed it in a not very respectful way.

The University of Canberra hydrotherapy pool has a range of design problems, including the air conditioning. You find this all the time: it might be heating the place but there is a waft of air that goes across the pool. If you are wet and you have air moving over you, even if it is warm air, it makes you feel cold. There are problems there in relation to the air conditioning.

There is the movement logistics of pool users and even accessing the key has been a problem, because there are restricted hours. Other hydrotherapy pools around Canberra, such as Black Mountain and Calvary John James, have a range of problems. In the case of Calvary John James, it has been said to me that it is not deep enough for some people, and it is often too cold.

I have had feedback through Mrs Jones from a member of the public who is in the gallery today who has said after last night's experience at John James she is not going to waste her time going back again because it is not suitable. Arthritis ACT has done an audit of other suitable but privately owned pools in the ACT, but the government does not seem to have an idea about that.

In conversation with the minister in the chamber earlier on, the minister has made some very laudable comments. I will speak on the amendments about that in a moment. I think that the minister is not very well informed about what is happening in the hydrotherapy space. Arthritis ACT has secure funding under Ausport funding grant programs. This will enable Arthritis ACT to provide an extra 12 sessions per week to an additional 120 clients. Any decision to close the pool will put this in jeopardy.

The most important thing is that I came in here with a speech to talk about the jeopardy that we were putting people in in Canberra. We have seen from the circulated amendment from the minister that there are changes afoot. I congratulate the minister for listening to the community and agreeing to come part of the way. I still believe this is part of the way. I think that the community requires from you—there are members of the arthritis community in the gallery—the minister, a real

commitment, not just words, but a personal commitment that the words here will be put into practice.

This is a most important issue. I am constantly confronted by people who tell me how life changing access to hydrotherapy is. People who were almost completely immobile have been able to resume walking and other physical activities which they thought were beyond them.

Some people have become so mobile that they have actually become volunteers for hydrotherapy. They are there helping other people achieve the great gains that they have made. Every time we allow someone to go to a hydrotherapy session and get those benefits, we are keeping them out of hospital; we are keeping them off painkillers; we are keeping them perhaps another six months away from a knee replacement. If they have a knee replacement, they are better able to recover. There are all of these things. The benefits are considerable. I have not costed them.

The government certainly does not seem to understand what they are, and therefore has not costed them. There is considerable benefit in keeping open these facilities and doing what we can to expand them to meet the need. We need to understand the need because suddenly we have had a 40 per cent uptake in people who want access to Arthritis ACT's programs. There is something going on. Maybe it is just that we have been talking more about hydrotherapy. We need to understand what is causing that.

I commend the motion today. I welcome the change of heart from the government. When the minister speaks, the minister needs to make real commitments, not to me but to the people of the ACT who use these services. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport and Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (11.05): I thank Mrs Dunne for the opportunity to discuss the motion and welcome many members of the Arthritis ACT community and the broader community here to be part of this conversation, as it has been continuing for some time. It was a welcome opportunity to chat with Mrs Dunne about my amendment to this motion, and I hope we can agree on that. Moving an amendment is by definition a commitment from me and the government to ensure that both the words and the spirit of the amended motion are followed up by the ACT government. I am possibly anticipating an amendment to my amendment, but anyhow.

Of course I recognise, as Mrs Dunne indicated, that users of both hydrotherapy and warm-water exercise experience significant health benefits and also considerable wellbeing benefits to their daily lives. ACT Health, Canberra Health Services and I understand the wellbeing benefits in addition to the physical benefits that come from accessing the service.

I will provide some background, some of it going back to prior to my time as the minister. Certainly the advice to me was that there was considerable consultation at the time the decision was made to build a subacute rehabilitation hospital, a dedicated

state-of-the-art facility to provide rehabilitation services in one location. Part of the reason for this was the benefit of providing a subacute facility but also, as Mrs Dunne has noted, the importance of having access to additional space at the Canberra Hospital, which is Canberra's trauma and acute hospital but also a very important trauma hospital for the southern New South Wales region.

The principle was that rehabilitation services would be relocated along with a range of other services that were provided across the ACT in a variety of different locations including from Canberra Hospital, some community health centres and Calvary Public Hospital. With the opening of the University of Canberra Hospital and the construction of a purpose-built hydrotherapy pool there, all rehabilitation services were provided in one location. I had understood that significant consultation had been undertaken at that time to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible understood the principle behind having a subacute rehabilitation hospital to enable the continued growth and development of the Canberra Hospital campus as an acute hospital campus.

It was certainly a question I asked upon first becoming minister, that is, was it the agreed position that when the University of Canberra Hospital was opened the hydrotherapy pool at Canberra Hospital would close? At that point I was assured that there had been considerable consultation. But in the lead-up to the opening of the UCH facility last year times had changed and those conversations were taken on with some renewed interest.

It was the case that prior to the opening of UCH we agreed with Arthritis ACT to extend the life of the pool at the Canberra Hospital and also to extend the contract the ACT government has with Arthritis ACT to continue to provide those sessions at the Canberra Hospital pool as well as additional sessions at UCH.

We are doing significant work with Arthritis ACT and I will outline that further for the benefit of the Assembly and for the record. The University of Canberra Hospital pool is open six days a week. It provides 29 hours of public rehabilitation services per week, as well as 19 hours to third-party providers such as Arthritis ACT. If there are issues in the conditions at each pool—a number of them have been raised and I have passed them on to Canberra Health Services to follow-up on—we will follow up on those issues.

The primary use of the UCH pool is prescribed courses of hydrotherapy through the rehabilitation, aged and community services division of Canberra Health Services. Members of approved organisations, such as Arthritis ACT but also a number of others, who wish to use the pool outside of a prescribed course of therapy are able to gain access to the pool at a number of different sessions. This mirrors the arrangements previously in place at the Canberra Hospital pool prior to the opening of UCH.

As I mentioned earlier, it was the intention that prescribed hydrotherapy services would transfer to the University of Canberra Hospital. As I understood it at the time, that had been well understood across a number of different groups.

Of course, accessibility and the safety of pool users, rehabilitation patients and members of our community is our number one priority. I have had discussions with Arthritis ACT about the nature of the current Canberra Hospital pool, and I will outline some of those shortly. In discussions the agreed priority was that, given the aged condition of the Canberra Hospital pool, the last thing we wanted was to let down at short notice the current users of the pool because of the need to close it for maintenance. I will highlight some of the maintenance issues at the Canberra Hospital pool shortly.

We agreed that we would focus effort on ensuring access to other sessions of hydrotherapy and warm-water exercise at other locations, particularly on the south side or at other accessible locations, for example, in the inner north of Canberra. That work has been underway. I have asked ACT Health to engage an independent expert group to undertake some work. I understand that work has been commissioned through the Nous Group and that they are meeting with Arthritis ACT this morning. I will give some more detail on that work shortly.

The decision to close the pool in the short to medium term was based on a number of reasons, principally because it is an ageing asset and coming to the end of its useful life. I will give some insight into that because users of the pool may not see what lies beneath that causes me some concern as minister for the occupational health and safety of staff members and contractors who maintain the pool in addition to the principles underpinning what services are provided on the Canberra Hospital campus.

The Canberra Hospital hydrotherapy pool was opened in 1973 and is currently maintained to facilitate use of the pool by Arthritis ACT for 17½ hours per week according to their latest report to us. Arthritis ACT's website indicates that eight hours is for hydrotherapy sessions and up to 10 hours for warm-water exercise sessions.

Maintaining the pool involves daily water quality checks as well as monthly HVAC system checks. The plant and equipment supporting the pool are located underneath the pool in a very confined space that has one egress and exit point. This presents—I have visited the site and viewed this myself—very difficult and suboptimal maintenance and access issues. Contemporary pool plant design would not have such a facility underneath the pool, and the current situation certainly does not meet any modern-day access standards for new pools.

The daily checking involves working with chlorine which, as members know, is potentially highly toxic. It is a very confined space with very difficult access that requires maintenance staff to wear a harness to get in underneath. The infrastructure supporting the pool is at the end of its life without spare parts backup in the event of a failure of aged equipment.

I am uncomfortable at extending the life of the pool beyond what is practicable and reasonable. It would bear risks to both the users of the pool as well as to staff. This is something that I have borne in mind as I have received advice from Canberra Health Services as well as a number of representations from the community.

As I mentioned, I will give some further detail on the work currently underway commissioned through the Nous Group. That will give us further answers we do not have at hand today. As Mrs Dunne noted, when I met with Arthritis ACT some weeks ago they presented to us for the first time a significant increase in the number of people coming to them requiring access to either hydrotherapy or warm-water exercise.

That is a significant increase and it is something we discussed, trying to understand what was behind this increase. There are a number of potential reasons, one being increased referrals to Arthritis ACT. We agreed that it was a really good opportunity to understand what is driving a 40 per cent increase in three months. That is some of the work Nous Group is now doing with Arthritis ACT, that is, further understand what is behind this growth. As a part funder of Arthritis ACT it is certainly in the government's interest to understand the growth and how we meet it not just now but into the future.

That will be part of the work Nous Group are doing to assess current demand and referral trends for hydrotherapy and warm-water exercise. I have asked them to ensure that the current policy settings and contractual arrangements with Arthritis ACT are appropriate and effective for community members, to determine the supply of hydrotherapy and warm-water facilities across the ACT and to provide advice to government about securing sessions at these facilities.

Through my discussions with Arthritis ACT I am aware that they were doing some of that work, and we have offered this as a way for Arthritis ACT to step back from that and focus on supporting their members so that we can bring to that discussion the view that if we need to increase access to sessions the government is willing to do that. Mrs Dunne asked whether other pools can be brought up to standard or heated to a higher temperature, and the government is well positioned to have discussions with different facilities to determine if there is a reasonable way to do that.

I have heard feedback from a number of people, many of whom may be in the gallery today, that they love and have been using the Canberra Hospital pool for some time. Its closure will be of concern to them just as it is of concern to me to make sure we have continued access to sessions at other locations. It is the view of some that we can secure those sessions, and that is the work that is underway, that is, to understand exactly how we can do that right now.

As the amendment notes, we undertake not to close the pool until we can access comparable levels of services and sessions, further understand the increase in demand, and understand where warm-water therapy is best provided and where hydrotherapy is best provided. As I indicated, Arthritis ACT's sessions at the Canberra Hospital are about equally split between hydrotherapy sessions and warm-water exercise sessions, and there are certainly more options available for warm-water sessions, including at some fairly new pools that have opened in close proximity to the Legislative Assembly.

The Nous Group is due to report to me by mid-June, and that work will give all of us, including members in the gallery, the government and the opposition, more information. It is my requirement of that contract that work is undertaken in very close discussions with Arthritis ACT. I look forward to that continuing, and I suspect that today's meeting will be only the first of a number.

I will comment very briefly on the discussion Mrs Dunne referred to in previous committee hearings. We certainly had a discussion, and I think all of us have learned a bit more about the differences between 31, 32 and 34 degrees. Although I do not have *Hansard* in front of me, I recall discussions in committees that it was a matter of how you determine whether it is a 32-degree pool or a 34-degree pool. That will be considered in the context of the Nous Group report.

I have undertaken through the amendment to report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in August and to continue to work collaboratively with community members and local stakeholders. Our commitment is to do just that.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

"(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of hydrotherapy services to the community;
- (b) there is a demand for access to hydrotherapy and warm water facilities;
- (c) the ACT Government is currently working with stakeholders to determine the current demand and usage of hydrotherapy and warm water facilities across the ACT;
- (d) the ACT Government acknowledges The Canberra Hospital pool is coming to the end of its usable and safe life and has advised stakeholders it intends to close the pool by 30 June 2019;
- (e) the purpose-built hydrotherapy pool at the University of Canberra Hospital opened in 2018 and has enhanced features compared to the facility at The Canberra Hospital;
- (f) the Stromlo Leisure Centre program pool, like the Lakeside Leisure Centre on Canberra's southside, will be heated to approximately 31 to 32 degrees Celsius and be available for use by the community, including for some types of warm water therapy;
- (g) construction of the new Stromlo Leisure Centre is progressing with completion expected in the second quarter of 2020;
- (h) the ACT Government initially committed \$33 million for the project to include a 50 metre lap and competition pool, a program pool, a reception, kiosk, administration offices and change rooms; and
- (i) after extensive consultation with the community, the Government allocated an additional \$3.6 million to provide funding for a gym, leisure pool, toddlers' pool, splash park, crèche and more seating throughout the centre; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) agree not to close The Canberra Hospital pool until an appropriate level of access at other suitable locations, readily accessible for those on Canberra's southside can be continued;
- (b) continue to work collaboratively with local stakeholders to include their input in the work that is currently underway to determine the current demand and usage of hydrotherapy and warm water facilities across the ACT; and
- (c) report to the Assembly on these matters by the last sitting day in August 2019."

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.20): I am pleased to rise and speak to this important issue. The ACT Greens understand that hydrotherapy services are crucial to the health and wellbeing of many Canberrans. We believe that these services should be available and accessible across the ACT community for those who need them.

As has been touched on in today's debate, hydrotherapy can improve mobility and quality of life for people with a range of conditions or injuries, including arthritis and chronic pain, just to name a couple. We also know that regular exercise in a hydrotherapy pool has a preventive and rehabilitative effect for people with chronic muscular and osteo conditions. This enables them to maintain an active life in the community and makes it less likely they would require admission to hospital. I think we would all agree that hydrotherapy is a vital service that provides benefits for individuals and the broader health system.

For years many people in the Canberra community have accessed hydrotherapy services at the Canberra Hospital pool. However, in recent times there has been growing concern that with the Canberra Hospital pool scheduled to close in June this year, those on the south side of Canberra would not have adequate access to hydrotherapy facilities. While a new hydrotherapy pool was opened at the University of Canberra Hospital last year, and I understand that that pool is operating very well at the new hospital, the community has shared with me a number of concerns about this operating as a replacement for the Canberra Hospital pool.

First, there is concern that there will not be enough hours of availability at the UCH pool for community hydrotherapy users, given that for many hours each day it is rightly being used by hospital patients. The view that has been put to me by community organisations and some individuals I have spoken to about this is that demand for hydrotherapy services is growing and that there is sufficient demand to get effective use out of both of the pools, rather than having one replace the other.

Another concern that has been raised is the accessibility of the University of Canberra Hospital pool for people on the south side. That has been canvassed in the discussion today. The advice I have received is that while there are a number of other pools on the south side that can provide hydrotherapy and warm water exercise, they have different issues around cost, limited opening hours and perhaps the temperature of the pool. I see that there is going to be a discussion in detail about temperatures shortly. My advice is that, for the ideal therapeutic effect, hydrotherapy pools must be heated

to 34 degrees. I think there is a different discussion about warm water exercise, and that is probably where some of the new ones come into this conversation.

I appreciate that the pool at the Canberra Hospital is ageing and that it cannot continue to operate forever. Minister Fitzharris has spoken about some of the details of that. But I believe we should not close the Canberra Hospital pool until we have an alternative plan to ensure that there are affordable and accessible hydrotherapy and warm water facilities for people in Canberra's south. My advice is that while the Canberra Hospital pool will not be a viable option in the medium to long term, it can continue to operate safely in the short term until another facility is either identified or developed. The advice I am working from comes from those who have raised their concerns with me.

It is apparent that there is a lack of clarity in the community about how people on the south side will continue to access hydrotherapy once the Canberra Hospital pool closes. There is an opportunity here to have a conversation with the community to gauge the level of demand, clarify available hours at UCH and establish alternative arrangements either with existing south side pools or through a new facility. So I am pleased to hear that the minister and Canberra Health Services are currently working with stakeholders to answer these questions and identify a pathway forward that is acceptable to all involved. I do not believe we should pre-empt the outcome of that process by starting planning for a new pool at the Stromlo aquatic centre before that consultation is concluded.

In Mrs Dunne's original text, she was very specific about needing to start work and planning on a new facility at Stromlo. I do not know if that is the right answer. The minister has spoken today in some pre-conversations about a number of other facilities around that may well be suitable. I think that there is some detailed work to do here around what the right answer is. I certainly do not presume to know that today, but having some further consultation on and consideration of those facilities is undoubtedly the right answer, because there do seem to be a range of options that should be considered. That is why we are supportive of the intention of Mrs Dunne's motion. I think that she has hit on an important issue here and one that I know is of concern to a number of people who have approached me.

Clearly this is an important issue, especially for those who are living with arthritis or have similar conditions. I hope the outcome of today's debate will be certainty that TCH will continue to remain available for people who need it in the short term and that a plan for an alternative facility is under development. Certainty is probably the most important thing today. It is very clear in the minister's amendment, and I thank her for this, that the TCH facility will remain open until that further work has been done. The other positive part of the minister's motion is a commitment to report back to the Assembly in August once that further discussion has taken place. That way there can be both information for the rest of us in this place and a degree of transparency for others who have an interest in what that consultation process has revealed.

We will be supporting the amendment brought forward by Minister Fitzharris today. I thank her for her commitment to working with the community to find a viable

solution, but I also thank Mrs Dunne for bringing this important matter to the Assembly for debate. We seem to have reached a good place in this discussion today. I look forward primarily to hearing the update on this work in the August sittings.

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (11.27): I thank Mrs Dunne for bringing this motion to the Assembly today and I welcome the minister's backflip on this issue. It is another significant fail that we have got to this point. The minister might shake her head, but that we have got to this point is astounding.

Hydrotherapy with water of 34 to 36 degrees is used by many people, for many reasons. Hydrotherapy works wonders for those managing chronic pain or suffering from arthritis. It is used by people who have been injured, undergone surgery, suffer from PTSD or have had a stroke. It is used for rehabilitation, for recovery and also for those suffering severe and ongoing conditions, sometimes stalling deterioration or reversing the effects of very serious illness.

I welcome today into the gallery in particular representatives of Arthritis ACT: Rebecca, the very capable spokesperson for the organisation, Ian, Angela, Maureen, Gordon, Joan, Yaa, Paul, Patricia and others. I commend you on your articulate manner of bringing this issue to light. It has been a pleasure to work with you.

Hydrotherapy also saves the health system time and money by helping to keep patients healthy and active and out of hospital and other health service support services.

I have heard from numerous residents in my electorate who are very concerned about the impending closure. In fact residents have been quite distressed that we have got to this point. The minister clearly stated in her speech that she believed consultation had occurred. I think this goes to the heart of one of the biggest problems with this government: I do not think that that word means what they think it means. I do not know the last time the minister sat down around the kitchen table with any members of the Canberra community and stopped listening to people who tell her that they have consulted when clearly they have not, have not done so properly or were not really listening in the first place. There is a petition on this matter that will come shortly to this place.

During estimates last year Ms Fitzharris talked about Stromlo pool it was not us who suggested Stromlo pool; it was the government who suggested that Stromlo pool would have a hydrotherapy pool in it, clearly not understanding that hydrotherapy requires 34 to 36-degree water. That is not our job to know; that is the minister's job to know.

But these promises to the community did not seem to mean much to the government. The Chief Minister himself said so on talkback. A summary on his own website now of the talkback discussion—not a quote from him but a summary written by his own people—says that ACT Health would:

... look at keeping the Canberra Hospital pool open to transition services until the new pool at Stromlo opens around 2020, noting the Stromlo pool will also be a hydrotherapy pool.

I think everybody deserves an apology.

The minister does not know what hydrotherapy is. Fortunately, as a result of the hard work of the people in the gallery today, Arthritis ACT and people on our side of the chamber, this issue is coming to light. I am glad to say that perhaps when we walk away from today the one thing we will know is that somebody suffering chronic pain who gets in the water at 32 degrees or 31 degrees or with an air conditioner blowing on their shoulders has their muscles seize up, so it has almost the opposite effect of the purpose of being in the water.

People are sick of the weasel words. They do not trust the government to do what they say they are going to do. This same minister last year came in here and agreed that we would have a playground built in Waramanga. Then, when the decision was made and the announcements are made under the new minister, apparently Waramanga was one of the playgrounds that could be applied for. So what the minister says in here and what she actually does can be two completely different things. We will be watching and everybody here will be watching to see if this minister's words are true. Joan from Curtin says:

Without hydrotherapy, I would be in a wheelchair.

I can't walk a block without stopping to puff ... but I can get in the [hydrotherapy] pool and walk for an hour, no problems.

When asked what would happen if the Canberra Hospital pool closed, Joan said:

I would give myself probably a month, before I have to go onto a walking frame.

Last month when these users met with me they stressed the importance of having nearby and accessible hydrotherapy. They have been absolutely stressed and distressed by the government's actions on this service. Minh told me that before hydrotherapy she was suffering chronic pain. Aurelio, now that he is undertaking hydrotherapy, is healthier and does not need to take as many prescriptions.

The pool at the John James hospital is not maintained at a consistent temperature. As the minister noted in her speech, that could be addressed. It must be addressed, and properly, because it is not acceptable for hydrotherapy services not to be offered at the appropriate temperature, as I have mentioned before.

In a monumental stuff-up that probably reminds some of us here of what happened with the Gungahlin Drive extension, the new pool at the UC has been opened with lesser facilities than the old pool has. It is smaller, it is shallower, it has cold air blowing across the top of it, and it has had more issues with maintaining temperature than the old pool has. Does this remind anybody of anything?

The idea of a public hydrotherapy pool is that people can go there at any time. Arthritis ACT has to maintain a careful roster and a contract with the ACT government because, unlike in large chunks of the country, even small towns on the coast, there is no public 34 to 36 degree hydrotherapy pool in Canberra. This is one of the reasons why it is so cruel that the government basically promised to make this a part of the Stromlo development and has backflipped. Now they are busily pedalling under the surface to make it look like it is not a backflip.

Having access to facilities that are essentially private, while it may be able to fulfil the needs of Arthritis ACT, is not the best outcome. It is nothing like as good as the outcome of having a publicly accessible, any time of the day, 34 to 36 degree pool so that people like Aurelio from Weston Creek can get up and go to the pool at 8 am instead of 5.30 am.

I am glad to see the amendment from the minister. I think the members of the community in the gallery are very glad to hear of the amendment from the minister agreeing not to close the Canberra Hospital pool until an appropriate level of access to other suitable locations readily accessible for those on Canberra's south side is maintained, continued and available. That is welcomed, because people here who access this service know that it is not just about a short period of access to this pool. For many of the people who use hydrotherapy, it is something they will have to do five or six days a week for the rest of their lives. It is the wonder drug. It is the wonder worker that creates a much better lifestyle for them.

It is appalling that we have got to this point. We will be watching. We will be taking very careful stock of whether the government keeps its word and maintains access on the south side that is equal to the access that these people have had to this point.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (11.36): I will speak very briefly because previous speakers have gone through all the medical reasons why hydrotherapy is a very good thing. I am sure that all the members in the gallery would be applauding everything that has been said here. I will not bore you by repeating it.

I thought I should say a bit, as a south side member who has been approached by a lot of constituents to say the things which the previous speakers have all talked about, about how important hydrotherapy is to them and how concerned—I could say scared, possibly in some cases—they are of what appears to be the outcome ahead of us. I remember the discussion that we had in estimates, Minister Fitzharris, Mrs Dunne and I, about where hydrotherapy would be and what was going to happen at Stromlo pool.

I must admit that I was a bit sceptical at the time, maybe because a constituent wrote to me and they were very optimistic. Unfortunately my scepticism was correct. Two things are really important: firstly, we increase the total amount of hydrotherapy facilities in Canberra because clearly there is unmet need—enough people have told me that there is—and, secondly, we maintain good access for people on the south side.

I will say what I have said many times before: there happens to be an ACT government facility that is located very close to the Canberra Hospital and that is about to be demolished. I am talking about the old CIT site. Every time we talk about how cramped it is at Canberra Hospital I keep on thinking, “Why don’t we expand across the road? It’s not far away; we have got a lot of facilities there.” It, to my mind, is the obvious thing to do. That, I agree, is a bigger discussion.

However in this context the people who will use it clearly have mobility issues and will tend to be using it for a long period because they have an acute condition, not just a couple of times and then it does not really matter; if it were a situation like that, they could maybe organise their friends to drive them or get a taxi or whatever. But because of the nature of the people using it, it does need to be in a position that can be easily accessed, including easily accessed by public transport, because quite a few of the people using this will be primarily using public transport.

We have to remember that there are two components to that. There is the bus time, which is important, but potentially even more important for some of these people is the distance and the time it takes to get from their home to the bus stop and, when they finally get there, the distance and the time from the bus stop to the actual facility. I hope that the government, in looking at the options for a replacement, will look at accessibility for the people who will be using it, and long-term accessibility.

I must say that it looks like we are going to have a love-in here and a very positive outcome. The minister’s amendment appears to deal with these things and talks about appropriate level of access, suitable locations, readily accessible for those on Canberra’s south side. I am hoping that that will encompass the things that I am talking about and I am hopeful that when the minister reports back on these matters in August we will all be able to say, “It’s not sorted yet but we know how it will be sorted and there is a clear path forward.”

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.40): I want to briefly speak to thank those in the gallery and Mrs Dunne for making today happen because, if this motion were not on the notice paper, it is highly likely that the hydrotherapy pool would have closed on 30 June. It is a shame that it requires that sort of pressure to be applied for something that is so desperately needed, for what is such an obvious solution, to actually come about. People going to a politician is not the first port of call. Usually there is some chat amongst the users. There will be conversations with perhaps managers of a facility. Emails might go back and forth. And you would like to think that reason would win the day.

But that is not the way it is here. It seems that it is only when there is intense political pressure that you actually get a common-sense solution here in the ACT. It should not be that everything is a battle. It should not be that you have to drag a minister kicking and screaming just to get a basic service delivered by the ACT government. This is core business for a government. These are essential services, and to say, “Just go to the other side of town, you’ll be fine,” does a real disservice to the taxpayers of Canberra, in particular the users of the hospital hydrotherapy pool.

Of course the UC facility is world class. A huge amount of money was poured into it. It is, I think, on the wrong side of the University of Canberra as well. It makes it quite difficult for anybody on the old 300 or rapid 4 route to actually access, which is why it takes three buses to go from so many parts of Canberra to the Aikman Drive or Ginninderra Drive side of the campus.

That is done. That decision is well and truly made, and I hope that there will be some further improvements, the much-needed improvements, to the bus network again as a result of community outcry to actually get some better routes to service the hospital at UC as well. Obviously there are not good public transport connections to the hospital at the moment, and that should have been considered by the government when it came to looking for alternative facilities. We have got a win today and it is a credit to Bec Davey and all the advocates who have fought for this outcome.

I thank Mrs Dunne for standing up and fighting for this because had she not put this on the agenda today, had she not spoken publicly, had she not put the pressure on Minister Fitzharris, we would not be here. We are going to get a good result today, and I just hope the minister keeps her word.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (11.44): The benefits of hydrotherapy are well known and have already been talked about today. The people who use hydrotherapy services know this as much as anyone. They use it for a variety of conditions.

I speak to this as the shadow minister for seniors because many older Canberrans have approached me about this proposed closure of the hydrotherapy pool at the Canberra Hospital and expressed their concerns. Nowhere has this concern been greater than in the south of Canberra, especially in Tuggeranong. Many older people have arthritis. It is something that is more common as you age. It is not only due to but certainly can be associated with ageing. Those older people may well have mobility problems due to their condition—arthritis or something else—which means that long walks to bus stops and long bus trips are not a good option and may create additional issues.

They are usually accessing hydrotherapy services or hydrotherapy to assist with pain management. Warm water pools are not enough. In fact, at some temperatures it can increase the amount of pain rather than alleviate and assist with the pain. The water has to be at the right temperature. Just having a warm water pool is not enough to assist these people.

Whilst the University of Canberra hydrotherapy pool is a great new facility it is not a good option for people in, for example, the Lanyon Valley who already have significant distances to travel to the Canberra Hospital. I have taken three random addresses in Lanyon Valley and what it would take for them to get from their address on a Wednesday morning to the University of Canberra hydrotherapy pool.

With apologies to the people who actually live at these addresses because I have just randomly selected some addresses—from 28 Jane Sutherland Street in Conder it is a 600-metre walk to the nearest bus stop. Who knows how long that will take if you have mobility issues—perhaps not the eight minutes suggested on the travel planning

website! It is then a three-hour, ten-minute return trip to the University of Canberra hospital plus the time spent walking to the pool, getting changed, having your therapy, getting changed, walking back to the bus stop.

Mrs Dunne: And hoping your connections work.

MS LAWDER: That is right. As opposed to currently at the Canberra Hospital what would be a 21-minute drive, they may be looking at a five-hour round trip to get to the University of Canberra using Transport Canberra's journey planner this morning—the expedition planner. From Banks, 11 Crespin Place, the time is slightly longer—an 11-minute walk to the nearest bus stop, 700 metres, and then one hour 42 minutes one way on the bus, which makes a three-hour 24-minute return as opposed to the three-hour ten-minute return from Conder. In Gordon, using 45 Clem Hill Street, it is again a three-hour 24-minute return plus an eight minute, allegedly, walk to the nearest bus stop 500 metres away.

This is just not feasible for someone who is experiencing severe pain and mobility issues. If we are serious about wanting people to use the bus we need to have a better bus network but we need to have these facilities closer to where people live. That is the main point of this. I would like to thank Mrs Dunne for the work she has done on bringing this motion to this place and all the considerable work that has gone on before now to do that.

As Mr Coe has alluded to, bringing it out into the public is not an easy decision for an organisation such as Arthritis ACT. I know this from my previous work in the community sector. It can be a difficult decision but I applaud Arthritis ACT for doing exactly what they are set up to do, and that is to advocate on behalf of their members. I would like to thank them for doing that, for advocating what would be the best possible result for their members. That is all we ask them to do, and they have done a great job of that.

To seniors generally who have expressed their concerns to me about the closure of the Canberra Hospital pool—especially for those in the Lanyon Valley but those in Tuggeranong as a whole, who have such a distance to travel already to their hydrotherapy pool, which is pretty much doubled if they go to the University of Canberra hydrotherapy pool—I would say, “All is not lost yet. We are hopeful of a result thanks to Mrs Dunne and an amendment from the minister.” I only hope we do not revert to the position of saying that the 31 to 32-degree pools at Lakeside Leisure Centre or the new Stromlo one are the solution because that is not the solution for the people who need access to hydrotherapy.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.50): Madam Assistant Speaker, I will speak on the amendment and seek leave to move an amendment to the amendment. As I said in my earlier remarks, I welcome cautiously the amendment that has been circulated by the minister. I echo the words of Mr Coe, Ms Lawder and Mrs Jones that, while we welcome this change, it should not have been this difficult. However, we are being quite cautious here. The minister has a track record of saying that she will deliver particular things and then not delivering in the way that you get the impression she has undertaken to do.

This is why I actually have asked quite specifically for a commitment from the minister—a personal commitment, which I think the minister has given—and I will be holding her to that. I will summarise the personal commitment. This amendment essentially says that the Canberra Hospital pool will not close until there are enough suitable south side options publicly available to people who need hydrotherapy. That is the summary. That is what I will be holding this minister to delivering.

I want to highlight some things that caused me concern and that I know caused members of the public concern. There is a tendency to conflate something the minister calls hydrotherapy with warm water exercise. Let us get it straight: whether a highly injured person is having warm water exercise or hydrotherapy one on one, the fundamentals apply. You need water at a particular temperature.

I foreshadow that I will be moving an amendment to Ms Fitzharris's amendment to make that explicit in this motion. It has to be hydrotherapy-quality heat or it does not work and it can be counterproductive. The minister, over a long period of time, has used the term "warm water therapy" in the chamber. She has said that warm water therapy is hydrotherapy, that it is therapy at a particular level of temperature. If you do not do the hydrotherapy properly, you are probably wasting your time. I will not be satisfied with the sorts of things that we have had previously—the offers of a 31 degree pool at Stromlo. It is not a hydrotherapy pool. It is not effective. There are hydrotherapy pools at some private facilities, like the one at Club Lime in Belconnen.

The minister has talked about other south side private facilities. I do not know of one that operates at hydrotherapy levels. If there are some, I would like the minister to tell us about it today. But I do not know of any and I am not sure that anyone in the gallery knows of any, either.

We had some hydrotherapy pools that did not operate to temperature and that are suboptimal. I have had a private commitment from the minister, and she said it here, that she will ensure that her officials work with those hydrotherapy providers to ensure that they are up to spec and that they do meet people's needs. But the risk that we have today is that the minister will cobble together a range of things and say, "Here are enough hours; be quiet and go away."

The Canberra Liberals will not continue to support the minister if she attempts to shift the people who currently use the Woden facility to the Belconnen facility and if she says, "Take it or leave it." It is not a take it or leave it option.

Mrs Jones: Or to other inappropriate facilities.

MRS DUNNE: Or we will not accept them being shifted to other inappropriate facilities. The minister has made a commitment here today for publicly funded hydrotherapy, and we will keep her to that. We will make sure that when the minister is delivering publicly funded hydrotherapy, it is delivered equitably and geographically as well so that people who have mobility issues are not spending inordinate amounts of times travelling.

Mr Rattenbury rolled his eyes when Ms Lawder spoke about the journeys. But if you live in the south of Canberra and you go to the hospital—

Ms Lawder: He has probably never been there.

MRS DUNNE: He probably has not been there. If you live in the south of Canberra and you have to go to the University of Canberra Public Hospital, it is a long journey. I found one today from Conder. It is walk, bus, walk, bus, walk. You can get a bus that will take you to the Belconnen interchange. Then you have to walk from the Belconnen interchange to Aikman Drive to catch a bus to the University of Canberra. It is a 1½ kilometre walk. So it is not an option for people. By the time you put in the time that you spend in the hydrotherapy pool, you are spending four or five hours for an hour session in hydrotherapy. It is ridiculous and it is not supportable.

Madam Assistant Speaker, I seek leave to move the amendment to Ms Fitzharris's amendment, which was circulated on the handwritten paper.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker, and I thank members for granting leave. I move:

In paragraph (1)(b), add “operating in the temperature range of 34 to 36 degrees Celsius”.

This is a simple amendment to emphasise that what we want out of this today is real hydrotherapy water—that is, water at 34 to 36 degrees. Paragraph 1(b) states:

there is a demand for access to hydrotherapy and warm water facilities;

I would like to add the words:

operating in the temperature range of 34 to 36 degrees Celsius.

I commend the amendment. I seek the support of the Assembly to ensure that we get the right sort of hydrotherapy.

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport and Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (11.58): I will respond to some of the imputations that have been made about my commitment to deliver on things in this place, which I reject. Notwithstanding the various imputations on my commitment as a local member and a member of this place that were delivered angrily—I think they let down everyone in this place—I understand that there are a number of people who are very keen to see this resolved. That has been my intention over the past few weeks.

It is certainly not the case that it is just today's motion that has brought me to the point where we are doing this work. We are doing it collaboratively. I cannot see everyone in the gallery. My eyesight prevents me from clearly seeing everyone who is in the gallery, but I understand that representatives of Arthritis ACT are here. I have met them and had discussions with them in good faith on my commitment to resolve this issue and to understand a variety of the issues that are arising.

When it comes to ensuring access on the south side, it is very clear that that is what we are intending to do. I would be genuinely interested to hear from visitors in the gallery today if they are currently using public transport to access Canberra Hospital for hydrotherapy purposes. I would be genuinely interested to learn more about that so that we can perhaps support them with some other options that I know are available through community transport.

If there are a number of people here today who are currently accessing Canberra Hospital for hydrotherapy, to use the hydrotherapy pool, I would be genuinely interested to understand their usage of public transport in doing that and to see whether we can work with any individuals who are currently using public transport to help them on their journeys and perhaps to outline to them a number of other options that we know currently exist.

In the short period that Mrs Dunne's amendment was being circulated, I sought advice about water temperatures. I know this has been discussed. I also have been advised on a number of issues that may come up. Indeed, I am advised by Canberra Health Services that in some cases a high temperature range can exclude people who could otherwise experience therapeutic benefit. So there is a range of different descriptions and definitions.

I understand that there are differences between a hydrotherapy pool, hydrotherapy sessions and warm water sessions. I understand all of that. I will seek to clarify the current work that is underway to get some clear definitions in this space so that we all have a collective and shared understanding between Arthritis ACT and Canberra Health Services. It may also help to understand what the actual differences are between warm water exercise programs that may be offered in a lower temperature pool and the same sessions that are offered in a higher temperature pool. If a warm water exercise program is being offered, it can also be offered in lower temperature pools. However, if there are differences in the experience, we will further seek to understand those.

Certainly, the advice to me is that there is an Australian standard for hydrotherapy pools. There is a range of clinical documents available to bring some clarity to this and to work even further with Arthritis ACT. As I indicated in my previous comments, it is certainly the case that if there are hydrotherapy pools currently not heated to the appropriate temperature, I believe that the government can bring its negotiations and its resources to bear to have discussions with other operators about whether or not temperatures can be increased if it is viable to do so. As I indicated in my previous speech, that is certainly something that we will explore. I am fine to agree to Mrs Dunne's amendment to my amendment to Mrs Dunne's original motion.

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (12.03): I will speak to the amendment to the amendment to the motion. Some of what the minister just said in her response to this amendment worries the people who are listening. It needs to be made very clear that this group of people currently use 34 to 36 degree water consistently at the Canberra Hospital. They require this for their care. I do not care what an expert tells you. They are the people using it, and they want 34 to 36 degree water, which they have had access to up until now. There are not enough easily accessible current options that are at that temperature consistently.

It is good of the minister to note these concerns and to accept the amendment, but let it be clear that if the minister leaves here and creates a response to this group which does not include fair and reasonable access—enough access—to 34 to 36 degree water, then their needs will not have been met as well as they have been up until now.

It would be another great shame of this government if they took away access to something which improved people's quality of life so much because the government has taken some expert's advice that 31 degrees is enough. I make it clear that no temperature is acceptable to this group of people except 34 to 36 degrees.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (12.04): I have listened very carefully to the discussion. As I flagged in my earlier comments, I do not have expertise in what the right temperature is. I am concerned by what Mrs Jones just said. She actually said, and it is worth repeating it for the record, "I do not care what an expert says."

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Cody): Mrs Jones, order, please!

MR RATTENBURY: This is actually symptomatic of how the conservative parties in this country approach issues. They do not care about science.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Members!

MR RATTENBURY: They take the same approach to climate change. They are prepared to denigrate climate scientists.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, I have asked you several times. Please! Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: Mrs Jones was heard in silence. Mrs Jones got to have her say, and as soon as I said something she does not like the sound of, she starts shouting at me. She has a real issue with how she conducts herself in this place. We need to listen to the experts and we also need to consult with the community. These things come together. You cannot just dismiss what the medical people tell us as being the right

approach. We have to work on all of this together and actually work out a right answer.

I am nervous about specifying in this place today that a pool must be at a certain temperature. I think that this is exactly the consultation process that the minister has committed to today. I would like to read some feedback on actually what the right answer is. So I am reluctant to do this today.

I should not rise to these things but I need to come back to a couple of things that Mrs Dunne said in this space. I think the Liberal Party has gone out of its way in the chamber today to be divisive on this matter, given the amendment that has been put forward. Mrs Dunne made some observation about my rolling my eyes at a comment Ms Lawder had made. I need to be very clear. I was probably showing some frustration because as a person who is driven by logic, I heard Ms Lawder describe the situation where she compared a bus trip from Lanyon Valley to the University of Canberra with a car drive to Canberra Hospital.

These things are simply not comparable. You cannot make an argument on that sort of alternative. In respect of the reaction that Mrs Dunne saw, that is exactly what I was reacting to. It just does not make any sense. It is not to the point. Let us talk about bus journey times but make some sort of logical comparison.

In terms of the snide comments that come about my not understanding the Lanyon Valley, I have direct relatives who live in the Lanyon Valley. Let us just keep those sorts of unnecessary personal jibes out of the conversation and actually try to have sensible discussions about policy in this place. It would reflect much better on this chamber and it would actually go some way to improving the standing of politicians in the community.

On the actual amendment, based on the comments and the amendment that is coming forward, we have a clear commitment to report back to this chamber at the end of August. The minister has made it very clear that she will outline all of the temperature considerations. I look forward to seeing that report at the end of August.

Mrs Dunne's amendment to Ms Fitzharris's proposed amendment agreed to.

Ms Fitzharris's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question now is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (12.08): I will be very brief, Madam Assistant Speaker. I am mindful of the time. I welcome the outcome today. Mr Rattenbury criticised me for politicising this and then he went on a rant about how conservatives behave, which I will just pass over. This has been politicised. I am sorry; I am in politics. My job is to represent my constituents. My constituents have been saying to me for a long time, well before the University of Canberra Public Hospital opened, that they needed facilities on the south side.

We have consistently worked to do that and to deliver that in the face of opposition from the government. So forgive me; we are at the eleventh hour and the minister—I will use this term—folds like a pack of cards on this issue. But I am a little sceptical. Call me a hard-bitten old politician. That is what I am. I have seen ministers in this place come and go. I have seen this minister make commitments that she has not kept.

I am going to keep this minister to this commitment. If that is politicising the issue, I am guilty. That is what I do for my constituents. My constituents, and Mrs Jones's constituents and Mrs Lawder's constituents, consistently have been telling us that this is what they want. We have delivered this today. It was a little easier than I thought it was going to be. I actually was not very hopeful of the outcome. It has been easier than I hoped it would be. I thank the minister for that. But I put the minister on warning: we are watching and we will make sure that she delivers.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Sitting suspended from 12.11 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

ACTION bus service—weekend services

MR COE: I have a question for the Minister for Transport. I refer to a *Canberra Times* article dated 8 May titled “Weekend buses cancelled after volunteer shortage”. The article stated that nearly 150 weekend bus services were cancelled due to driver shortages. Minister, why did you promise extra weekend services but fail to secure enough drivers for these routes?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Coe for the question. As Mr Coe well knows, the arrangements that have been in place for some time regarding weekend services remain. It is the case that there are enough drivers. There were not enough volunteering on that weekend. But we are in very close discussions with bus drivers and with the TWU, their representatives, on how we can secure drivers for all the weekend bus services. I note that that was four per cent of services.

Transport Canberra works very carefully on these matters. On any given day there may be a variety of reasons why tweaks needs to be made to services but certainly on the first weekend of the new network, I think, the weekend bus services performed very well and, indeed, patronage on the weekend services was extremely high.

MR COE: Minister, what weekend loadings are currently in place and what changes will you have to make to encourage more drivers to take up these services?

MS FITZHARRIS: There are full-time, part-time and casual employees who work for Transport Canberra driving buses. There is a composite rate but I will take the specifics on notice and provide further advice to the Assembly.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, can you guarantee that this weekend's bus services will be fully staffed and delivered?

MS FITZHARRIS: I can guarantee that both the drivers and Transport Canberra will make every effort, as they have always done under an arrangement where drivers volunteer for weekend shifts, to ensure that we can deliver our much improved weekend network.

Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER: I draw members' attention to the presence in our gallery of some community members from U3A and COTA who have been in as part of our education program. Welcome to your Assembly.

Questions without notice

Light rail—patronage

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is also to the Minister for Transport and relates to the fantastic news that public transport use is substantially higher than at this time last year. Minister, if light rail overcrowding continues past the end of the free travel period, what options does the government have to increase capacity at peak periods?

MS FITZHARRIS: It is terrific that we see public transport patronage, boardings and the number of MyWay cards up right across the network. Certainly it is the case that patronage on light rail has been outstanding.

The question we are now faced with is how we can increase capacity and potentially increase the frequency. It has been the case that we have been able to request Canberra Metro to add an additional service in the 7.45 to 8.15 peak period. This will ensure that we can increase capacity during that peak period in the morning. We have also expanded the peak period in the afternoon, particularly to cover school services because there has been considerable take up of school services right along the route from 3 pm. The original peak period to 6 pm has now been extended to 6.30.

I note that the business case—which those opposite had many issues with, including that there would be very limited patronage on light rail, saying it would be, in their words, a “white elephant”; I also note that it is the first business case published by a government into an infrastructure project—had estimated patronage in 2021 of 15,120 boardings. Already we are 10 per cent above that, with 16,500 boardings.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, what options is the government looking at to address the same problem; that is, full buses which are bypassing passengers on routes like the R4 rapid from Tuggeranong town centre to Belconnen town centre?

MS FITZHARRIS: We are now in week 3 of the new bus network. What we saw in week 1 was what you would see in week 1 of any new bus network rolling out, not least a bus network that had had the considerable change and addition of services as was seen three weeks ago. We have seen a number of issues with patronage being higher than we expected. Of course with rapid services during the peak times there is usually another rapid service following in the next five or six minutes.

We have been monitoring a number of routes very carefully. The rapid 4 is very successful. We can see it across from the Assembly here and how people are getting on particularly in the evenings. That suggests a very high take-up, which we are seeing right across the rapid network.

We are monitoring very closely the capacity on two other services in particular: the rapid 5 from Lanyon and also route 32 from Belconnen. On some occasions we have been able to—and will continue to—provide, on those services and some other school services, additional capacity largely in the form of larger buses. The deployment of our articulated buses is being looked at very carefully to ensure that we can meet what has been very high demand over the past couple of weeks.

ACTION bus service—school services

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, I refer to Red Hill Primary School children who live at the Causeway, within the Red Hill catchment area, who no longer have a dedicated school bus to travel on to their local public school. Your journey planner recommends a 23 to 32 minute walk either side of a bus ride or a 57 minute, 4.1 kilometre walk for these students. Minister, noting that this is similar for hundreds of students across Canberra, is it acceptable that your only solution for many Canberra kids is to suck it up and walk?

An incident having occurred in the gallery—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members in the gallery, please, no clapping.

MS FITZHARRIS: That is certainly not the message that I have sent. Indeed, the journey planner does provide a number of options. Certainly, it is the case that it will provide options for walking, because it will provide options for walking for any journey. That is certainly not the message that I have sent in any, way, shape or form.

Transport Canberra, my office and I have been having extensive conversations over a long period about designing and delivering an effective and efficient bus network that services our whole city in the most effective way. Since the beginning of the new network there have been significant discussions as well, working particularly with schools, about how to access the services and whether or not we can make some tweaks at some certain schools. For example, some of those have been to capacity, as I mentioned earlier, on school services, the location of the bus stop itself and a number of other changes.

We will continue to have those conversations directly with schools. We have a very active schools committee. We also have a school bus liaison officer as well as our active transport and active travel school liaison officer. They have been in place for some time working extremely closely with schools right across the city.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, what are the transport alternatives to children walking without supervision for Canberra families that have relied on dedicated school buses and where both parents work full time?

MS FITZHARRIS: I think I understand what Miss C Burch is trying to say but I note that—and this is where I have significant concern with some of the Canberra Liberals' positions on this—the implication that children walking to school without supervision is unsafe is patently wrong. I am sure that many of us walked to school and many of our children walk to school. It is simply not true to state that it is unsafe for children to walk to school unsupervised. It is simply not true.

I am happy to have a public debate and be questioned on these matters but the dog whistling that is implicit in the consistent approach from the Canberra Liberals does not help anyone. It is not unsafe for children to walk to school unsupervised. Children across this city do it every day. Children who live around the corner from their existing school walk to school every day safely in the safest city in the safest country in the world.

Mrs Jones: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, on relevance, the question asked what she would say to those who have relied on a dedicated school bus service. We have not had any information about that question.

MADAM SPEAKER: The question was also linked to their having to walk to school.

Mrs Jones: There has not been an answer to the question. There should be direct relevance. That is the point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will say—and I understand that there are members of the community in the chamber today, including representatives of parent bodies—that we will continue to work closely and provide alternatives, of which there are many for many families and many schools right across our community.

MR PARTON: Minister, how do you justify forcing hundreds of primary school aged children to walk long distances unsupervised—we are talking about primary school aged children—when most Australian jurisdictions, including Queensland and South Australia, expressly classify that as both unsafe and unlawful and, indeed, Queensland, New South Wales, Victorian and South Australian police advise against it for under-12s?

MS FITZHARRIS: I refer Mr Parton to my previous answer.

Federal election—impact

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Chief Minister: how is the ACT government preparing for the differing impacts for the Canberra region between the major parties' election commitments?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. Certainly this Saturday will be a defining moment not just for the Australian nation but for our city. There is a very

clear distinction in the policies of the two major parties, the two potential governments of this country, as they relate to Canberra and the broader Canberra region.

To date the difference in terms of infrastructure and recurrent funding commitments in areas like health, education and transport infrastructure now shows a gap of half a billion dollars between Labor's commitments and those of the coalition. The coalition appear not to be seriously campaigning in Canberra or, indeed, in Eden-Monaro, because they are not proposing any significant infrastructure investments in this region. The gap now is at half a billion dollars.

Federal Labor will, as has been well publicised, partner with the territory government on a future stage of light rail, committing \$200 million towards that project. Federal Labor have also committed to investing an additional \$100 million in the Barton Highway duplication, taking that federal Labor investment to \$250 million, and have put forward a \$67 million commitment to build Dunns Creek Road just on the New South Wales side of the territory border.

There have been a series of commitments from federal Labor inside the territory, including funding for oval upgrades in Kippax, a new netball and indoor sports centre in Tuggeranong, and two bike path upgrades across the city in partnership with the territory government.

The range of financial commitments in terms of infrastructure and health and education funding are also added to by a clear commitment to end the coalition's disruptive and harmful decentralisation agenda. (*Time expired.*)

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, what will this difference in support mean for Canberra region residents?

MR BARR: This significant infrastructure investment, half a billion dollars of additional investment, will clearly mean more jobs in our economy. It will mean faster commutes for residents in our region, and more time with family and friends. It will mean improved sporting facilities. It will mean better health facilities where and when you need them. This will all be delivered in a close working relationship with the territory government.

Just as importantly, for the first time in many years we would have a federal government that actually respects our city; that thinks that it is more than a bubble and more than an excuse to avoid answering hard political questions by describing them as being "from the Canberra bubble"; that does not take Canberra for granted like some on the other side of politics; and that recognises the importance of this city and this region.

We will work in close partnership with a federal Labor government. It is very clear that there is a stark difference between the announced commitments on the Labor side of politics for this city and this region and what we are not hearing, the absence of any meaningful commitments, from the coalition. Those opposite know that that is absolutely the case.

MS CODY: Chief Minister: what action will ACT ministers be taking to engage with a newly elected federal government?

Mrs Dunne: I rise on a point of order. Madam Speaker, you have to rule this question out of order. We do not know what the result of the election will be. It is hypothetical.

MADAM SPEAKER: Please resume your seat.

Mr Barr: The question was: what action will we take with a newly elected federal government?

Mrs Dunne: The implication of a newly elected federal government is that there will be a change of government, which is hypothetical Madam Speaker.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please all settle down. There is no point of order. A government will be elected; by nature it will be new. Mr Barr, you have the floor.

MR BARR: Thank you. We will swiftly engage with incoming federal ministers. Clearly that engagement will be meaningful on identified projects that have been announced as commitments during and before the federal election campaign period. One example: I expect to see significant progress on advancing light rail approvals to align with the ACT's investment in Stage 2 early works that I announced last week.

We will of course tailor our own fiscal and economic approach to reflect the result on Saturday. There will be a new budget if there is a new government. That will necessarily mean changes in terms of priorities between the incumbent government and a newly elected government. We know largely what to expect if the coalition is returned on Saturday, and that is: nothing for Canberra.

ACTION bus service—school services

MS LAWDER: My question is to the minister for transport and city services. I refer to a *Canberra Times* article of 4 May this year entitled, "Bus timetable changes leave children in tears." Minister, why did you persist in cutting all dedicated school services to 51 schools, and a number of dedicated services to many others, despite community uproar?

MS FITZHARRIS: As the opposition is aware, prior to the new network starting a number of weeks ago there were a number of schools that did not receive dedicated school services. I guess my question is: are the Liberals going to commit to providing a dedicated school bus to every school in Canberra? That is the implication they are making.

As members know, we undertook a considerable amount of consultation over a series of different engagements. We acted on quite a considerable amount of feedback on

the original network. This work was certainly one of the most significant community consultation processes. The government made a significant number of changes as a result.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what do you say to the hundreds of children who have—and I quote from that article—“gone to bed crying at night” and to their parents because of the bus cuts you made?

MS FITZHARRIS: This is something that we have thought about and been engaged in for a long time, and I know—and I understand that there are members in the gallery today—that for a number of people there have been significant changes to their services. But for a greater number of people there has also been a considerable improvement and increase in the number of services. Certainly in the first week we saw a lot of feedback. But I think members opposite will also agree on the range of feedback coming through now, as people are starting to understand the new system. It was a really big change. We have seen changes to the numbering of every route, the addition of a whole new level of services.

We are working very closely with schools right across the territory on ways that we can support them to support their students and their families to access all the information available because it has become apparent to me that not necessarily all schools have been able to access the information or been able to relay that to their parent community in the most effective way. And we are working closely with schools on that and we will continue to do so through the mechanisms that I outlined earlier.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, how many pieces of correspondence have you or your directorate received regarding safety concerns for schoolchildren under the new network?

An incident having occurred in the gallery—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order!

MS FITZHARRIS: I cannot comment on that; I will see if I can get advice on that. I make the point that safety is a very high priority for me, for Transport Canberra and for every bus driver. Two months ago bus drivers were picking up school students on one route and perhaps members of the public, including school students, on other routes.

I reiterate that the vast majority of school students catching public transport in the ACT last month, and this month, travel on our regular route services. I understand changes, but I do not accept that we do not contemplate and treat with the highest priority the safety of passengers right across our network, particularly of school students. Our duty of care is very high; our operational procedures are clear.

I also reiterate that school students right across our city every day—as there always have been—are getting to school in a variety of ways. They will continue to do so.

We will continue to support schools and school communities and students in providing the best information and the best access to the services that we can.

MADAM SPEAKER: Before calling the next question, I recognise that there are a number of people in the gallery and I ask them to note that clapping or making comments is considered disorderly. It is good that you are here to be part of the discussion, but please let there be no more noise from the gallery.

ACTION bus service—school services

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the minister for transportation. I refer to a *Canberra Times* article dated 1 May which states:

Children at St Vincent's Primary School in Aranda who catch the bus home have no option but to leave school 15 minutes early under the territory's new transport system.

Minister, this means that children are missing 50 hours of school each year under the new bus network system. Why is the government forcing children who use public transport to get to and from St Vincent's to choose between their education and getting home at a reasonable hour?

MS FITZHARRIS: I met with the principal of St Vincent's last week and we discussed this issue. We have undertaken to keep in touch very closely with St Vincent's over the coming weeks to see if there some adjustments—

Mrs Kikkert: In the meantime, let kids leave early.

Mr Coe: "We have undertaken."

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, the minister is on the floor providing an answer.

MS FITZHARRIS: and to work with Transport Canberra and St Vincent's to look at the timetabling on this route. I understand that there are about 10 students and there were previously around two students using the network who boarded at St Vincent's. There are some options that we may have to work through with St Vincent's on that. I had those discussions with them last week. We will continue to work with them, because it is of concern to me.

There is a bus, as was noted in that article, that is available at 3.46, and the bus that arrives at 3.14 they believe does not provide them time to get to the bus stop. So we are looking very closely at those issues and responding, as we have been over the past two weeks, and working closely with a number of schools and school communities on how we can work with them. This is a very good example.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister: who owes a duty of care to students at St Vincent's after hours who are forced to wait until 3.46 pm for the next bus service?

MS FITZHARRIS: The schools have a strong duty of care. As far as Transport Canberra goes, I mentioned previously that of course all its staff but particularly bus drivers have a duty of care as well.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, who is responsible for a duty of care for children that are then made to wait at bus interchanges for long periods under the new network?

MS FITZHARRIS: Children have long waited at bus interchanges to connect to other buses. That was the case last month, last year and the year before that. Again, I would like to say that one of the reforms that we have made is to ensure that there are customer service assistants working at interchanges. They are working very closely with the community and taking a particular interest in assisting any schoolchildren who may need assistance as they are travelling through interchanges.

What I can advise in terms of interchanging is that across the network, interchanging in the same two-week period as the first two weeks of the new bus network there were on average 1.3 interchanges per journey. This year under the new network there have been 1.37 interchanges. I do have figures for schoolchildren—they are comparable figures—but to further clarity, I will take that question on notice.

Schools—cleaning services

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, why has the government decided to insource cleaning services in ACT public schools?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Cody for her question. The government has for some time been concerned about the treatment of vulnerable workers in our community. Within my portfolio responsibilities I have been particularly focused on improving the employment conditions of government school cleaners who have been engaged by contracted service providers. These workers are employed to do often undervalued work in an industry where low pay and unfair and insecure employment are, unfortunately, structurally entrenched.

The government has high standards for ethical, industrially compliant employment and is particularly focused on supporting workers who are vulnerable to exploitation because of issues like the industry context and/or factors like English literacy or age. Achieving the government's high standards is difficult in the cleaning industry where margins are tight and the services are much the same. The required contract management has also proven very demanding.

The government has made numerous enhancements to contracts and contract management, with the aim of ensuring ethical, industrially compliant employment for government school cleaners. It has become clear, though, through this process that achieving the government's high standards of cleaning in our schools is best achieved through insourcing. Therefore the government has decided that from the beginning of 2020 the government will directly employ a cleaning workforce to clean government schools.

MS CODY: Minister, who will benefit from this decision?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Cody for the supplementary. Of course, most importantly this decision will benefit people working as cleaners in government schools. Many of these workers, nearly 300 people, are migrants or refugees in our community. For example, a large number of these workers are from the S'gaw Karen people group and resident with us after fleeing conflict in Myanmar. There is also a cohort of Iranian refugees and some who are Bhutanese migrants.

Others, local people, typically come from a modest personal background. Members have noted the heartbreaking story of Karen Love, who works at Macquarie Primary School. Karen is a lovely woman whose personal story shows why we have made this decision. Karen is a grandmother and has not had the easiest of lives, but has worked as a cleaner in this school for more than a decade. She is deeply valued by the school community.

Members might also recall the troubling federal court decision about another local firm and the effect that it had on workers like Htoo Ywai at Alfred Deakin High School. While there are a range of technical details to resolve, through this process my intention is that the existing workers will be offered employment with the government to the greatest extent possible.

Through this, these workers will gain more secure employment and the financial stability that comes with it, and the opportunity to develop and grow their skills as valued members of the ACT public service. The government and schools will also benefit because of the opportunity to directly manage the delivery of high quality school cleaning through increased workforce diversity in the ACT public service as well as employment pathways for the ACT community.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how does this decision contribute to the government's commitment to secure, local jobs?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. This decision will make an important contribution to the government's clear election commitment to defend working people in the ACT. I acknowledge my colleague Ms Stephen-Smith, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety, for her lead role in delivering the government's commitment in this area. Bringing school cleaning in house aligns with the intent of the Government Procurement (Secure Local Jobs) Amendment Bill 2018 to ensure fair working conditions for vulnerable workers.

On this side we are committed to pursuing fair working conditions and promoting permanent employment and job security for working people. The social and economic benefit of doing this is clear. All people deserve the opportunity for a decent, fulfilling life, and employment is a key part of that. For example, Canberra has a proud history of welcoming refugees. Securing good jobs for these people where they are respected and treated fairly will make an important contribution to continuing our shared commitment to embracing and celebrating cultural diversity.

Equally, for all these workers, regardless of where they come from, this decision will improve social inclusion and our response to problems like poverty, deprivation and disadvantage. The government will continue to take steps to improve the treatment of vulnerable workers in our community through a range of measures, and I look forward to supporting Ms Stephen-Smith as she continues to deliver in this area through a range of other initiatives.

ACTION bus service—new network

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to Minister for Transport. Minister, amongst the stories received about the new bus network was one from Simone. Simone contacted us on behalf of her elderly neighbour in Harrison, an area that was previously well serviced. This senior resident used to be able to walk two minutes to catch a bus to the town centre to shop, visit the bank and go to the post office, retaining her independence. Under your new network her shortest walk is now 11 minutes up an incline. How should Simone's neighbour get to the post office under your network?

MS FITZHARRIS: Not knowing where in Harrison Simone's neighbour lives, it is pretty difficult to answer that question.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister how does treating our elderly and vulnerable who rely on the bus network in such a manner align with your vision for an inclusive and better connected Canberra?

MS FITZHARRIS: As I have mentioned previously, this network is designed to operate right across the city and provide as much access as possible to as many Canberrans as possible, and that is what we are delivering.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why are older Canberrans constantly disadvantaged by the decisions of this government?

MS FITZHARRIS: I certainly do not believe that they are.

ACTION bus service—bicycle racks

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, under the new bus network, children are forced to cover longer distances to catch buses, with many opting to ride their bikes to stops and interchanges. However, current bike storage infrastructure on buses themselves is limited to two bikes. Minister, what advice do you give to students when they are turned away from buses without bike capacity and are then made late to school?

MS FITZHARRIS: I would be interested to hear from anyone who has not been able to board a bus because the bike rack has been full. Certainly, the new network is designed to give more people more options. If they are catching a rapid bus, there would be one coming. Because there are now nine rapid bus services and one rapid light rail service, people right across the city, with rapids extending to every corner of

the city, now have many more options on how they move around the city. It is certainly the case that we are looking to further invest in bike storage facilities at school locations and also particularly along our rapid transport routes.

While we are speaking about school services, I note in relation to a previous question about Red Hill Primary School and residents living in the Causeway that there is a school route, school route 2024, that services that school.

MR PARTON: Minister, who is responsible for these primary school aged children at interchanges when they are unable to board a bus due to the bike racks being full?

MS FITZHARRIS: Again, if there are instances of this I would be keen to hear of them. It would certainly be the case that our customer service assistants would work with them to make sure that they could get onto the next available bus.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, parents have been told by your directorate that if they have three children travelling with three bikes you do not have a service available for them. Do you stand by that advice?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take advice on that. If that particular instance has been raised with my directorate, I will talk to them about it.

Government—space industry policy

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Advanced Technology and Space Industries. Minister, what update can you provide about the space sector in Canberra?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in the sector. The space industry is growing quickly and is worth \$US345 billion globally today. It is expected to grow to more than \$US1.1 trillion by 2040. In Australia the space sector is expected to grow seven per cent over the next five years, outpacing Australia's gross domestic product, increasing from around 10,000 jobs to 30,000 jobs and is expected to be worth \$A12 billion per annum by 2030. Almost one in four of Australia's space sector jobs, around 2,000 jobs, are in Canberra.

Our city has a long and direct involvement with some of the biggest events in international space exploration, providing critical support to missions from the first moon landing in 1969 to the 2008 Mars *Phoenix* landing and beyond. The capability of our local industry is internationally renowned. Canberra's research and education institutions, innovative local SMEs, global exporters and multinational primes with large space programs already make a significant contribution to the global space economy.

The ACT's ecosystems include end-to-end capability for the design, test and manufacture of Australia's next generation of micro and small-scale satellites. The future of Australia's space industry and the economic and social opportunities that lie ahead for Canberra are very exciting.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how is the ACT government supporting the local space sector?

MR GENTLEMAN: The space industry is a priority sector to achieve economic diversification and growth in the region. We have provided leadership in the national conversation to develop Australia's space industry, including the Space Agency. The ACT government is committed to working with Canberra's local space industry to help build a sustainable and globally competitive industry.

To date we have supported space projects to strengthen Canberra's space sector such as \$250,000 to the ANU's national space test facility to enable free access to Australia's largest space flight test facilities and \$375,000 to help establish the national space mission design facility to bring together industry, agencies and the research sector to rapidly design and test the viability of space missions.

Building on these investments the government has also committed \$9.7 million over the next three years, through the priority investment program, to support the growth of key sectors, including space, by facilitating collaboration between the ACT government, industry and the tertiary sectors.

Our actions are in stark contrast to the federal Liberal government, who have turned their backs on local businesses in this sector and refused to accept the clear evidence that Canberra leads the nation in space.

MS ORR: Are there any partners who will assist the territory government's endeavours regarding the space sector?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. As in so many areas, the future will be brighter for Canberra under a Shorten federal Labor government. In a Shorten government Canberrans will find a friend, a partner willing to grow and make our city even better than it is today. We will not have a government like the current federal government that has spent six years attacking Canberrans and their businesses, ripping out jobs so that they can pork-barrel.

The federal Labor Party recognise that this city is the national capital and that we are well placed in sectors such as space to help the nation grow and create more jobs. Over \$55 million has been committed to help develop the national space industry and recently there was a \$20 million commitment to create a space industry cluster in our region, recognising the central role our region has in space. There was also a \$10 million boost to the capabilities of CSIRO. It is very clear that only under a Labor government will we see Canberra protected and the bush capital that we call home enhanced.

ACTION bus service—school services

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Transport. I refer the minister to a *Canberra Times* article dated 2 May in which a spokesperson for the ACT's peak body for public school parents stated that they unsuccessfully pushed for a "no child left behind" guarantee to be enforced across the new bus network.

Minister, why did you reject a “no child left behind” guarantee when you put forward the bus network?

MS FITZHARRIS: That reporting was, I believe, incorrect. It is certainly not the case. This is an important point about how the network operates. Under the previous network there were a number of dedicated school stops. In many instances the only bus to stop at that dedicated school stop was a school bus. If a child is waiting at a dedicated school bus stop and misses that bus, there is no other bus.

It was a very important principle to remove dedicated school buses, as I understand, in response to a number of issues that have been raised around the country of children being left at bus stops: not to have dedicated school bus stops where only one service in the morning and one service in the afternoon would be attending, because there was a view that this is not a good policy. That is why dedicated school services now largely stop at existing bus stops. That is actually an important principle around safety. I have followed up on this and I am assured of our policy.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why did you launch a bus network based on so-called rigorous patronage data but fail to take account of buses at peak hour leaving school students stranded at bus stops across the territory?

MS FITZHARRIS: School students were not stranded at bus stops across the territory.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, why is it acceptable for Canberra students to be dangerously left behind under the new bus network?

MS FITZHARRIS: They are not. Certainly in the first week of operations we saw some capacity issues particularly at a number of schools, given that we are talking about school services, but also on regular services. That is because we have seen close to a 10 per cent increase in patronage, which is fantastic. We have responded where there are particular capacity issues. For example, at St Francis Xavier College and Burgmann College we have responded specifically to capacity issues either by having an additional service or by expanding the bus capacity at the schools.

Responding to Miss C Burch’s earlier question about a family with three children catching a bus, I note that when that family of three children were catching a bus last year—whether it was a dedicated school bus or a normal route bus—there were still only two bike racks on the front of every bus. So in that matter nothing has changed. Bike racks can take only two bikes. That was the case last year; it is the case right now.

In that instance they would not have an option because there would have been one dedicated school bus. In the new network there may be on occasion two dedicated school buses as well as the option to catch a normal route bus. So, in fact, as is the design of the network, there are now more options.

I certainly accept that there will be questions but not fanciful questions about differences. The difference between last year and right now is that there is no difference because bike racks can take only two bikes. That was the case last year; it is the case now.

ACTION bus service—school services

MRS JONES: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, I refer to the serious concerns of many parents and schools over the cuts to dedicated school bus services and the significant amount of time many students are now spending at bus stops and interchanges, often being late for school or needing to leave early. Minister, how are you responding to the confusion and stress faced by many students as a result of these cuts?

MS BERRY: I thank Mrs Jones for the question. For the most part, I refer to the responses of the Minister for Transport to most of the questions that have been asked today around buses and bus services at schools. The Education Directorate has actually had only very few concerns raised about the school services, government schools in particular. Ms Fitzharris has already talked about the changes that have been made to some of the other schools in the ACT that were facing capacity issues because of the significant increase in numbers of students who are now catching buses and who were not catching buses before.

I will continue to work very closely with Ms Fitzharris on issues around student capacity on buses. It is a good thing that more students are catching buses. That is a fact. If there are issues that arise, as the minister has said, and they are raised with our officers, we will work together to make sure that students are able to catch buses home from school.

MRS JONES: Minister, what alternatives, if any, are you providing to schools across the ACT when their dedicated bus services have been cut?

MS BERRY: I refer the member to the responses provided previously by the Minister for Transport.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, what advice have you received from your directorate regarding the impact of late arrivals and early departures and students missing up to 50 hours of school a year on children's educational outcomes?

MS BERRY: I refer the member to the responses already provided by the Minister for Transport on this matter.

Government—building documentation guidelines

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Building Quality Improvement. Can the minister update the Assembly on the recent announcement regarding documentation guidelines for the building industry?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Orr for her question. We are in the final round of consultation now on our new set of building documentation guidelines. These will complement the parts of the Building Act that state that building approval applications must contain sufficient information and that certifiers must make sure that all requirements for plans they are provided with are met.

We have been working to develop the guidelines over a significant period of time. Local industry associations who represent builders, certifiers, building designers, architects, engineers, heating and cooling experts, plumbers and electricians, and construction employee representatives have all been involved in this process.

This final round of consultation on the draft guidelines is ongoing. I look forward to the input from our stakeholders in industry and other partners. Today's announcement outlined a time line for implementation, including a date for release of the final guidelines, as well as a date for their implementation. However, of course, there is nothing to prevent developers and designers from working to this final draft of the guidelines from today. Certifiers can use this as a standard document from today.

I encourage all of our industry professionals to feed into the process to ensure that we create useful guidelines and to ensure that the quality of building documentation provided to builders in the territory is very high. This will help raise the quality of building throughout the territory.

MS ORR: Can the minister explain why these guidelines are important?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. The change is to ensure that building work is not approved until there are good quality plans that properly describe what will be built. Some approvals do this already, but this change will clarify the law to ensure that this is always the case.

It will give certifiers a tool to insist on good building plans, giving them a standard to point to as a minimum requirement. It will give building designers, such as architects, guidance on the level of detail they must include when designing a building. This will give them the tools to better scope and contract for design services, to ensure that their designs have sufficient details to determine whether the building complies with legislated standards. It will give builders a minimum set of details that they can expect to receive, which will give them the ability to accurately price and plan building work and help them see what is needed for the building to meet those building standards.

The change will clarify the law to ensure that those building in the territory know what to expect in their design documents. It will provide standards that people must meet. Through this it will ensure that everyone across the profession has a common understanding of what is required and how it is presented.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, can you outline how this change fits into the government's broader suite of reforms for the building industry?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary question. We have a series of reforms with three purposes. We want to ensure that: we have the highest level of building quality in Australia; people have confidence in our building system; and we are able to get a good, strong regulatory outcome when things are not up to scratch. This change to design document requirements is a clear signal to all involved in the industry about all three of those intentions.

We expect our buildings to be thoughtfully designed with enough detail for building certifiers to determine compliance and for builders to reasonably build from. By clarifying the minimum documentation requirements, we are giving builders greater detail to work from to improve the outcomes of the building process.

We also want consumers to know what they are paying for. By insisting on good documentation requirements, consumers will have greater confidence that the buildings being built will conform to building standards.

These guidelines will also link into the new code of practice for building certifiers to be released for consultation shortly. Building certifiers have an obligation to make sure that the technical information required by building laws and the guideline is provided. This reform provides greater clarity in the regulatory system of what is expected and what will be required. It is part of our comprehensive reforms to lift the quality of buildings in the ACT.

We have set out to improve the quality of buildings in the territory, and this documentation guideline is one of the ways we are doing this. It is something we have promised we would do, and it is something we have delivered.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answer to question without notice ACTION bus service—school services

MISS C BURCH: On a point of clarification, Madam Speaker, in one of her responses, the Minister for Transport advised that route 2024 goes past the Causeway. However, she failed to mention that it does not travel in the direction children need to go in to get to and from school.

Housing—residential property sector

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (2.51): I move:

That this Assembly notes:

- (1) the importance to the ACT of having a Commonwealth Government that is a good economic manager;
- (2) the lack of affordable accommodation in Canberra, for both home owners and renters;

- (3) the challenges facing the residential property sector in Canberra, including:
 - (a) rates;
 - (b) land taxes;
 - (c) ACT Revenue Office valuations;
 - (d) bank valuations;
 - (e) bank lending criteria;
 - (f) cost of land; and
 - (g) delays, complexity and certificate of occupancy issues in the planning system;
- (4) further notes the risk of Labor's negative gearing changes; and
- (5) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) publish all modelling undertaken about the future of the property sector in Canberra; and
 - (b) detail the known impact of Labor's proposed housing policies.

It is absolutely vital that we have a strong property sector in the ACT, but unfortunately this property sector is under attack from the ACT Labor government, and that risks being compounded if we get a Bill Shorten federal Labor government.

The problems in the ACT are manyfold. We have the outrageous rates regime that has put a huge burden on many Canberra households. In addition, we also have the onerous land tax regime that is, in effect, a rent tax. It gets paid on rental properties; therefore, it is highly likely it will be passed on to renters. Land tax and the huge gouge we see in this space by the ACT Labor government is, in effect, a rent tax.

We also have the problem of the ACT revenue office overvaluing properties. In the past the changes to the rates regime have been about increasing the multiplier, increasing the percentage of the value of your property that you pay in rates. But now the revenue office is increasing the value of your land as well. So not only are you paying a higher percentage but it is off a higher base, meaning you are getting hit twice.

At the same time as the revenue office is overvaluing properties, banks are undervaluing properties and making it even harder to get finance, should you want to borrow. Further to that, the lending criteria of banks are also having a very serious negative impact on the availability of credit in the ACT. People who thought they could buy a \$400,000 unit may well find when it comes time to settle in 12 or 18 months that the bank only values it at \$350,000 and they have got to make up the shortfall.

There are real concerns that many people in Canberra will be throwing away their deposit because they cannot make up the difference between the bank's valuation and that of what they purchased. When you add in to that changes to the lending criteria of banks, such as that they will now only lend 75 per cent rather than 85 or 90 per cent,

you are talking about a huge amount of money that buyers will need to gather before they can purchase a property.

Then we have the concoction which is purely of this government's creation—the cost of land in the ACT. They have artificially constrained the supply of land in the territory such that it has driven up the cost of land to \$1,000 a square metre. How can it be that a 400-square metre block of land in Canberra 15 kilometres away from the city centre and adjacent to the bush, is \$400,000? How can it be that 400 square metres costs \$400,000?

To optimise that land you then have to spend at least \$400,000 to get a block that will live up to a bank valuation. All sorts of problems with the property sector in Canberra have been influenced by or are the sole creation of this ACT Labor government. That is before you even get into the planning system—the planning system that puts unreasonable delays, unreasonable complexity and unreasonable issues with building quality into the mix.

When all these issues are combined—the rates, the land taxes, the revenue office valuations, bank valuations, bank lending criteria, the cost of land and the planning system—it is no wonder we are in a situation in the ACT where investing in property, buying your first home or renting a house has become so unachievable and so out of reach for so many people.

We have competitive federalism in the ACT; we have competitive federalism in Australia. Fifteen minutes away we have another jurisdiction; we have New South Wales, and they do not have all these issues. They have a much better planning system. They have cheaper land. They do not have the rates and land taxes we have. In fact, many, many properties in New South Wales—perhaps even most—do not have any land tax because of the very high threshold before land tax is payable.

Here in the ACT, land tax is payable on the first and cheapest property and, of course, all subsequent ones as well. When you have that mix in the ACT it is no wonder that there are growing doubts about the property sector in the ACT. That is a shame, because it is a good sector. It has been one of our strongest sectors for a long time. But Andrew Barr wants to take advantage of that—he wants to squeeze it. Of course, home owners and renters are paying the price.

The real risk is what happens on Saturday. What happens if Bill Shorten is elected? What happens if negative gearing is added to the mix here? What happens if there is a further disincentive to providing rental properties in the ACT? We will see a reduction in the supply of rental properties and rents will increase. It is pretty simply economics. It is a real risk to the ACT. This is a pretty potent cocktail of challenges facing the property sector that are almost all of Labor's creation.

We in the ACT will continue to do all we can to make sure we get some balance and common sense back in all these issues I have raised. But it is up to the country and to territorians to make sure we do not have Bill Shorten in the Lodge come Monday morning, because that is a very real risk to all property owners and renters in the ACT.

I hope the Chief Minister has raised concerns with his colleagues in federal Labor about the negative gearing policy, because it will drive up rents for Canberrans. It is a policy that will hit hardest the poorest in our community because of what it will do to rent. We in the Canberra Liberals will continue to do all we can to support the property sector. We will advocate for this sector and we will fight for what is fair for all the property owners and renters of the ACT. I only wish ACT Labor would do the same.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Social Inclusion and Equality, Minister for Tourism and Special Events and Minister for Trade, Industry and Investment) (3.01): I enjoy the irony of the greatest complainer about motions in this chamber that relate to federal politics bringing forward in this chamber a motion that relates to federal politics, but I will let that one slide because we are a few days before a very significant and defining moment in our nation's history. I welcome the opportunity to talk about the importance of good economic management at both commonwealth and territory levels.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after "That", substitute:

"this Assembly:

- (1) notes the importance to the ACT of having a Commonwealth Government that is a good economic manager;
- (2) notes that housing affordability is an issue for many Canberrans; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to work with whomever forms government after the next Federal election to secure the best possible outcomes for all Canberrans."

Mr Coe is indeed right to talk about the importance to the ACT of having a commonwealth government that is a good economic manager. And that is exactly why the election of a Shorten Labor government this Saturday is the best outcome for all Canberrans. The choice facing Australians is very clear: Labor's positive and progressive vision for Australia's economy and for Canberra and this region or the Liberals' continuation of unfair and regressive policies that are framed in the rear-vision mirror of Australian politics, Australian economics and Australian history. The starkness between the parties is particularly clear here in the ACT. I mentioned in question time that the difference in election commitments, infrastructure and recurrent funding support between what is offered by the Shorten team and by Scott Morrison is about half a billion dollars. I will come back to this point.

I think it is worth spending some time unpacking some of the details of the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government's record on managing the economy. Under the current coalition government Australia's net debt has more than doubled. Australia's growth debt has now passed \$500 billion. Many cost of living expenses highly influenced by commonwealth government policies have increased significantly. People's penalty rates have been cut. Budget forecasts for economic growth, household consumption and wages growth have failed to be met in recent years.

Mr Coe: On a point of order, on relevance, this is about the ACT property sector. I spent the vast majority of my speech talking about 3(a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g). Mr Barr just said he is going to give a reflection on Tony Abbott and Scott Morrison. I did not mention either of them. They are not mentioned in the speech. I am curious as to how this could possibly be relevant to my motion.

MR BARR: On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker—if you could stop the clock, please—the first point of Mr Coe’s motion, which is what we are debating, is the importance to the ACT of having a commonwealth government that is a good economic manager. If I cannot talk about the importance to the ACT of having a commonwealth government that is a good economic manager, I do not know the point of having such a motion. It is not what you say in your speech; it is the motion that we are debating.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Orr): Members, I do not believe there is a point of order. Mr Barr has also moved an amendment, and I believe he is speaking to that amendment. Mr Barr, please continue.

MR BARR: As I was mentioning, penalty rates have been cut, budget forecasts for economic growth, household consumption and wages growth have failed to be met year on year, and the latest WPI data out again shows anaemic wage growth here in Canberra, particularly in the public sector dominated by the commonwealth government, but across the nation.

One of the defining issues in this campaign is getting wages moving again. And we know because Mathias Cormann said so. It was a deliberate economic tactic. He said so on *Sky News*, the bible of right-wing politics in this nation, where you go to show just how much of a right-winger you are. You go on *Sky News* to beat your chest to show how much of a right-winger you are, to worship at the altar of the right-wing media in this country. That is where you go. And Mathias Cormann said it was a deliberate design of coalition economic policy to suppress wages. We are seeing the results of that in this city and everywhere else year on year.

This week was the fifth anniversary of that infamous 2014 budget in which Tony Abbott, Scott Morrison and Joe Hockey tried to introduce the \$7 GP tax, to increase the age for the pension to 70 years, to cut \$57 billion from Australia’s hospitals and \$30 billion from our schools. Some of these cuts, because they were blocked in the Senate, have now been reversed in part, but their impact is still being felt right across Australia’s states and territories today. I remember the then New South Wales Premier, Mike Baird, describing it as a kick in the guts for New South Wales, just as it was a kick in the guts for the ACT and the other states and territories.

This, of course, all happened after that famous promise from the then Leader of the Opposition and soon-to-be prime minister, Tony Abbott, that there would be no cuts to education, no cuts to health, no change to pensions, no change to the GST and no cuts to the ABC or SBS. Remember that! It is so long ago, so many prime ministers ago, so many Liberal Party coups and internal ructions ago, but that is what we are

talking about. That is economic management at the commonwealth level, and that is what directly impacts on people here in the ACT.

In contrast, Labor has announced all its policies and commitments, has had them fully costed by the independent parliamentary budget office, and released them last Friday, well in advance of polling day on Saturday, for all Australians to see. And there are some very significant commitments for our city, including \$200 million towards the second stage of light rail; an extra \$100 million to duplicate the Barton Highway between Canberra and Murrumbateman; \$67 million for Dunns Creek Road, servicing Jerrabomberra and Queanbeyan; \$20 million for a capital region space industry hub—after that outrageously political decision to locate the national headquarters in Adelaide, it is pleasing to see federal Labor committing to more jobs in a space industry hub here in the capital region; \$7 million for sports facility upgrades at Kippax and Tuggeranong; and bike path upgrades across the city.

These financial commitments are in addition to ending the coalition's disruptive and harmful decentralisation agenda that would move hundreds of APS employees and their families out of Canberra, mostly driven by the National Party, I would acknowledge, but still part of the coalition. They are part of the coalition, and the Liberal Party cannot form government in 99 elections out of 100 without them. And they are still out there seeking to take jobs out of Canberra—pointless exercises, counterproductive exercises like the APVMA into Barnaby Joyce's own electorate in Armidale. The other important commitment that our federal Labor colleagues have made is that the staffing cap that has put public servants under extreme stress will be ended and efficiency dividends that have been baked into the forward estimates will be reversed.

Combined, federal Labor, should it form government this Saturday, has now committed at least \$500 million more investment in Canberra and the immediate region than the coalition. This is particularly important because we know that the territory's gross state product is estimated to be hit by \$110 million for every 1,000 APS jobs that are cut in the ACT. The choice is, indeed, very clear.

I would now like to turn to the second part of my amendment. It is indeed the case that housing affordability is an issue for many Australians around the country and here in Canberra. We certainly welcome the proposed reforms at the commonwealth level that will put first home buyers on a level playing field with investors and encourage investment in new builds—and this is an important point—to encourage investment in new houses instead of existing properties.

At the territory level we have made the largest investment in public housing renewal and growth in Canberra's history. The Deputy Chief Minister will have more to say about this shortly, but I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Minister Berry on her extensive work that has been undertaken in developing the growing and renewing public housing 2019-24 plan that builds on a very significant period of renewal already. This new plan for the next five years outlines how we will invest \$600 million to renew 1,000 public homes and add 200 new public homes to our city's public housing stock. Per capita, this is the highest investment in public housing by any government in the country.

We are also addressing housing affordability and cost of living by abolishing once and for all stamp duty for eligible first home buyers from 1 July 2019 and extending the concession across the housing market for first home buyers. This is part of a long-term program to remove stamp duty, one of the worst taxes levied by state and territory governments across this nation.

We are establishing an affordable home purchase scheme which sets aside dwellings built as part of the land release program to be able to be sold to eligible Canberrans at affordable prices. We are continuing to provide a 50 per cent rates rebate for eligible pension card holders up to a maximum of \$700. We are increasing the utilities concession by \$50, again up to \$700 annually for eligible applicants on 1 July this year, providing greater flexibility for ratepayers in how rates bills can be paid.

In addition to these important policies, we will continue to release new land for housing supply and we will continue to focus on policy reforms like the ones that we will return to tomorrow, to improve people's cost of living in Canberra, namely CTP reform from which over 280,000 motorists in this city will benefit, not only from extended CTP coverage but from lower premiums—one-third—a practical example of important policy reform that delivers a cost of living benefit to Canberra households.

In relation to further reforms in the housing market, there is no doubt that an emphasis on supply, an emphasis on innovation and reform within the territory's planning system—work that is being led by Minister Gentleman—and a focus on providing choice in the housing market will be important as we move into the city's next phase of development.

I note that the city of Canberra is growing faster than the Canberra region. Our rate of population growth is outstripping that of the immediate region. But as Canberra grows, the region grows too. And that is a good thing. It is a good thing that Canberra and the region continue to grow. But we need to grow sustainably and we need to grow in a way that respects our unique urban bushland.

The areas that immediately surround the city of Canberra are valuable and should be protected. That is why we have ruled out development in the Kowen Forest precinct while we are focusing future greenfield development in Canberra in the balance of Gungahlin, those west Belconnen suburbs associated with the Ginninderry development, and in the Molonglo Valley. And there are some further areas identified for further planning studies around future greenfield.

We do, as a city, face a choice as we continue to grow. As our population heads towards half a million people, we will need to make choices about where new greenfield development occurs and what is the balance between urban sprawl and urban consolidation. Canberra is one of the least densely populated cities in Australia and in the world.

We have an active program of encouraging greater density in our city centre, in our town centres, in our group centres, around our local centres and along transport corridors. That supports small business activity and it creates different, vibrant

precincts in our city. And that is important. Canberra has more than 100 leafy suburbs. We have a handful of dense urban areas. That balance reflects our city's growth path, our history.

Our future also needs to include diversity of housing types. That will mean that there will be some areas that are densely populated. They are the city centre, town centres and in and around group centres and major employment hubs. But our suburbs, which constitute about 70 per cent of all housing in the ACT, continue to be detached, single dwellings. That will be the dominant housing type in our city in most of our lifetimes.

There is demand for more dense living opportunities in the city, in our town centres and in and around group centres, in major employment centres and along transport corridors. Part of our work in supplying new housing for our growing population is to strike that balance. That is exactly what we are endeavouring to do. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (3.16): The Greens will not be supporting Mr Coe's motion today. It is clearly a pre-federal election stunt, as Mr Barr also noted. The first item of his motion calls on the Assembly to note the importance of having a commonwealth government that is a good economic manager. That is a statement of the obvious and it is quite hard to argue with, so I will not bother.

The second item of Mr Coe's motion calls on the Assembly to note the lack of affordable housing in Canberra. That is a topic I have devoted considerable time to in this chamber, as indeed have the ACT Greens and the Australian Greens in developing policies on this matter. The parliamentary agreement commits the government to a range of housing-related measures. These include the development of a housing strategy, the creation of a housing innovation fund and the expansion of homelessness services.

Since the beginning of last year the ACT Greens have tabled a successful motion calling on the ACT government to maintain the current proportion of social housing in the ACT; ensured that the indicative land release program includes information about the number of public, community and affordable housing dwellings planned for new release; introduced a successful motion to allow landlords to receive a discount on their land tax if they rent their property at a discount from market rent to lower and moderate income tenants, which has now been legislated into effect; worked with the government to ensure that the seniors rates deferral scheme is both more widely available and better advertised; and introduced a raft of amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act to improve renters' rights.

Sadly, both Labor and the Liberal Party have voted against many of our housing-related motions and amendments. Most recently the ACT Greens developed a raft of amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act. I was saddened that neither the ALP nor the Liberals supported our amendments to remove no-cause eviction and to put in place some simple minimum standards for rental housing.

Mr Coe's third note in his motion is a grab bag of issues, some of which relate to the ACT government's policies and operations, and others to external entities, the banks. Really, this is just not worth going through today.

The fourth note in Mr Coe's motion probably goes to the substance of this pre-election notion. It dovetails with the Liberal attack ads which are on corflutes and mobile billboards throughout Canberra right now. As well as, to the best of my knowledge, falsely implying that the federal Labor Party will introduce death tax, they link a local issue, changes to our rates system in the ACT, with a federal one, the ALP's proposed changes to negative gearing. This is a false equivalent.

In relation to negative gearing, I note that removing it and abolishing the 50 per cent capital gains tax discount has been a longstanding Australian Greens policy. As with a slew of other sensible things, Labor has belatedly come to the party regarding negative gearing. On behalf of the Greens, I would like to welcome them.

Negative gearing costs the Australian budget more than \$4 billion a year in forgone revenue. It is difficult to say exactly how much, because it is not counted by treasury as a tax expenditure. But if you combined the cost of negative gearing and the capital gains tax discount it would have to be at least double that figure. Negative gearing is problematic enough on its own, but housing experts believe that it is the interaction between negative gearing and the 50 per cent discount on capital gains tax that has been responsible for the dramatic increase in speculative investment in property and the subsequent increases in house prices since the beginning of the millennium.

In 1999, when Treasurer Costello introduced the 50 per cent discount on capital gains tax, the Greens, ACTCOSS, National Shelter and others pointed out the distorting and inflationary impacts these changes would have on the property market, as have many people since, including distinguished economists such as Saul Eslake. Sadly, history has borne out these predictions and we can see them now in Canberra.

It is also worth noting that the urban myth about increases to rents during the period when the ALP abolished negative gearing in the late 1980s is just that: a myth. Unfortunately, it has become an article of faith for those who have proposed reforming this expensive folly. The data from this period shows that the cost of rent grew at a double-digit rate in Sydney and Perth off the back of unusually low vacancy rates in both cities. These changes distorted the national figure.

It is very hard to predict how the federal ALP's proposed changes to negative gearing will affect the property market, because the property market, the housing market, is subject to a wide range of other factors, including interest rates and population changes. The general view we have seen from independent experts is that the ALP changes are likely to moderate the level of house price growth.

While we are talking about negative gearing, I note for the record my disappointment in the Real Estate Institute of Australia's current campaign on negative gearing. As part of the scare campaign, tenants are being sent REI brochures in the post by their managing agent. These brochures warn tenants that their rates will rise if a federal Labor government is elected. The direct marketing of partisan political material of dubious factual merit to tenants is nothing more than irresponsible fearmongering.

The calls in Mr Coe's motion are particularly concerning, mainly because they do not in fact make much in the way of actual sense. The first item calls upon the Assembly to:

... publish all modelling undertaken about the future of the property sector in Canberra

To quote Kevin Rudd, this lacks detailed programmatic specificity. All programs going back how far? By who? Would this include the Liberal Party's own modelling, if it exists? Does it include academic studies? Should we in fact have just a whole back-copy collection of the *Canberra Times*? Is it going to include all the work by developers? Is this only government modelling? Modelling for what purpose? This is just ridiculous.

The next call is almost as bad:

... detail the known impact of Labor's proposed housing policies.

It is cryptic. The known impact as distinct from the unknown impact, the known unknowns, the unknown unknowns? This is pretty out there. Mr Coe's motion notes some issues that come under the territory government and others under the federal. Which actual policies are we talking about? There is currently in the ACT a principally Labor government. There may in the future be a federal Labor government. We will know that in a few days time.

What policies are we actually talking about? Maybe it is the ACT housing strategy or the land release program. Could it be federal Labor's new version of the national rental affordability scheme, which will offer a \$15,000 per year subsidy for newly constructed affordable rental properties that are rented to low to moderate income tenants over a 15-year period? Who knows? What else should be included in details of the known impacts of Labor's policies? Where should this data and modelling come from—the Parliamentary Budget Office, the federal Treasury, the ACT treasury, a special commission from NATSEM, AHURI, RMIT ABC Fact Check, a fortune teller? I have always been in favour of tea leaf reading myself.

Were it not a pre-election stunt, presumably the calls in this motion would be a bit more sensible and, at the very least, a bit more specific. If Mr Coe actually had any interest in having this motion passed, I suspect that one of his staff might have approached the Greens to discuss whether we would support it and might have done likewise with Mr Barr's office.

This brings me to Mr Barr's amendment, which itself does not go beyond statements of the obvious. It does, however, have one positive in its favour over Mr Coe's: it does at least make sense. On that basis the Greens are happy to support it. We are very hopeful that the outcome of the federal election will bring about some positive changes in the housing sector in the ACT. We look forward to hearing an update from the Treasurer or the housing minister on these issues in coming months.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.26): It does not surprise me that the Chief Minister has completely obliterated Mr Coe's motion, because that is how the Chief Minister rolls. That is what he does. It is no surprise that he trashes the whole motion and serves up something that is completely different. But I am absolutely astounded that the Chief Minister could possibly amend a motion and include the words:

... notes that housing affordability is an issue for many Canberrans.

The Chief Minister wants us to note that housing affordability is an issue for many Canberrans. My oath it is. It certainly is. We on this side of the chamber have been noting that issue extremely loudly, time and again. It is a massive issue for many Canberrans. A great number of them write to me. They probably write to you too. The difference is that I respond to them. How can the Chief Minister possibly bear to stand in the chamber and even utter the words "housing affordability"? Those wishing to buy a home are being squeezed out of the market by this government's policies.

Mr Barr: You would like house prices to fall, would you?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Orr): Members, I appreciate that Mr Parton has one of the louder voices in the chamber and it can carry quite well. But if we can keep the noise down while he finishes, it will be much appreciated.

MR PARTON: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. It is not often he gets riled up though, so do not feel the need to step in. Those who are trying to rent in the private sector are being squeezed out of the market by so many factors of which, although Mr Barr may wish to portray them as national issues, the vast bulk have been manufactured right here. Mr Coe mentioned many of them in his speech.

The Labor-Greens government talk the talk of trying to provide as much housing as needed for those who need it, but they do the exact opposite. We all know that if we get the Prime Minister that Mr Barr is hankering for and the negative gearing changes come raining on down, it is going to get worse. I think even those in this chamber know. Ms Le Couteur may roll her eyes, but time will tell how much worse it could get. We already have the gold medal when it comes to rental affordability. We are the highest. It will not be whether we win gold; it will be by how many lengths after this. We all know that the private rental market will narrow even further. Where will those people go? Where will they live? They cannot really go to public housing.

Mr Pettersson: Buy a home?

MR PARTON: Mr Pettersson is of the belief that they can buy a home, those people down at the bottom end of the private rental market.

Mr Coe: Yes, buy a home. Great advice.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Coe!

MR PARTON: I was astounded to hear Mr Pettersson on the radio some weeks ago suggesting that the positive impact of people being squeezed out of the rental market, the positive impact of investors selling up, was that those renters could buy those homes. We all know that, for most of them, that is not possible. They also cannot really go to public housing as an option, because of the current waiting time. When we are talking about people who have been squeezed out of the private rental market, we are talking about people who would go on that standing waiting list.

What is the waiting time? It is 1,000 days plus. So to families who are squeezed out of the private rental market and front up to Housing, the advice is, "Sure, we've got something for you in three years." They have probably surveyed the family and said, "Well, he's 17. He probably would have moved out in three years time, so you might only need a three-bedroom place. It'll be fine."

If Labor and the Greens continue to trash these previously well-functioning markets, we will continue to get a traffic jam in the public housing list. Labor and the Greens have distorted these real estate and rental markets, and they want us to add to the woe by electing a Shorten Labor government. God help us.

Members interjecting—

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (3.31): The biggest joke in Australian politics is that the Liberal Party are good economic managers.

Members interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Orr): Mr Barr and Mr Parton! You have each had your chance to talk. Can we hear Mr Pettersson in silence.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. The second biggest joke is that the Liberal Party will ever help young people to own their own home. If you look at the facts, the Liberals are nothing more than economic wreckers who never got past economics 101.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Coe!

MR PETTERSSON: The Morrison government is filled with economic dinosaurs, and I can only assume the local Liberals would be just the same if they were ever to get into power.

Members interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Sorry, Mr Pettersson, we will stop the clock. Mr Coe, Mr Parton, I have had to remind members many times to let others make their speeches in peace. Keep it down, please. Mr Pettersson, please continue.

MR PETTERSSON: The Liberals squandered the mining boom, to the benefit of their corporate mates. They cut wages to those who can least afford it.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Coe!

MR PETTERSSON: They give out corporate tax cuts to corporations who already do not pay their fair share. They stifle wage growth through criminalising unions. They privatise anything that is not nailed down. They slash the public sector and services, and after all of that they subsidise those with multiple properties who want to buy more properties. Then they have the gall to say they are the best party to run the economy and to help Canberrans own a home. Rather, the Liberals are rabid ideologues obsessed with the debunked idea of trickle-down economics.

This motion put by the Leader of the Opposition links the importance of strong economic management to the ACT housing market, and there is so much truth to that link. As an aside, absent from Mr Coe's list of challenges to the ACT property sector is the threat of a federal Liberal government cutting jobs and relocating more public servants from Canberra with their decentralisation agenda. I also note that Mr Coe states that negative gearing is a risk, although paradoxically the price of land is also a challenge. I would take their concerns far more seriously if those opposite were not mostly speculative property investors contributing to locking young people out of the property market.

It takes some mental gymnastics to understand Mr Coe's point here. He says land prices and rent are too high, which is bad, but he also says federal Labor's policies which will bring down prices are bad. I am not too sure what Mr Coe is advocating for here. The one thing that is very clear is that he wants the government to continue to subsidise speculative property investors to buy their sixth home rather than help first home buyers afford their first.

Fundamentally the Liberals just do not understand how the economy works. In one of then Prime Minister Abbott's many gaffes, he attempted to explain the economy to the housewives of Australia. As well as insulting most Australian women, he showed his very poor understanding of how the economy of the country actually works by comparing it to a household budget. It is a bit more complicated than a household budget.

An economy is more than just business. Other stakeholders are as important too—workers, households, government at all levels, small businesses, non-profit institutions, NGOs and the voluntary sector all contribute to what our economy is. So just being business friendly is no guarantee that the real economy, measured by employment, output and incomes, will automatically improve.

The correlation between big business friendly policies and a strong economy is a lie spread by the far right-wing media and the IPA. In reality, economic progress is measured by high employment, rising living standards, increasing wages, stability,

and a sustainable and accessible housing market. This progress requires that all sectors of the economy—business, workers, consumers, governments and more—are engaged.

Developing policy that aligns with these interests is more complicated than targeting policy favours to large businesses and property owners on the assumption that their enhanced prosperity will trickle down to the rest of the economy or that increasing their already large property portfolios will make life better for renters.

Since the Liberals took office in 2013 they have presided over one of the weakest economic periods since the end of the Second World War. We have seen the lowest wage growth, only two per cent. Ten of the 12 economic indicators for a healthy economy have decreased over this time. When the 11 postwar governments were ranked according to these economic indicators, the government came dead last in four cases, second last in three more and fell within the bottom half of governments, ranking them no higher than seventh.

It is quite hard to know where to begin when talking about the economic failures of the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government. Their economic narrative should start with the cruel and extreme 2014 budget. They gutted our public institutions and attacked our most vulnerable. Morrison's 2019 budget is an extension of this rabid IPA ideology, destroying our progressive tax system in this country. The Liberals' tax cuts, the centrepiece of their election promises, will only benefit the rich, with \$87 billion for those earning over \$180,000 and nothing for those on Newstart.

The Liberal government shriek about wasteful spending, referring to welfare, our hospitals and our schools, yet they give away taxpayer money to the wealthiest people in Australia by giving tax concessions for people to negatively gear their investment properties which do not contribute to the economic growth of this country.

When looking at any of the economic indicators that have a real-world impact on Australian lives, the Liberals fall short. If you want to understand why owning a home is so hard in this day and age it is because under the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government electricity prices have gone up 15 per cent, child care up 24 per cent and private health insurance premiums up 34 per cent at the same time that wages have increased by only two per cent, on average, since 2013, the lowest since the end of the Second World War.

The household savings ratio is currently lower than it was during the GFC. Underemployment has hit record highs, with 1.8 million Australians looking for a job or for more work. But—and this is a very important but—while in the past 20 years rent has increased broadly in line with wages, house prices have definitely not. This tells me one thing and one thing only—it is not that we do not have enough housing stock in this country and this city but that our tax system has distorted the housing market and working people are getting left behind when it comes to home ownership.

Then there is this much talked about budget surplus from the federal Liberal government. Liberals are obsessed with a budget surplus because it seems to be the only economic concept they can understand, never mind the fact that the deficit

surplus paradigm is not a good indication of economic health. Still, the Liberals managed to double the government debt whilst also slashing services, which is truly an amazing feat. For a party obsessed with the surplus, the Liberals are not very good at getting one. Federal Labor had a deficit because they saved Australia from the GFC. The Liberals have one because they do not know how to count.

It is clear to me that the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government have been terrible economic managers. But what would you expect from the prodigies of the biggest economic vandal Australia has ever seen—Prime Minister John Howard. Australia experienced one of the biggest mining booms in world history, and what do we have to show for it? Unsustainable tax cuts for the wealthy that cost the budget more than the education system, no infrastructure projects, no fast rail or internet, no investment in mental health or domestic violence facilities. Nothing for the working middle classes. This was nothing short of theft. The Liberals then had the nerve to turn around and say, “We can’t afford to properly fund hospitals and schools or lift people on welfare out of poverty.”

Unlike the Liberals, Labor has a long history of economic success. Under Treasurer Wayne Swan, Australia avoided the catastrophic effects of the GFC. When Labor handed government over to the Liberals in 2013, Australia had been the top performing economy for three years in a row. We are now 21st, the lowest in the OECD. Since Hawke, Labor has always handed over government in a better economic position than the Liberals leave it. Almost all major economic reforms that have led to economic growth are Labor policies. As Paul Keating said recently:

It is a blatant denial of history for Scott Morrison to allege that the Labor Party cannot manage the economy when he knows the design and structure of the modern Australian economy was put in place exclusively by the Labor Party.

(Time expired.)

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 Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (3.41): I am happy to talk on this motion today and on the amendment moved by the Chief Minister. In the upcoming election there are significant policies on the table which go towards tackling this national issue of housing affordability. The cost of renting or buying a home is something that is faced in every capital city where stagnant wages and a lack of federal investment have seen more and more people in need of affordable housing, coupled with dwindling affordable and social housing stock.

In the last round of negotiations under this federal government for the national housing and homelessness agreement there was no extra funding by the federal government for social and affordable housing; that is, zero dollars. But the ACT government has been continuing to actively work to tackle these issues. I thought it was a good chance today to remind members of some of those actions. The housing strategy that the Chief Minister referred to, which was launched last October—and I released this comprehensive housing strategy—outlines a number of actions that the

government is taking to improve housing affordability for Canberrans on lower incomes. There are copies of the strategy available in my office and of course it is available online.

As outlined yesterday, \$100 million has been allocated for public housing growth and renewal, building 1,200 new homes and providing an extra 200 homes for people on the housing register. Per capita, this is the highest investment in public housing in the country. If you add this to our current renewal program, over \$1 billion will be invested in growing and renewing our public housing. One hundred and fifty-one dwellings will be managed by Community Housing to provide affordable and social rental housing. More details on these projects will be announced soon.

Fifteen per cent of the indicative land release program is being set aside for community and public and affordable housing, and land release overall is meeting or exceeding demand. There is no brake on when it comes to land supply, and there are blocks available over the counter right now for people to buy. Affordable housing set aside as part of the land release program forms part of a new affordable home purchase scheme allowing eligible Canberrans to purchase their home at affordable price points. Canberrans can go online right now and apply for the program and confirm their eligibility.

On homelessness support, the government is continuing with Common Ground at Dickson, an election commitment which will see up to 40 new homes available for social and affordable housing, with wraparound supports for people experiencing chronic homelessness. In addition, approximately \$20 million is allocated each year for the homelessness services sector. This year's budget allocated \$6.5 million for homelessness programs for emerging cohorts, including women and migrant families, with no increase in funding from the federal government.

The ACT government, however, has continued to work on the issues of homelessness and to support people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness to ensure that they are supported appropriately. And of course there is more support for OneLink and the Early Morning Centre, with longer operating hours so that people in need of accommodation can access that and support can be available for them over more hours.

On public housing, remember what happened the last time that the Canberra Liberals were in charge? They sold off around 1,000 homes. The government has been continuing to build more public housing and more culturally appropriate housing for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with \$4.4 million set aside in this year's budget. To reduce energy costs for vulnerable Canberrans, \$5.7 million has been committed in the budget to improve the energy efficiency in 2,200 public housing dwellings. On public housing in the ACT, the ACT has reduced homelessness, compared to a national trend of a rise. We have reduced homelessness numbers here in the ACT against the national trend. Nobody ever wants to report on that because it is good news, but it means that we are heading in the right direction.

The affordable housing innovation fund is already starting to deliver outcomes, with \$230,000 granted to HomeGround, which was launched last week by CHC, enabling

private rentals to be used as affordable rental, with a land tax exemption for participating properties. Again I make the call: if anyone here has a spare property to contribute, they can get in contact with HomeGround and make the social and ethical investment in people in our community that can least afford affordable rentals.

Other projects to be funded under the \$1 million innovation fund include co-housing, community rental housing, disability accommodation and affordable housing for women escaping family violence. A streamlined rental bonds scheme has also been introduced that provides interest-free loans for up to two years, removing the bond as an up-front cost for housing. We have already seen a significant increase in the uptake of this program since it was updated, and I encourage anyone who needs help with getting together a bond to check it out and access that online.

I would happily compare our record on affordable housing with that of those opposite or the current federal government, and I think you will agree that we are doing a whole lot more. With what I have been seeing across the country, and particularly with our actions in reducing homelessness numbers here in the ACT, it is clear, as I said, that we are on the right track.

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.47): I thank everybody for their contributions. Some of them were entertaining, if not factual. But it is interesting how those opposite try to skirt around the issues. Which is it of the challenges that I have listed—rates, land taxes, revenue office valuations, bank valuations, bank lending criteria, cost of land and the planning system—that Ms Le Couteur thinks is just fine? Is there a single one of those that she thinks is okay? She pretty much did not address any of them in her remarks. I can only assume that her wiping that all out is pretty much giving the tick of approval to how the ACT Labor government, the ACT Labor-Greens government, manages the property sector in the ACT.

Then we had the Chief Minister talking about how the changes to negative gearing are actually going to promote the construction of new dwellings. This is in the same month as the Chief Minister said there is going to be no more greenfield in Canberra. If we are not going to have any new houses and negative gearing is only for new properties, it means that in time we are not going to have any houses in the rental market. We are only going to have apartments. That has a massive impact for this territory. The social impact of that is going to be huge. What do the Greens think about that? What do the Labor backbenchers think about that?

Mr Barr: It is not true. There are thousands of detached dwellings.

MR COE: Mr Barr is now saying there are thousands of detached dwellings in the ACT that are privately rented out. He is now saying there are going to be lots of detached homes built in the ACT. That seems to be in stark contrast to what he goes around saying with regard to his more compact, dense city. Of course, this is a government that says the property sector are all evil but at the same time schmoozes up to them, some in particular, and does some very sweet deals with them.

We all know that one of the key property developers in the ACT is the CFMEU and we all know the hold that the CFMEU has on each of those opposite, including the

Greens. We know the role that they have had in preselections; we know the role that they have in policy development; we know the role they had in the secure local jobs code; we know the role they had in pressuring Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith. We know the Labor Party, through the Labor Club, is another major property developer in the ACT. When it comes to the big end of town, it is the ACT Labor government that has been working very closely with their vested interests.

The risk of having Bill Shorten—who has form when it comes to cosyng up with corporates, in addition to Labor’s appetite for taxation—as Prime Minister means that unfairness and disparity in our community are only going to get greater. That will be the legacy of this Labor government. After 18 years of Labor we have the most expensive rents in the country, some of the most expensive land in the country; homelessness is on the increase; rates and land tax are out of control. It is appalling. This government has form when it comes to letting down people in our community that cannot afford to live here.

We of course will be opposing the amendment, but we find it very interesting that at least Andrew Barr, in amongst all his spin, still acknowledges the immense problem that he has created with housing affordability in the territory.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11		Noes 8	
Mr Barr	Mr Pettersson	Miss C Burch	Mr Milligan
Ms J Burch	Mr Ramsay	Mr Coe	Mr Parton
Ms Cody	Mr Rattenbury	Mrs Dunne	
Ms Fitzharris	Mr Steel	Mrs Jones	
Ms Le Coureur	Ms Stephen-Smith	Mrs Kikkert	
Ms Orr		Ms Lawder	

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Environment—re-usable containers

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (3.57): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) it is estimated that as many as one billion disposable coffee cups are sold each year in Australia and that the majority of these end up in landfill;
- (b) while in the ACT we do accept coffee cups to be disposed of in recycling bins, it is better to avoid single use items;

- (c) the German cities of Freiburg, Berlin and Munich have supported the reduction of disposable coffee cup waste by establishing reusable coffee cup zones; and
 - (d) the positive experience of going disposable coffee cup free by Frankies at Forde demonstrates a willingness by Canberrans and businesses to support and adopt environmentally friendly practices; and
- (2) calls on the ACT government to:
- (a) develop an implementation strategy for a Reusable Coffee Cup Zone trial within the Gungahlin region, in conjunction with local businesses and organisations, by the end of 2019; and
 - (b) commence the Reusable Coffee Cup Zone trial within the next 12 months.

I am bringing this motion to the Assembly because we need to do more to reduce plastic waste in the ACT. Disposable single-use coffee cups have long been identified as a significant contributor to our vast levels of plastic waste both here in Canberra and across Australia.

It is estimated that as many as one billion disposable coffee cups are sold and discarded every year in Australia. The vast majority of these cups end up either in landfill or in our oceans. The harmful effects of our excessive plastic waste are well documented and well known. In particular, I am sure members have all seen the devastating images of sea life caught in plastic bags and other plastic waste and of the massive amounts of plastic found inside deceased sea and bird life. Yet, despite us knowing the harmful and irreparable effects of plastic waste, our plastic obsession continues.

It is true that Canberrans are among the best recyclers in Australia. According to the 2018 national waste report, of the one million tonnes of plastic waste Canberrans produce each year, approximately 70 per cent is re-used or recycled. Here in the ACT we are also able to recycle the paper component of disposable coffee cups. However, the plastic lining, the more harmful component of the disposable cups, remains unrecyclable. Whilst Canberra's excellent recycling rate is commendable, if our goal is to minimise the harmful effects of waste on our environment it is far better to avoid single-use items altogether.

The ACT has been at the forefront of plastic waste reduction in this country. The ACT's plastic bag ban, introduced in 2011, has been incredibly successful in reducing our plastic waste. According to the report handed down by the 2018 unfantastic plastic review of the shopping bag ban, there has been a marked impact on the ACT's consumption of single-use plastic bags as a direct result of the ban's implementation. However, that same report noted that overall plastic consumption in the ACT continues to grow. Our total consumption of single-use plastics is returning to pre-ban levels, and Canberra's own war on waste is far from over.

The government's recently released discussion paper on phasing out single-use plastics and the accompanying proposal for a ban on single-use plastics is a promising

step forward for our city. But it is important that we offer a tangible proposal for how to implement the policy ambitions.

Across the globe, the German city of Freiburg has pioneered one way to significantly reduce the use of single-use coffee cups. For the cost of just one euro, customers can take their coffee away in a re-usable Freiburg cup. Customers can return their Freiburg cup to participating businesses and get back their one euro. The cups are then washed, disinfected and re-used. These cups can be re-used up to 400 times, after which they are recycled.

This ingenious initiative has drastically reduced Freiburg's coffee cup waste. The Freiburg cup has been a resounding success. In fact, the scheme has been so effective in reducing waste and so well received by the people of Freiburg that other cities such as Berlin and Munich have now both adopted similar schemes, implementing their own re-usable coffee cup zones.

But the people of Freiburg, Berlin and Munich are not the only pioneers in reducing single-use coffee cups. Here in Canberra several environmentally conscious business owners and managers have now taken steps to reduce their businesses' plastic waste. Cafes such as Teddy Picker's in Campbell and Little Oink in Cook have already chosen to make the transition from plastic straws, utensils and food containers to re-usable, recyclable or biodegradable alternatives. These businesses, as well as many others throughout Canberra, now give their customers the choice of taking their coffee away in a single-use cup or in a re-usable one.

Some cafes, such as Little Oink, have even gone a step further offering their customers discounts for using re-usable coffee cups. Little Oink's owner, Natalie Legg, has said the community response to the change has been overwhelmingly positive and that the extra cost has been well worth it. These changes are extremely encouraging to see, and I strongly commend these businesses on their efforts.

In my electorate of Yerrabi I am proud to say one cafe's efforts in reducing plastic waste truly stands out. Back in 2017 Frankies at Forde made the decision to stop selling single-use coffee cups altogether. For almost two years now Frankies have only sold their coffee in re-usable cups, eliminating the use of disposable, single-use coffee cups. Now, instead of handing over a disposable coffee cup when someone orders a coffee, the staff at Frankies ask one simple question: do you have time to drink that here?

Frankies owner, Mark, says most people, when they think about it, reply that they do. The need for a disposable cup is gone. For those who cannot take a seat to have their coffee, the staff then explain that Frankies do not have disposable coffee cups. Rather, they have a cup library from which you can grab a re-usable cup; they just ask you to bring it back so that they can wash and re-use it in the future. Mark says that almost everyone is happy with the proposition and only very, very rarely will someone will raise an objection.

How has making this change impacted Frankies' business? Well, Mark has said that going plastic and single-use free has only improved his business. In fact, he has said,

“We have had a lot of new customers seek us out because we are doing the right thing by the environment.” The experience of Frankies, as well as other Canberra cafes, moving away from single-use plastics clearly demonstrates a willingness by both Canberra businesses and consumers to make the transition to environmentally friendly practices. Frankies is a brilliant example of how well going single-use free can work. I cannot commend them enough for their work.

However, while one cafe is good, many would be even better. That is why I am calling on the ACT government to work with local businesses and organisations over the next six months to develop an implementation strategy for a re-usable coffee cup zone trial in Gungahlin. I am calling for a consultative strategy because I believe participating businesses should be given a say in how the scheme is developed and adjusted to best suit the needs of Canberra. This is essential for the long-term success of the scheme.

Developing the scheme in consultation with participating businesses will help to ensure that the resulting scheme and the implementation strategy is tailored to meet the needs of the Canberra community and our local businesses. It will ensure that the trial is both effective in reducing waste and supportive of our small local businesses. Once the strategy is finalised, by the end of this year, my motion calls for the trials to commence in the first half of next year. Establishing a re-usable coffee cup zone will simultaneously achieve significant, meaningful change and support our local businesses. It will be up to businesses to opt in to the trial. Based on the response I have already received from businesses right across Gungahlin, I am confident it will be a success.

Yes, making the transition away from disposable single-use plastics to re-usable, environmentally friendly alternatives can be costly for both businesses and consumers. That is why I am proposing a model like the Freiburg cup scheme. Under this model the ACT government would purchase a supply of re-usable cups to be distributed to businesses within the re-usable coffee cup zone. Instead of using disposable cups or requiring customers to purchase their own re-usable cups, businesses will then loan these cups to their customers. Just like with the Freiburg cups, these cups can then be returned to participating businesses to be washed and re-used again and again.

I note that the Freiburg scheme encourages customers to return Freiburg cups to businesses by charging a small one euro deposit, which customers are then refunded upon returning their cup. This is something that can be considered during the development of the implementation strategy. By implementing this model we can eliminate waste from disposable single-use coffee cups in the Gungahlin region. And what is more, we can do so without imposing costs on local businesses.

By providing businesses with re-usable cups to loan to their customers, we will take the burden off local small businesses and take the onus off customers to purchase their own re-usable cups and to remember to bring them. I believe that the Gungahlin region is an ideal location for the trial of a re-usable cup zone. The success of Frankies at Forde clearly shows that customers in the Gungahlin region are interested in more environmentally friendly practices and are keen to do what they can to reduce

their overall waste output. My discussions with constituents and local businesses in Gungahlin have further proven this.

Aside from Frankies, two other local cafes in Gungahlin town centre have shown a strong interest in and enthusiasm for establishing a re-usable coffee cup zone in the Gungahlin region. Atlas and the Sunday in Canberra cafes have already taken steps to reduce their waste and to transition to more environmentally friendly practices, with great success. They are now eager to make their businesses even more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

All three of these cafes—Frankies at Forde, Atlas, and Sunday in Canberra—have made clear to me their great excitement at the prospect of a re-usable cup zone in Gungahlin. The people of Gungahlin want to see more environmentally friendly practices in their region, and many of Gungahlin’s local businesses are interested and willing to make the change. They just need the support and certainty that a re-usable coffee cup zone will provide both to businesses and to consumers.

Here in the ACT we are fortunate to live surrounded by our beautiful natural environment and wildlife. But our levels of waste, particularly plastic waste, are incredibly harmful to that environment. The evidence on this is clear and irrefutable. It is important that we recognise that where there is plastic and waste there is change to be made, and it means taking meaningful, tangible action to make those changes.

The ACT must continue to lead the way in sustainability and plastic and waste reduction. It is time for us to address and meaningfully tackle the waste produced by disposable single-use coffee cups. This motion, with the support of ACT Labor, will be another vital step forward for ACT Labor in honouring and increasing our commitment to environmental sustainability. I encourage all members to join me in taking this important step and in continuing to identify meaningful ways to reduce plastic use and waste in the ACT. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety and Minister for Mental Health) (4.08): I welcome, as always, focus on reducing unnecessary consumption and waste. Single-use, disposable items come at a high cost to the community and the environment, and there are viable alternatives that provide better outcomes. As technology improves and our awareness improves, those viable alternatives are in fact increasingly available and cost effective.

In my role as the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, I note that the ACT government is focused on helping the community to avoid, re-use and reduce waste through varied programs and campaigns available for the community and businesses. There are over 1,000 businesses across the ACT and Queanbeyan participating in the Actsmart business recycling program, which provides free advice, education and signage to assist with reducing waste and increasing recycling. With dedicated support from the Actsmart team, accredited businesses have all achieved reductions in waste to landfill, some by over 90 per cent. The program also encourages businesses to look at additional initiatives like their purchasing practices so that they can reduce waste, including single-use items.

With this in mind, we introduced the Actsmart straws suck campaign in June 2018. The campaign encourages Canberra businesses and their patrons to rethink their use of single-use plastic straws and reduce the ACT's contribution to the estimated 10 million plastic straws used in Australia every single day. There are currently 33 businesses signed up to the campaign, and community members can sign up to this pledge as part of the Actsmart online carbon challenge.

Of course, we understand that straws make up a small percentage of the plastic waste problem. However, this campaign was designed to open up the opportunity for conversation about all single-use items, including disposable coffee cups, with community members and local businesses. Australians consume more than 50,000 cups of coffee every half hour and use an estimated one billion disposable coffee cups each year. To use what is a tried and true measurement, if all these cups were lined up they would stretch around the world twice. And that is just the Australian use of these cups.

There are many issues regarding disposable coffee cups. They make up a significant portion of polluting litter in the environment. They, of course, require energy and water to create, and there is a lot of confusion regarding their recyclability. Here in the ACT our materials recovery facility, or the MRF, accepts coffee cups for recycling. That puts us at the better end of the spectrum. However, it is obviously a much better option to avoid them altogether.

There are many ways to encourage businesses and consumers to reconsider their use of disposable coffee cups. What we know—and I am sure we have all seen these experiences—is that many consumers are already using re-usable coffee cups, with some cafes and shops providing a discount to those consumers. I particularly acknowledge those businesses who have really taken that initiative by themselves and started to make that individual change.

As Ms Orr has referred to, one particular cafe, Frankies at Forde, have gone as far as removing all disposable coffee cups from their business, which demonstrates a willingness by Canberrans and businesses to support and adopt environmentally friendly practices. For members of the Assembly, I also note the local version across the square at the Canberra Museum and Gallery, where they have a similar practice with their cup library. I encourage members of this place to avail themselves of that opportunity and those of some of the other places around town that offer discounts for bringing your own cup. As a non-coffee drinker, I feel singularly unqualified to provide any specific advice, but I am assured that there are a number that are quite close to the Assembly.

As Ms Orr has touched on, there are a number of other projects around the world that are seeking to address this issue. Freiberg in Germany launched the Freiberg cup project in 2016, which saw businesses participate in a voluntary scheme of re-usable cups under a deposit paid by the customer. Anyone who read yesterday's *Canberra Times* will have seen a similar project being run here in Australia through Green Caffein.

The possibility of a more concerted program to address coffee cups could be considered in the broader context of waste policy. This would allow analysis of relative priorities, how it fits with other strategies and the costs of implementation relative to the benefits. This could also include consideration of how localised programs could be part of a broader campaign. I think there are many ways we can approach this. Certainly the design and delivery of a campaign would require some degree of adequate funding to support its success.

We want to make sure that something like this is not destined to fail from the beginning by not adequately putting the effort into it. Analysis could also consider potential sources of funding for such a program, which might include revenues from the container deposit scheme, for example. I think there are a number of practicalities we need to have a look at here. I certainly agree that it would be worthwhile for government to consider the merits of the program to reduce disposable coffee cup usage within the next 12 months, as is flagged in Ms Orr's motion.

It is critical that we act wisely to reduce waste, both for the health of the world's oceans and waterways and to care for our environment here in the ACT. There is no doubt that here in the ACT we need to do more to reduce waste. When we look at the ecological footprint measured by our Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, it shows that the ACT has an exceptionally high ecological footprint because of—their speculation is—the relative wealth of the territory and, therefore, the relatively high level of consumption.

We have taken a number of steps to reduce that. I think the next *State of the environment report* will show a significant reduction because of our move to 100 per cent renewable electricity. Other measures like that are starting to bring it down. But what it tells us is that we started from a place where we had a lot of work to do and we need to be focused on measures like this.

I do have an amendment, which I now move:

Add new paragraph (2)(c):

“(c) report back to the Assembly on progress in November 2019.”.

I have moved this amendment as a friendly addition to Ms Orr's motion because I think it is worthwhile to have a report back to the Assembly later in the year. I know there is real interest in this sort of approach and I think it would be good to keep it on the discussion topic here in the Assembly so that we can keep members updated and also keep the community updated. I think with something like this there might be a bit of a gap between design and implementation; so we can at least continue to provide information back.

On that basis, I commend my amendment to the Assembly and I also thank Ms Orr for bringing this matter before the Assembly today. Ms Le Couteur and I indicate that we are committed to continuing to improve our work in this area for the sake of our community and for future generations.

Amendment agreed to.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.17): I would like to thank Ms Orr for bringing forward this motion today. It is an issue that affects a lot of Canberrans because we do love our coffee; we are big consumers of coffee. That can mean a lot of plastic, cardboard and associated waste.

Canberrans are already quite good recyclers. We do need to commend them for that. They are doing what they can to reduce the amount of waste that we produce. Using re-usable cups is a good way of reducing waste. It is a good initiative. The best way of reducing waste is not to produce waste in the first place. That is why re-usable plastic cups are a good alternative. What we have not talked about yet is that the lids are plastic. In the Freiberg example they are recyclable. I am not sure if that is the case here in the ACT. So there may still be an amount of waste being produced.

However, on this side of the chamber we very strongly believe in consumer choice. Consumers have the right to choose what they do, how they consume their coffee and what they consume their coffee in. We also believe that businesses have the right to choose. Small business owners especially have put up their own money, time, blood, sweat and tears to have their own small business. The government should offer them some trust and respect that they are doing the best they possibly can in the circumstances, and that they will do the best for their business, their family and their customers. The government could actually get out of the way and leave them to get on with what they do best, rather than bringing in increasing controls which make their lives more difficult.

This is a proposal for a trial, or a pilot, which is a good thing, rather than a change to legislation or regulation. In that regard I think it is a worthwhile thought. But let us not forget here also that it is already happening without government intervention in any way. Frankies at Forde is a good example. They have done it because it is their business ethos. Their customers like it, not because they are being told by someone else.

Mimi's Pit Stop in Tuggeranong, on Lake Tuggeranong near the Learn to Ride park, is another example. The lady who runs Mimi's Pit Stop offers re-usable cups to people. Consumers have the choice of whether they want re-usable cups, which are really popular amongst customers, or whether they will go with a paper cup. Vicki takes them home, sterilises them and brings them back the next day for customers.

We believe that businesses, especially small businesses, and consumers can make their own informed decisions. That is what the best result is. That is not to say in any way that there is not merit in re-usable coffee cups. That is not what I am arguing here at all.

I would like to see that local businesses can make that decision for themselves, whether they assess the viability of going with re-usable cups or not, based on their own circumstances. For example, are they set up to wash large numbers of re-usable cups? Some coffee shops are very small facilities that may not have that ability. There

can be a staffing impact as well, in the washing of the cups. These are things that must be taken into consideration. Plus, there is the additional cost to purchase the cup.

We hear a lot in this place about vulnerable people, people on low incomes and other vulnerability factors. What of them? What if for some of them that dollar, or whatever the price may be, is the difference in whether or not they can afford that cup of coffee today? It is taking away autonomy from businesses and people. It is stopping them from making their own choices about what is best for them. I also feel that the government will have to come up with a different analogy. If the cost of coffee is going to go up, instead of their saying, “This is only the equivalent of the cost of a cup of coffee a day,” they will have to come up with something else. Maybe it will be the glass of sparkling water a day rather than the cost of a cup of coffee.

We already have a high cost of living here in the ACT. Things are going up all the time. Consumers should not face increased prices because of a potential trial that has been called for, given that it can already happen if there is demand, and if the businesses themselves feel it is what their customers want and what they can accommodate in their business. There must be consultation with the businesses. I would like to know how many coffee shops in the Gungahlin area Ms Orr has communicated with and how many have agreed to participate. Has she talked with consumers and had any feedback on whether the cost would be a barrier to some people purchasing their takeaway coffee? What will it mean for the plastic lids? Will they be recyclable? These issues are important to look at.

We do not need certainty about whether we have re-usable cups. Businesses are already doing it right across Canberra—in Gungahlin, in Tuggeranong and everywhere in between. We need to trust people to do what is best for them and what is best for their customers. Generally speaking, what is best for their customers is what is best for a business.

Whilst reducing waste is important and whilst implementing or encouraging the use of re-usable plastic cups is a great idea—already I keep cups that I give out to constituents; I think it is a good idea—mandating, at some point in the future, because generally that is what a pilot, even an opt-in trial, is about, will lead to further regulation and further legislation. This is what we are concerned about: the unnecessary intrusion of government into the lives of small businesses and consumers, the vast majority of whom are doing the right thing. I commend Ms Orr for bringing this to the Assembly. The use of re-usable coffee cups is a good idea. Reducing waste is important for us all and should be encouraged. But is this the right way to do it? We are not convinced.

I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name:

Leave granted.

MS LAWDER: I move:

- (1) Insert new paragraphs (1)(e) and (f):

- “(e) Canberrans are amongst the most conscientious consumers when it comes to being environmentally responsible; and
 - (f) there exist commercial operators who are able to provide cafes, restaurants and coffee vendors a reusable cup that can be exchanged at multiple coffee retailers;”.
- (2) Omit paragraph (2), substitute:
- “(a) supports a consumer’s and a business’s choice to engage in the use of reusable beverage containers; and
 - (b) encourages local businesses to assess the viability in engaging in a reusable beverage container scheme.”

I have nothing more to add, other than what I have already said. I commend the amendments to the Assembly.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for City Services, Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Roads) (4.27): I welcome the opportunity to speak today in response to Ms Orr’s motion regarding disposable coffee cups. Australia is in the midst of a waste crisis, with the onset of China’s national sword policy, which has severely disrupted the norms of the recycling industry across the whole country. We are seeing local governments across the country forced to dispose of recycled material straight into landfill. This is a terrible outcome for our environment.

I wrote to the national environment minister, Melissa Price, about the need for a national approach to waste reduction as a matter of urgency. I am not sure where in the world a response to that letter is at the moment but I look forward to receiving one in the near future, whichever government may be in power—

Mrs Jones: She could be on the campaign trail.

MR STEEL: I wrote to her earlier in the year; so I think she has had plenty of time to respond to me and to address this issue, which is of national importance. Whilst we need a national approach, in the meantime we need to continue to take a responsible approach here in the ACT to manage our environment, to reduce waste and to divert more waste from landfill.

The ACT’s current waste management strategy has the goal of leading innovation to achieve full resource recovery in a carbon neutral waste sector. Our strategy is underpinned by a globally accepted waste hierarchy and principles. Our first and most critical step in accordance with the waste hierarchy is always to avoid waste wherever possible. That is reflected in the national waste policy, which has been agreed to by all states and territories—Liberal, Labor or of any other political colour.

Members will be aware that the government is already educating our community on how to avoid and reduce waste and how to better re-use, recover and recycle the waste that we produce. We are managing and leveraging existing organics in our landfill through methane gas capture. The new opt-in green bin service opens opportunities to

further reduce the amount of organic material going into landfill through recycling into mulch.

We are also continuing to discuss potential strategies for waste-to-energy policies in the ACT. Options around reducing the consumption of single-use plastics are, of course, also on the agenda. We are continuing to work on how we apply circular economy principles to treat today's waste as tomorrow's resources.

A strong contemporary legislative and regulatory framework underpins the ACT's ability to reduce and sustainably manage its waste under the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act 2016 and the associated regulations. The act embeds the waste hierarchy, supports innovation investment and promotes responsibility for waste reduction and best practice.

We need to be innovative in the ways that we use waste. Circular economy principles are the cornerstone. Under the principles, waste is viewed as an important resource that can be recovered and re-used. The application of circular economy principles presents a significant opportunity for the waste sector. A closed loop waste sector helps stop our reliance on virgin materials and maximises the economic value of all waste.

While our current approaches are proving effective in the waste we are managing, there is a pipeline of initiatives that seeks to accelerate our future efforts to avoid and reduce the territory's waste and better manage that which cannot be avoided. The government has provided the community with a number of opportunities to participate in the discussion on how we can best avoid and reduce, and then recover and recycle, our waste—for example, through the waste feasibility study.

We are also engaging with Canberrans and the broader community on the phasing out of single-use plastics through the discussion paper that is currently out for consultation. Our society can no longer throw away responsibility for the plastics littering our environment. Single-use plastics are ubiquitous. They are found in our waterways, in our landscapes, in our city parks and they are going into our landfill. If we are to take the responsible approach to managing our environment, we must reduce problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics.

I know that community concern about this waste is now at an all-time high. Many businesses in Canberra and our Australian packaging industry are already taking steps towards a more responsible approach. Yet it is still commonplace to see takeaway shops continuing to use plastic-foam polystyrene takeaway cups. Of course, we all know that most businesses currently use plastic-lined coffee cups.

Supermarkets also continue to sell plastic plates, cups and cutlery when it seems like there are clear alternatives already being sold on their own shelves. That is why governments also have an important role to play, through education but also through environmental regulation.

The European Parliament last year voted to ban single-use plastics by 2021. Similarly, South Australia and the City of Hobart are also looking at phasing out single-use

plastics, as is the ACT. The ACT government believes that we should consider phasing out or banning single-use plastics in the ACT, thus going beyond our existing ban on lightweight single-use plastic bags. To do this, we need to continue our work on building a circular economy. We need to work with industry through innovation to help design out and minimise problematic plastics and move to more sustainable alternatives where they exist.

We want to ensure that, as part of a responsible approach to plastics, any government intervention is practical, particularly for consumers, and addresses important social equity concerns as well. We are currently seeking feedback from the community. We look forward to seeing the community's response to that as it continues.

Our government also represents the interests of Canberrans as they relate to single-use plastic packaging, working with other Australian jurisdictions and the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation on this issue. They have very strong targets as an industry to help phase out single-use problematic and unnecessary plastics. They have actually been leading governments in a sense, but it is important that we take further strong action. There are things that we can do as consumers and businesses to help reduce the use of problematic and unnecessary plastics. The government also has a role to play.

Coffee cups are a daily reminder of single-use plastics in our throwaway society. It is estimated that one billion coffee cups are sold in Australia each year and most of these currently end up in landfill. Unfortunately, as takeaway coffees are usually consumed in public places, they are often disposed of in general waste bins or, sadly, some end up as litter.

Nearly 32 per cent of the volume of all litter items counted in the ACT consisted of takeaway food packaging in 2017-18. However, it is estimated that by using re-usable cups the average Canberran coffee drinker could save a bar fridge worth of space in landfill each year. This equates to 87 litres of uncrushed waste or five kilograms worth of waste. Whether or not coffee cups are recyclable depends on what they are made from, how they are disposed of and which facilities they are treated in.

Mixed materials such as coffee cups cause issues for recyclers and are better off avoided. Most single-use disposable cups are made from cardboard, with a thin layer of plastic to make them waterproof. The cups are made of a similar material to milk and juice cartons, which are accepted in recycling in all Australian states and territories.

The use of mixed materials presents recycling challenges for many packaging items, not just coffee cups. The ACT commingled materials recovery facility, the MRF, recycles paper, cardboard, rigid plastics, aluminium, steel and glass. The MRF sorts, aggregates and bundles these materials together. They are then sold on for recycling. Despite challenges with coffee cups being made of mixed material, the ACT accepts disposable coffee cups at the MRF in the paper recycling stream for cardboard-based coffee cups, but not their lids. Generally, they arrive in the MRF flattened. They are classified as paper and are sold to Visy in Tumut for reprocessing, where the fibre content is extracted and used.

I want to note the Responsible Cafes movement. It has been reporting changes in community behaviour through the growing use and popularity of re-usable cups, which are a great alternative to plastic-lined coffee cups. The movement aims to get Australian cafes to offer their customers discounted rates for coffee served in re-usable cups. Some cafes are committed to using no disposable cups at all and are undertaking to better manage their waste and improve their sustainability by offering fewer single-use plastic products.

Almost 5,000 cafes have now joined the program nationally. Many cafes in the ACT participate as well, which has been noted during this debate. Canberrans can reduce their waste footprint by bringing their own re-usable cup, ordering in, bringing their own mug, refusing a lid if they do not need it and, importantly, never using polystyrene foam cups, as they are not recyclable in the ACT.

I understand that the Actsmart business recycling program supports businesses to set up effective recycling systems and to use their purchasing power to reduce single-use plastic packaging where possible. The program also has an education component. We are certainly supportive of a disposable coffee cup reduction pilot being delivered through the ACT government Actsmart business program, building on the success of the straws suck campaign, which was launched in 2018 around single-use plastic straws.

Encouraging businesses that do the right thing should be part of our government's effort to reduce waste. I was pleased to see organisations like Green Caffein put their hands up to get involved in a pilot scheme. I would be highly supportive of ACT NoWaste working closely with Actsmart on the program to help avoid and reduce waste. I also note that it is a key strategy in the national waste policy to deliver coordinated actions that help the community and businesses to avoid and minimise waste. I thank Ms Orr for her motion.

MR PETERSSON (Yerrabi) (4.38): Our city, our country and the planet are addicted to single-use disposable plastics and this is having a disastrous impact on the environment. Half of all plastic materials are used once and then thrown away. Around the world one million plastic drinking bottles are purchased every minute. Up to five trillion single-use plastic bags are used worldwide every year. In Australia we consume an estimated one billion takeaway hot drink cups every year.

Only nine per cent of all plastic waste ever produced has been recycled. About 12 per cent has been incinerated, while the rest—79 per cent—has accumulated in landfills, dumps or, unfortunately, the natural environment. Thousands of sea animals die every year from eating or getting entangled in plastic in the oceans. If current trends continue, our oceans will have more plastic than fish.

Even if Australians do the right thing and recycle their plastic waste, the issue is still not solved. Australia is currently struggling to deal with all of our recycling. Currently, Australia exports much of our recycling to other countries, mostly countries in our region. Last year, however, China drastically reduced the amount of recycling it imports. This year India, the fourth largest destination for Australia's recycling,

banned imports completely. More and more countries are phasing out recycling imports, with Malaysia and Thailand indicating they will do so by 2021. We cannot rely on shipping off our waste to our neighbours. It is time to reduce our waste at home.

Not only do plastics contribute to waste but the process in creating them is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Plastic manufacturing is estimated to use eight per cent of yearly global oil production. When exposed to solar radiation, certain plastics produce methane and ethylene greenhouse gasses. This means the plastics pollute the environment and also have the secondary effect of creating more CO² as they are exposed to the sun. Reducing our reliance on plastics is therefore a key component in tackling climate change.

Whilst the issue of plastic pollution is a big one, small changes can have a big impact. Encouraging recycling and opting for products that are biodegradable or plastic free are some simple examples. Given our addiction to good coffee here in Canberra, we need to think about what a daily coffee is doing to our environment. Even though they appear to be made of cardboard, most disposable coffee cups are coated in plastic that makes them hard to recycle and not biodegradable. The vast majority therefore end up in landfill. That thin plastic film on the inside of the cup can take 100 years to break down. Even if consumers do the right thing and recycle them, with the current crisis in recycling this is also not sustainable.

Even the biodegradable part of a takeaway coffee cup harms the environment. Some 700,000 trees are cut down every year to create one billion coffee cups. We need to start using alternatives. Re-usable coffee cups are becoming more and more popular as consumers become more aware of the environmental impacts of their choices. Using a re-usable coffee for a year, instead of the disposables, will lead to a 36 to 47 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, a 64 to 85 per cent reduction in water use and a 92 per cent reduction in landfill. Clearly, we should be encouraging people to embrace re-usable cups.

Whilst education campaigns, word of mouth and changing consumer expectations have done a lot to increase the use of re-usable coffee cups, more can be done. In Germany, cities like Berlin, Munich and Freiburg have established re-usable coffee cup zones. In these areas customers pay a deposit for a disposable cup when they get their coffee at any of the participating stores. They can then return their cup to a participating store and receive the deposit in return. The cafes use this system rather than relying on disposable coffee cups. We could easily implement a scheme like this in Canberra.

Luckily, we already have environmentally conscious cafes implementing waste reduction practices. In my electorate of Yerrabi, alongside Ms Orr I note that Frankies at Forde has stopped using disposable coffee cups altogether, and it has been a success. Everywhere you walk in this city—the town centres or even just the local coffee shop on the weekends—Canberrans are choosing to use their keep cups. There is clearly a willingness in the community to reduce our waste.

Changing behaviours should not be left to individual consumers; government should be encouraging this behaviour as much as possible. Whilst there is clear community support for moving away from disposable cups, a government-led scheme that encourages the use of re-usable ones is the next step in further reducing our waste. That is why I am supporting this motion to implement a re-usable coffee cup zone in the Gungahlin region.

With the support of community members and local business a government-led re-usable cup zone can help phase out the use of disposable coffee cups. We can lead the way in simple environmental policies that can have a big impact. This is an opportunity to again lead the way in positive and progressive initiatives that Canberra is known for.

Given how much Canberrans love their coffee, we cannot ignore the environmental impact of this obsession. Encouraging the use of re-usable coffee cups will help lessen Canberra's environmental footprint and reduce our reliance on overseas recycling plants. This may be a small step in tackling the huge problem of what to do with plastic waste, but small changes to our lifestyle can have a big impact.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.43): The Greens will not be supporting Ms Lawder's amendments. I listened carefully to the comments, and while I do not entirely disagree with them the fundamental basis of Ms Lawder's amendments is that we should just sit back and let it happen. The bottom line is that we do not have the time to wait. As has been touched on in this debate, some of the environmental issues facing this planet mean we cannot just sit back and wait for some sort of evolutionary process to get us there; we have to be more deliberate. We have to intervene to ensure our planet is not contaminated by excessive amounts of plastic.

Just as we need to intervene to ensure that runaway climate change does not get a grip on this planet, we have to do everything we can to prevent those things happening. We cannot be passive about these things. We have a duty as the current generation to do the job with the knowledge we have to protect this planet for future generations. So I cannot accept the fundamental premise.

One could be more harsh and suggest that it was actually a speech about the right to pollute—you can choose to do the right thing or you can choose not to. I cannot accept that we can just sit back and give people *carte blanche* to pollute in any way they like. Just as we prevent noise pollution through the EPA and just as we prevent people dumping oil down drains, we have taken a whole series of steps as a community over the years to expect certain standards.

Government has a role in providing leadership on helping the community get to a place where we can be more sustainable and still lead good lives. That is what we need to achieve, and we cannot simply sit back and hope that it will all get better, which is the essence of Ms Lawder's amendments.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (4.45): To my Labor colleagues, thank you for your support. To Mr Rattenbury, I was happy to accept a friendly amendment. I echo the sentiments of

Mr Rattenbury about Ms Lawder's comments this afternoon. I found them a little bit confusing for the simple reason that I think this is a very sensible proposal to take us forward to address what is a very real need. We do not have time to waste before we act.

I will address some of the things Ms Lawder raised in her motion. She posed the question of whether I had spoken to anyone before bringing this forward. The short answer is yes, I have actually spoken to quite a few people, including businesses. One of those was Frankies at Forde which would be one of those businesses I believe Ms Lawder refers to when she says it is already happening so just step to the side and let it continue.

Frankies was really supportive of the idea of a government-supported zone for the simple reason that they still do on the odd occasion have people who come in who cannot be accommodated by either having their coffee there or taking one of the re-usable cups. They saw this as a really good way to overcome that so that everyone is able to use re-usable cups and no-one has to find an alternative when they cannot be provided with one. Frankies were also very keen to share their knowledge with other cafes and share their experience and to raise awareness to see this thing grow so that it is not just one cafe but quite a few that are working together. They see it as important to take a lead and reduce their waste where they can.

Ms Lawder asked about a small cafe that does not have a place to store the cups. Atlas down in Gungahlin would fit that category; they are not a large space, but when I spoke to Tristan, the owner there, he was really enthusiastic. I saw him once and put the idea to him. I came back another time and he said, "Look, I've been thinking about space and I've figured it out," and he proceeded to tell me how he was going to manage it. This was not with my prompting; this was all out of his own enthusiasm.

As to the washing and so forth, when I spoke to Ange at Sunday in Canberra, I asked her, "You know, mate, are you okay with the idea that you'd be washing all these cups, because that is what we're asking you to do?" And she said, "It's fantastic. It's a great idea." It is not a problem for them. In fact, you know, she thought it would be fine to do because they do not need to worry about storing and looking after all the disposable cups that they have to order. She did not have a problem with the washing; she said it would just go through and it would be fine.

I appreciate that Ms Lawder has raised points, but they are all questions I have already put to businesses. Businesses have already said, "No, no, we're still happy to opt in to the scheme and we're still happy to give it a go." Given that the support is there from businesses, I appreciate Ms Lawder's concerns, but I think it is okay. I think it is fair to say it is fine.

It is an opt-in scheme. Given the media coverage that came up yesterday on this, I think more people than not will want to opt into it. I grabbed a coffee this morning on the way in—in a re-usable cup I should note—and the business owner at that café, who I had not spoken to in advance of this, said to me, "Oh, I saw you in the newspaper yesterday. I really like the idea. How can I get my business involved?" So I think there is a lot of genuine support out there and that we will see this embraced

enthusiastically by the community. I commend my motion to the Assembly. I will not be supporting Ms Lawder's amendments.

Amendments negatived.

Original motion, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Transport—network changes

MISS C BURCH (Kurrajong) (4.50): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) since Network19 launched, feedback received with regards to experiences using the new network have been overwhelmingly negative;
- (b) cuts to dedicated school services under the new network have left parents and school children at a loss with how to get to and from school, with some parents unwilling to have their children travel through interchanges unsupervised;
- (c) the unnecessary strain placed on the public network by the cuts to dedicated school services has meant that buses are at capacity early on in their journeys, preventing commuters from using the same services;
- (d) the Minister for Transport's claims of record-breaking patronage statistics are based on total boarding figures, not unique passengers, and are therefore not an accurate measure of the new network's success; and
- (e) the concerns regarding the safety of school children, and the inconvenience caused by the new network that were raised over the 2018 consultation periods remain a significant concern for Canberrans to date; and

(2) calls on the Minister for Transport to release detailed data:

- (a) assessing the impact of the changes to the dedicated school bus network specifically to:
 - (i) primary school;
 - (ii) high school; and
 - (iii) college students;
- (b) examining the impact of the cuts on:
 - (i) patronage;
 - (ii) journey times; and
 - (iii) safety for students broken down as above;
- (c) exclude any data collected from the first month of free travel; and
- (d) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting week in August 2019.

Over the past 2½ weeks we have seen commuters in Canberra being thrown into absolute chaos as people are being forced to spend much longer on their daily

commutes. What is most appalling about the new transport network is that it affects the most vulnerable people in our community.

Children have been left without dedicated bus routes, forced to walk long distances alone across dangerous intersections and wait at unsafe bus stops. Canberra parents have continuously raised obvious and significant concerns about their children's safety under the new transport network but the minister continues to ignore these concerns. This is why today the Canberra Liberals are calling on Minister Fitzharris to properly assess the impact that these cuts have had on student safety and release this information. Canberra parents have a very clear, basic and reasonable expectation that the government prioritise getting children to and from school safely. But Minister Fitzharris is so out of touch that she continues to ignore this.

It has been just over two weeks since the new network commenced but let us not forget that the anxiety, uncertainty and anger caused by these changes began months ago. If we look back to 2018 when the changes were first announced, this government received over 13,000 submissions during the consultation period but reluctantly made very few changes. Record consultation, the minister spruiked but she reluctantly made very few changes to the school bus routes.

Minister Fitzharris, Canberrans told you months ago that this new network would not work. Parents told us that they would be forced to drive their children to school because they did not want to entrust the safety of their children to the few extra staff employed at interchanges. Students told us that this new network would make it harder for them to get to school on time and that it would take longer for them to get home in the afternoon.

Canberrans told us that cuts to dedicated school bus services would mean that children in places like Tuggeranong and Belconnen would be left stranded and forced to walk many kilometres with their heavy backpacks to get to public buses. And yet the minister has persisted. Had it not been for the hard work and absolute determination of parents who had been left behind by the government across the territory, even more schools would be without dedicated school buses than what we are seeing today.

What is perhaps worse is that we have heard very little from the minister since the network's commencement, instead choosing to send spokesperson after spokesperson to address this public outcry. The minister has refused meetings with concerned principals and parents, and Canberrans who have contacted her office to pass on their concerns have received either a cut and paste reply or none at all. The minister, too afraid to confront these failings, has buried her head in the sand, hoping that all this negativity will just disappear.

I refer to the *Canberra Times* article dated 4 May titled "Bus timetables leave children in tears". The article describes just how distressed and anxious the cuts to dedicated school buses have left students. This is the same network that the minister claims has been a great success. Whilst the article refers to students at Radford College, the feedback my office and the offices of my colleagues have received from concerned parents in other schools has all been troublingly similar.

Schools like Brindabella Christian College have been severely disadvantaged under the new transport network. Despite taking in students from across the territory, Brindabella Christian College had 17 dedicated services cut to just three, with one of these services terminating at the Belconnen interchange, leaving students with no option but to change buses. This network has been far from a great success for the students at Brindabella Christian College.

What I find confusing about the minister's optimism about the new network is that in October last year the ACT government released their school bus services policy, and one of the principles that the network continues to violate states:

Active travel is not a viable option for students living longer distances from their school, or for students who cannot safely walk or cycle to school because of their age, degree of independence or access to an appropriate route or school.

Over the past two weeks I have been out and about chatting to parents across the territory, listening to cases where the network that the minister claims has been a great success violates this very principle. An example that is particularly notable is that of Holy Family Primary School in Gowrie. As per the Transport Canberra website, Holy Family Primary School is served by one dedicated school bus which travels through Monash and Gowrie, with the alternative being a public bus stop located 200 metres away from the school gates. Under the new network, the minister would have primary school students undertake a 4½-minute walk to a bus stop down the road when there is a bus stop located just 200 metres away from the school gates.

This scenario is so much worse for the 41 primary schools who have lost all their dedicated services as the minister thinks that children aged six and seven years are classified as independent enough to walk further to safely access public buses. Children at St Vincent's Primary are another example. They must now leave school 15 minutes earlier than normal finishing time just to get home safely at a reasonable hour and avoid long waits at the public bus stop. According to a *Canberra Times* article dated 1 May, this would mean that over the course of a year these children would lose up to nine days and 50 hours of school time. Because of Minister Fitzharris's decision, students are now being educationally disadvantaged by choosing to use public transport to get to and from school.

The implication from many in the Labor Party seems to be that if children attend their local public school they can simply walk to school. However public schools are also significantly affected by these changes. Children who live at the Causeway and attend their local public primary school, Red Hill, no longer have a dedicated school bus. In fact, Minister Fitzharris's expedition planner recommends anything from a 23 to 32-minute walk and a bus ride or a 57-minute walk, 4.1 kilometres, to get to and from school. That is more than an eight-kilometre round trip each day for primary school children.

Adding insult to injury, Transport Canberra has refused to move the crossing guards closer to the new bus stop for those children at Red Hill who still have a bus to catch, meaning that children as young as five are forced to cross La Perouse Street. Before

these changes, 16 students caught a dedicated bus. Each of them has been forced to be dropped at school by their parents, meaning more cars on our roads and more congestion around the school.

I also draw the Assembly's attention to a *Canberra Times* article dated 2 May which refers to instances where students were left waiting at bus stops, as already full buses drove past them. We have seen the desperation of students trying to get home, with footage on social media and in the *Canberra Times* showing a student clinging to the outside of an overcrowded and moving bus after being unable to board a number of already full buses.

Despite all the concerns raised by schools, by parents, by parent bodies and by community groups, the minister still will not recognise the serious safety concerns and the risky situation she is forcing children and parents into. In question time only today we heard the minister claim that primary school children around the country walk to and from school, so why should Canberra be any different. However, the minister seemed entirely unaware of the fact that police services in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia advise against children under the age of 10 or 12 walking to and from school alone, unsupervised. In fact, in South Australia legislation prohibits children under 12 travelling alone, and in Queensland this is a criminal offence.

As our territory grows in both population and density, so too does the demand on our public transport. It also means that over time the challenges faced by the government when delivering integrated public transport also change. The Canberra Liberals understand this. However, what should always remain the highest priority is the safety of children. The minister needs to stop experimenting with our children's safety.

Many parents have raised concerns that it is only a matter of time before we have a Daniel Morcombe situation here in Canberra. A review 12 months from now is not good enough. For the sake of students who have been left at bus stops and confused at interchanges and for those left without a dedicated school service, this is not good enough. And the minister has still not explained why these cuts have been made.

If the minister is so confident in the safety of children travelling to and from school on her new public network then she would have no problem releasing this information. Children as young as six being stranded at bus stops should not ever be an occurrence on a well-conceived public transport network, nor should children be confused, stressed, anxious and afraid at bus interchanges. Children should definitely not have to make a choice between their education and being able to get home safely.

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport and Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (5.00): I welcome the opportunity to update the Assembly on the new public transport network Canberra is now enjoying. Indeed, this is a new era for public transport in Canberra. This network is a major redesign of Canberra's bus network along with the introduction of light rail. This is the first root and branch redesign of our bus network since 1999. As we know, our city has changed dramatically over this time. It has been important to invest in

public transport to create a truly integrated seven-day-a-week network to keep Canberra connected.

Some key features of the new network I would like to outline include: 10 rapid routes served by high frequency bus or light rail services running for extended hours every day of the week; a well-connected local bus network designed to get customers where they need to go within their community, including to local shops and schools as well as town centres and key transport interchanges where they can connect with rapid services for longer trips; and 223 dedicated school bus services each school day as well as other services for particular groups of customers, such as the Bruce shuttle, the AMC shuttle and peak bus services between the city, Barton and south Tuggeranong.

We acknowledge that for many existing users of public transport there has been a big change, and I thank the community for their patience as we bed down the new network and iron out any issues passengers are experiencing. Of course, change takes time to adjust to. We have received a lot of feedback from the community, and we are taking much of this feedback on board. I note that all the articles those opposite have referenced were in the first week, and we certainly acknowledge the first week of a new network will bring these issues to light. I am confident that Transport Canberra have responded to them well.

I am pleased that many Canberrans have embraced the new network. In the first two weeks of operation we have seen record numbers of users, no matter which way you look at it, whether you measure it by boardings or individual trips or the numbers of MyWay cards in circulation. Each day we hear from new and existing users that the new network has given them more options and that they are now using public transport more and in some cases using public transport for the first time.

As we know and have debated previously in this place, to design a network that better meets the changing needs of Canberrans and the growing city that we live in the government undertook extensive consultation with the community about what services they wanted. This included an initial phase of community engagement in 2018 during which Transport Canberra officials spoke directly to the community about why and how Canberra's public transport network is changing, including the introduction of more rapid routes. In that consultation the community told us it wanted more direct routes, more frequent and reliable services, and increased services at peak and off-peak times, such as during the evening and on weekends.

The second phase of consultation took place between June and August 2018, and focused on getting practical feedback from Canberrans about the detailed route proposals for the new bus network. During this consultation period the government released extensive information to help Canberrans understand the proposed changes, including maps of rapid and local services, city-wide information on a district-by-district basis including regional maps and indicative frequencies for each rapid and local service, and information for each individual schools to help parents, students and schools understand how they can use the new public transport network. I am pleased that so many Canberrans engaged, as has been noted, with over 13,000 pieces of feedback.

The government heard concerns raised during consultation, and made changes to rapid and local services across 58 routes in response to community feedback. Some of these changes included: extending the rapid 4 to provide a frequent, direct rapid service between Belconnen, the city, Woden and Tuggeranong; all local buses from Weston Creek and Molonglo now provide access to the Woden town centre; introducing peak bus routes to the city and Barton from south Tuggeranong suburbs; and introducing an additional route and other service changes to local services to provide better coverage for suburbs in south-west Belconnen in particular. The government also included an additional 78 dedicated school services in the network, a 50 per cent increase over the number initially proposed during consultation.

In designing the new network Transport Canberra had to consider not only existing bus users but also potential future users. It is the government's aim to increase the number of Canberrans catching public transport. With our current figure of eight per cent we lag significantly behind other Australian cities and other cities in our region in providing more options to use public transport and increasing the percentage of Canberrans using public transport.

We want more people to use public transport, and that is what we are seeing today. The simple fact is this: continuing to do what we have done in the past was not going to result in a material increase in public transport usage. That is why we invested in light rail and it is why we have redesigned the bus network. Building a new bus network is a complex task; transport networks are also a network of interconnected parts that work together to provide a city-wide service.

Having a system as we previously did based on long, windy, bespoke point-to-point services is not an efficient way to plan a network. In previous debates in this place in the last term the Canberra Liberals noted that. Something the Canberra Liberals have not brought to the more recent debate is any policy framework to their belief on how they would design a new public transport network.

The debate has been utterly devoid of any options that the Canberra Liberals would seek to undertake and any acknowledgement at all of what it takes to build and deliver an integrated network that will drive patronage and give more people more choice and give Canberrans what they have asked for for a long time: frequent reliable routes. Turn-up-and-go services like the rapid services have been proven locally, nationally and internationally to drive a big uptake in patronage.

Many factors go into the design of a public transport network, including providing more regular school services past schools to improve public transport options for everyone. Running a dedicated service on occasion carrying only a handful of students alongside a regular service does not make sense from an efficiency point of view. It does, however, make sense to run increased regular services past schools.

Many members of the community may not be aware that schools in Canberra have very different bell times. Schools adjacent to one another may finish 10, 15 or 20 minutes apart or, indeed, start at different times in the mornings. This means that it is not always possible to provide a bus service for each school at the optimal time;

there sometimes just needs to be a compromise. School service design also recognises that some schools have much larger demand that needs to be catered for, such as non-government schools drawing from a larger area right across the community.

The government recognises that the new network has been a big change for some existing users, and that is why Transport Canberra has gone the extra mile to help customers adjust, especially school students and parents. This has included: launching a major communications campaign to inform customers about the new services and encouraging as many Canberrans as possible to give public transport a try, particularly during the free travel period; deploying customer service assistants at key transport interchanges to help students and other customers use the new network supported during the initial launch of the network by additional Transport Canberra staff; and creating a bespoke school pack for each school showing walking routes from each bus and light rail stop near the school, routes that students can use and timetable information for these routes.

As a parent I know that the previous information provided about schools was incredibly difficult to navigate. You would have to look down a long list to find which service better met your needs. Compare and contrast that with what Transport Canberra have done in terms of providing information packs to school and you see it has been a fantastic effort. Everyone who needs to use public transport to get their kids to and from school would agree the information provided about both dedicated and regular route services is a considerable improvement on what was previously provided.

We also have an improved online journey planner to help people understand and use the new network, and the journey planner has included dedicated school bus services for the very first time. We have also employed a dedicated staff member in Transport Canberra to focus on improving engagement with schools and encouraging more students to use public transport to get to and from schools.

To support the new integrated public transport network the government has also added another five supervisors to the school crossing supervisor program. The additional crossings were selected based on how kids will access public transport as part of the new network and existing pedestrian and traffic volumes. This is a clear commitment from the government to continue delivering support to schools and families to make it safe and easy to travel to and from our schools. Indeed, the removal of school-service-only bus stops is one of the great enhancements to student safety in the new network.

Transport Canberra has engaged and will continue to engage extensively with schools, school communities and parents to help students transition to the new network. We are prioritising any issues and concerns raised with us that relate to student bus travel. On 5 March, 14 March and 10 April Transport Canberra wrote to all schools to ensure that the school communities, parents, students and staff were aware of the changes and offered assistance in helping schools to understand and communicate the changes to their communities. They also provided schools, as I mentioned, links to detailed information about the changes available online.

I am pleased to say that many schools helped to get the message out to parents and students by, for example, distributing information to parents by email or putting notices in school newsletters. This engagement helped ensure that most students were aware of the changes to the network and knew how to get to and from school by public transport.

This individual contact with schools also helped to identify a number of issues with specific services that Transport Canberra has since addressed or is now monitoring. This includes changes to the platforms used by bus services stopping on McMillan Crescent outside St Edmund's college and St Clare's College. Since the new network commenced Transport Canberra has again been in regular contact with all schools to ensure that they have information about the changes and to check in with them if there are specific issues with the new services.

As part of this process Transport Canberra has continued to meet with schools and visit schools to observe firsthand how students are using the new services, including at Good Shepherd primary, Burgmann Anglican, St Clare's, St Edmund's and Radford. Indeed, my office has also had significant contact with peak bodies and a number of individual schools and parent representative bodies to work with them. We have seen over the first two weeks and into the third week of the new network that this high level of engagement is providing significant information both ways and allowing us to make small changes that have made a difference in the network.

A significant number of students are also using light rail. We know that Canberrans are currently flocking to the new service, including many students either living or attending schools along the corridor. As I mentioned earlier, in order to meet the growing demand for light rail services we have requested Canberra Metro to run an additional service to the city between 7.45 and 8.15 on weekdays and additional school services during the afternoon around school bell time.

At this point 14 adjustments have been made to bus services since the commencement of the new network, which have included: increasing the capacity on a number of routes by scheduling additional buses or larger buses to meet higher than expected demand from school students; making minor timing changes to services to ensure that students can catch a connecting service or that buses arrive at or depart from schools at the best time for students; changing the platforms or bus stops used by buses to better manage how buses move through interchanges or pick up and drop off students near schools; and, notably, aligning with bus services that take students to New South Wales.

Some of these specific changes are: services to commute between the two Burgmann campuses in Gungahlin; scheduling a larger bus on school route 1038 from St Francis Xavier College and St Matthew's primary in the afternoon; and adjusting the departure time of some rapid 9 services leaving Dickson for Belconnen to make it easier for students from schools such as Daramalan College and Lyneham high to connect with other services.

In the first two weeks of the new network over a million boardings were recorded on bus and light rail services and over 740,000 journeys. These are record figures, and I am particularly pleased to see that Canberrans have been coming out in droves to use public transport on the weekend.

We are now starting to see some of the benefit of the government's significant investment in the public transport network with better bus and light rail services seven days a week. We certainly understand that some of these changes have been challenging for current users of the system, but there are a number of new users to our bus network.

Madam Speaker, I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

"(1) notes that:

- (a) on 29 April 2019, the new integrated public transport network began operations;
- (b) the new network offers 10 rapid routes, including light rail, new local routes and more buses servicing schools across the ACT;
- (c) the new network underwent significant consultation during 2018 and, as a result, a number of changes were made to the final network;
- (d) community consultation identified that people wanted more direct routes, more frequent and reliable services and increased services during on and off-peak times;
- (e) the ACT Government acknowledges that the new network is a big change for some people, particularly where individual journeys are different, and is taking feedback about the new network on board;
- (f) to support the transition to the new network an additional 18 Customer Service Assistants have been deployed to interchanges;
- (g) Transport Canberra is carefully monitoring performance of the network and giving priority to school-related travel issues, and making adjustments to services, including:
 - (i) putting on bigger buses for certain services;
 - (ii) adding additional services past schools where there is high demand;
 - (iii) adjusting bus stops near schools; and
 - (iv) adding more light rail services, particularly where some services have proven to be more popular than anticipated;
- (h) Transport Canberra continues to talk to schools regularly to ensure families have the information they need to navigate the new network; and
- (i) safety across the network continues to be monitored through CCTV cameras on every bus and at all major interchanges, school crossing supervisors at 25 schools, improvements to infrastructure around schools and the additional Customer Service Officers at interchanges;

(2) further notes:

- (a) this is the biggest investment the ACT Government has ever made in public transport and delivers light rail and a seven day a week bus network, and includes an additional investment of almost \$50 million over four years in running the new bus system, an additional \$2.65 million invested in the rollout of the new network, as well as \$43 million for 80 new buses added to Canberra's bus network;
- (b) since the start of the new network, we have seen a record number of boardings as well as individual journeys and MyWay cards in use; and
- (c) in the first two weeks of the new public transport network, there were over one million boardings recorded on bus and light rail services in Canberra, and over 740 000 journeys which is more than 10 percent higher than over the same period in 2018; and

(3) calls on the Minister for Transport to report back to the Assembly by the last sitting week in September 2019 including:

- (a) the performance of the network since commencement, including capacity of bus fleet;
- (b) MyWay patronage data broken down by month and across ticket categories (including school student categories), including both the free travel period and subsequent standard-fare months;
- (c) MyWay patronage data broken down by boardings, individual journeys and MyWay cards in use; and
- (d) patronage data as it relates to school student travel.”.

I believe I have covered all of these points in my remarks, but before concluding I will comment on this issue of safety. I would appreciate it if those opposite would take a moment to think about what currently happens around our city with children walking to and from school and walking to and from bus stops. Are the Canberra Liberals telling Canberra families whose children currently walk to school or walk to a bus interchange and catch a public bus—and have done so for many years—that their children are somehow not safe? (*Extension of time granted.*)

I welcome the debate about changes and their impact on some members of our community. But I find it quite offensive to many Canberra families whose children currently catch public buses, I find it offensive to current, past and future users of all public transport services in our city, I find it offensive to Transport Canberra staff and to our bus services that the Canberra Liberals appear to be making this an issue about the safety of schoolchildren on public buses or the safety of schoolchildren walking in our community to their schools. That is simply irresponsible and reckless.

I am happy to have had conversations with a number of principals. I have also met with peak bodies. As I say, I have spoken with a number of principals and I speak to families every day about bus service changes, as members in this place do. I have done this as an elected member of the Assembly and as a member of our community. I have heard from many people who have welcomed these new changes as they are starting to get used to them. They have found them to be very welcome additions to their daily routine.

I have said repeatedly that I understand that for some people this is a significant change. But on this issue of safety, the implication from the Canberra Liberals that somehow children are not safe on our public bus service is offensive. It is dangerous. It shows an utter lack of leadership from the Canberra Liberals.

All members in this place have a responsibility to have a reasonable and respectful debate. I know some members opposite find that very difficult, but there are responsibilities on all of us. Members in our community look to the Assembly to provide representation, leadership and advocacy. I accept all of that. Debates will be undertaken in various tones, but I ask the Canberra Liberals what they would say to any parent whose child is currently catching a public bus. Are they unsafe? I would ask this of any school community that on any given day has students arriving at their school on a public bus or on a dedicated school bus: are those children arriving at your school on a public bus any less safe than those coming on a dedicated school bus? Madam Speaker, the answer is no.

This is one of the safest cities in one of the safest countries in the world. I really implore the Canberra Liberals to consider their leadership in the community and the way that they are presenting this issue in the chamber. I think it is offensive and I will say that in any forum in which the Canberra Liberals continue to raise these issues.

I also ask the Canberra Liberals to be clear with the Canberra community on exactly what their policy would be on transport. I welcome any contribution they have to this debate that is reasonable, that reflects some policy thinking on their behalf and that shows some real leadership in our community.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (5.19): I am pleased to support the ALP amendment to Miss C Burch's motion. Miss Burch's motion has two assumptions underlying it that I disagree with and one part which I think is a good idea—so good, in fact that I have worked with the ALP to have its amendment expanded. I will start with the two bits that I do not agree with.

The first assumption is around school bus services. As elaborated on by Minister Fitzharris, Miss Burch has been putting forward a narrative since the middle of last year that rearranging school bus services is unacceptable. I am afraid that I just do not actually agree with the whole narrative. Yes, the government has a responsibility to ensure that children can get to their nearest public school. That is a totally reasonable expectation. You should be able to send your kid to the nearest school for their age group.

The government also has a responsibility to provide public transport to help the community in general to get around Canberra safely. That, of course, includes schoolchildren. Schoolchildren have the same rights as the rest of the community to get around and the government has a responsibility to ensure that they can get to the nearest practicable public school. Those things I think are clear and fine, and hopefully non-controversial.

But in respect of the responsibility of the government to provide public transport to help the community in general to get around safely, I am afraid that it cannot extend to getting every child directly from any suburb to any school in any other suburb. It is simply not practical. Yes, maybe it would be nice if it were, but it is not. I would also note that there are quite a few other people in Canberra who would really like to have a public transport system that was door to door. There are quite a few elderly or disabled people for whom walking distances are a problem.

There are clear trade-offs in running a public transport system. The Greens have said forever that we would like to see more money going into public transport, and in particular the bus system. But given the budget that ACTION has, they have to make the best use of their limited resources. Under the previous network, the government was running school buses on very long trips across Canberra for a fairly small number of children.

At the same time, other people were on busy routes where full buses were driving past them. The situation needed to change. A rearrangement of school services was required. Of course, that is always going to be difficult. Once children are established in their particular school, understandably parents do not want the school bus to be moved, even if it is poorly used.

I can note from personal experience that Radford College kids seem to be doing fine. I see quite a few of them on the R4 bus, which I catch. One day I went home early because of a tooth extraction. There they were on the bus as well. They certainly appeared to be coping absolutely fine, as you would have expected, with the bus.

The second assumption that I disagree with is that negative feedback equals a failed bus network. Look, we all know this. The reality is that people who are upset and concerned contact us; they complain and complain. People who are happy do not bother telling us about something they are happy about. This, unfortunately, is life and human nature. We all see this as MLAs in this place.

Of course, as a public transport user you find the same thing. People have issues. Every change triggers complaints. But over time the change is often better for the majority of users. I have no doubt that this change will be better for the majority of users. Whatever you may think about Transport Canberra, they have access to a huge quantity of MyWay data. I am absolutely confident that whatever you may think about it, they have tried their best to get the most use out of their limited bus fleet. I really do not believe that anything else is possible.

Of course, that involved some trade-offs between one route and another. Given the limited resources of buses and bus drivers, that is the issue. It would be really good if the solution to this problem were less around “buses are unsafe” because people do catch buses. I catch buses. I walk home at night, and I do not feel unsafe.

As Minister Fitzharris said, Canberra is a very safe space. I do not think that this commentary is helping. What would help would be more money towards our public

transport system. I am sure that if there were more buses, Transport Canberra may have made some different decisions.

Let us look back to last year when we saw the introduction of the green rapid bus service in the inner south. There were quite a few complaints. I got quite a few of them. They were understandable because the affected individuals now have a bus service that is worse for them personally. However, overall patronage is substantially higher compared to the old services, which shows that many people actually benefited from the change.

Of course, network 19 is a huge change. Therefore, I am confident that there has been a huge number of complaints. This is life. However, it does have a positive aspect. At least it shows that people are engaged with this and that some of those complaints will lead to positive changes. We cannot run a bus system without feedback from the users and some of this feedback obviously will be complaints. The government is going to have to strike a balance between responding to the complaints and keeping the changes that are of benefit to the bulk of public transport users.

Patronage data would seem to be the best measure of the views of the bulk of public transport users. The first signs on patronage data are good. Ms Fitzharris has stated in her amendment that the patronage data suggests a 10 per cent jump in patronage over the same time in 2018. We will have to let the network settle down a little to see for sure how successful it has been for the average user. Of course, when it stops being free, people may do things differently. But at least a 10 per cent jump year on year is a good start. I think we actually should be saying something positive about a 10 per cent jump.

This brings me to the part of Miss Burch's motion that I think contains a good idea, and that is the call. Miss Burch is calling for a report back to the Assembly providing detailed data on how school bus patronage is going. I think that is a great idea. Of course, even better, we should get data on the overall network as well so we can see how the whole system is going. The majority of bus users actually are not school kids, and we need a bus system which works for us grown-ups as well.

The amendment that I have worked on with the ALP does this. The Assembly will be provided with detailed data on patronage, both overall and for school students. I suspect that this will be of great interest not just to us here but also to the broader community.

There are a few other changes to Miss Burch's original data request that I want to mention. Miss Burch's motion excludes the first month of free travel. I really do not agree with that because I actually think the free travel period is a very interesting public transport policy experiment. There is an ongoing debate in the transport field as to whether the best way for the government to boost patronage is to abolish fares or to spend the same amount of money on better services. Seeing the data for both the free travel period and for a few months before and after that will be very interesting. I am very much looking forward to seeing that.

The amendment also changes some other data details in the motion because we are not confident that useful data exists. For example, I am referring to data on safety for students. The deadline is also delayed by one month to get an extra month of data on network 19. I think this is probably pretty important over a short period as this can be skewed by things like wet weather, really windy days and the number of public holidays.

In conclusion, I do not agree with Miss Burch's views about changes to school bus services and complaints being the main measure of success or failure of the bus network. However, I do think that getting detailed data on how network 19 is going is a very good idea for students and for adults in Canberra, in fact, for anyone who gets around in Canberra. Therefore, I will vote for the ALP amendment.

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (5.29): I begin my contribution by thanking the minister for her patronising speech about stranger danger. I will read to her from the newsletter of one of the government schools from last year, before the changes to the bus network, where this principal said:

You may be aware that there have been a number of incidents across Canberra recently where strangers have approached school children, enticing them to their car or away from school grounds. In each case, the children have acted wisely by refusing and moving away from this man.

The idea of stranger danger is not something new. To suggest that our representing the views of parents who have come to us in this place makes us somehow irresponsible is utter nonsense, and the minister knows it.

The Labor-Greens government has made bus travel more difficult and more time consuming for school children. We now need to walk further, wait longer and transfer more often. Schoolchildren have been the hardest hit under these cuts—an absolutely ironic outcome.

As the Liberals have continually warned, schoolchildren are being stranded on the side of the road with their school buses now cut and the too few public routes being full. Schoolchildren have lost their direct school buses and are now left to catch public buses, making transfers at busy interchanges, a concept which really worries me as a mum of children across primary and middle-school ages.

When this change was first suggested I had my own personal panic because I have an 11-year-old who has ADHD. He thinks that every person he meets will be his best friend. The idea of him at a major bus interchange was very distressing to me personally because I know what would happen under those circumstances. He would make friends with all sorts of people.

At the end of the day, the danger that a child is in is up to the parents to determine. If parents have come to us and they believe that their children are in danger, the minister should not be mocking us but should be taking that matter very seriously.

I have recently received correspondence from constituents in Kambah whose 10-year-old daughter can no longer catch a direct bus home from Sacred Heart primary in Pearce. She is now forced to have to make a lengthy and daunting transfer at Woden interchange.

I am not sure what is entertaining the minister, but I would not mind if she would listen to this. Her previous school bus, the 629, went via Garran primary, Marist, Melrose, Sacred Heart and Torrens primary. The so-called replacement route, the 2035 and the 2036, now skips Sacred Heart. My constituent told me, and I quote:

I feel that it is unsafe to expect my daughter to navigate a busy interchange. Therefore, our family faces either increased childcare costs or after-school care or loss of income incurred by reducing hours at work to allow for previously unneeded school pick-ups. The bus route we need exists; it just does not stop at the school any longer.

I urge the minister to consider the impacts of these cuts and, in particular, this change, and investigate if this new school route could be amended to include the students of Sacred Heart primary at Pearce.

MISS C BURCH (Kurrajong) (5.33): The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the minister's amendments today. By opposing my motion today the minister has demonstrated that she does not, in fact, have confidence in the quality of her network and in the safety of children under this network. If children were so safe and if Canberra were so safe, then the minister would have no issue in releasing analysis to prove this to be the case.

As if this were not evidence enough to demonstrate the minister's complete negligence when it comes to student safety, I would also like to quickly draw the chamber's attention to Transport Canberra's walk safely to school initiative taking place this Friday. I visited this website recently expecting to find some advice for students and children on road safety and stranger danger, but was incredibly surprised to discover the only advice relating to safety recommends that drivers obey traffic signs and that the best way to keep children safe is to reduce the number of cars around our schools, which the minister has not managed to achieve in this case.

I then opened up the "What do I do if" form thinking that this had to be the place where they included road safety and stranger danger, but was even more surprised to see that this simply told students what to do if they got a flat tyre.

It is absolutely absurd that the minister is again accusing me of fabricating these concerns and that Ms Le Couteur has echoed that sentiment today. These are not my concerns; these are the concerns of hundreds upon hundreds of parents that we have heard from and continue to hear from every day—parents who cannot believe that this minister continues to ignore them and refuses to acknowledge their concerns.

We are not saying that parents are negligent for letting their children catch public buses. We have never said that. Parents are free to make that choice and the Canberra

Liberals will continue to support them to make that choice. What we are saying is that they should not be left with no choice. They deserve better from this minister, and the children of Canberra deserve better from this minister. But, instead, she continues to refuse to acknowledge these concerns and continues to let them down.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10		Noes 8	
Ms J Burch	Ms Le Couteur	Miss C Burch	Ms Lawder
Ms Cheyne	Ms Orr	Mr Coe	Mr Milligan
Ms Cody	Mr Pettersson	Mrs Dunne	Mr Parton
Ms Fitzharris	Mr Ramsay	Mrs Jones	
Mr Gentleman	Ms Stephen-Smith	Mrs Kikkert	

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Building—National Construction Code

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (5.40): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes the:

- (a) critical importance of government compliance with current building regulations and rules, including the National Construction Code;
- (b) need to prepare for building code updates and building regulation reforms within required implementation dates;
- (c) necessity for effective stakeholder relationships and consultation to ensure government regulators and industry bodies responsible for applying regulation are harmonised to guarantee proper implementation;
- (d) most recent National Construction Code amendments were adopted by all other states and the Northern Territory on the recognised due date of 1 May 2019;
- (e) the Minister for Building Quality Improvement approved a delay in adopting the recent National Construction Code amendments to 1 September 2019 arguing that industry needed more time to adjust for the substantial changes;
- (f) the Minister is reported to have said the Government had considered industry feedback before deciding on the delay;
- (g) conduct of further talks with industry over the weekend of 4 to 5 May revealed industry practitioners did not require further time to adjust for most of the changes;

- (h) the Minister then decided to adopt a majority of the changes on 1 June 2019;
 - (i) doubts this raises over the Minister's ability to consult effectively with industry and stakeholders; and
 - (j) the Minister still has a significant number of ACT Government building regulation reforms outstanding despite a firm commitment to have all 43 in place by the end of 2017-18; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) review the adequacy of governance resources for the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to ensure its capacity to liaise with industry and assess its capacity to implement updates of construction standards and other building regulation reforms;
 - (b) expedite implementation of outstanding elements of the National Construction Code update; and
 - (c) as a matter of urgency, complete implementation of the Government's own building regulation reforms.

This is a pretty basic motion concerning the nuts and bolts of good governance and assurance for the building industry and the clients of that industry. I am pleased to report, for anyone in this chamber who does not know, that it looks as though we will reach some agreement on this today, the three parties represented here in the chamber. And that is always a good thing, I think. It is always a wonderful thing.

Of course the clients of the ACT building industry are the Canberra community itself. Our community needs the confidence that its building activity is supported by rules that guarantee construction is delivered to the highest levels of quality, functionality and safety. I appreciate that our industry associations work hard to meet these objectives. I would like to say that unions work hard to meet this objective. But they cannot do it alone. It is impossible because the government also plays a major role in this space. And everyone in this sector has got to work together to some extent. In relation to the government's role this motion seeks that the government gets its role right, not only in terms of regulation but also in terms of consultation and clarity of stakeholder engagement.

I have moved, as I said earlier, a pretty simply motion here. It is a motion that calls on this government to perform one of its basic obligations, and that is to make sure that we have the right building regulations and stakeholder engagement processes in place. It is not the first time our side of the chamber has asked the government to have a go at this. As I recall, we were compelled to do something similar back in March last year in relation to the implementation of the government's own building regulation reforms. There is a bit of *deja vu* on this issue and I fear that building compliance issues are not receiving the priority that they deserve, despite some improved efforts from the minister.

In this case, the specific issue is the recent treatment by the Minister for Building Quality Improvement in relation to updates of the National Construction Code. The

National Construction Code sets out the minimum necessary requirements for safety, health amenity, accessibility and sustainability in design, construction and performance. Among other things, its prescriptions cover multi-residential, houses, commercial, public buildings and structures, including plumbing and drainage. These things are very important to all of us.

The NCC is relied upon by architects, builders, plumbers, building certifiers, surveyors and engineers. It is pretty well a fundamental ingredient and assurance for construction quality and the consumers' confidence in the structural resilience of a building and also its performance and fit-for-purpose factors. It is pretty important that all stakeholders in the construction game, including those who commission or purchase a building, are confident that their purchase is compliant with the National Construction Code and buildings codes enshrined in territory legislation.

It is not a trivial matter. This government's development visions are resplendent with plans for many thousands of new apartments and houses—I am paying a compliment here—and these will be augmented with additional thousands of commercial and public structures. There is a bit going on. The application of outdated construction codes and the impact of delays while the codes are brought up to date could have enormous impacts on the costs and quality of building construction, including for private and public housing.

I note that, in the discussion where we were halfway between changing the dates on this, the minister said that builders who had cross-state and territory-aligned work could choose to adopt the national code; they did not have to wait for it to be implemented in the ACT. But we do not think that that is the way to go about things. In the interests of effective governance, we would expect the Minister for Building Quality Improvement to stay on top of these updates.

According to reports, the most recent update required by the Australian Building Codes Board was made available last February and put online in the following month for a 1 May implementation date. The NCC website indicates the latest round of updates were adopted by all states and the Northern Territory on 1 May, with the ACT to adopt these on 1 June.

I know that when the minister brings his amendments forward he will have a different view there. The Minister for Building Quality Improvement originally told industry that the ACT would take these up by 1 September because the building industry apparently said it needed more time to understand and absorb the changes. I am not sure if that is what they did say. It was reported that the minister's decision to defer was made on 29 April, two days before the updates were to be implemented. It is not a good look, is it?

It then transpired that not all the industry sector representatives had been consulted. In fact, most were prepared and able to adopt the changes. This compelled the minister to commission an urgent review of the advice that led to the deferral decision and in turn led to some frantic consultations with industry over the weekend of 4 and 5 May. These consultations produced a more fulsome perspective of industry's capacity to

move ahead with the changes. I am not quite sure then what happened in the process that led to that 29 April call. I know that the minister has tried to enlighten us on that in public spaces in the past couple of weeks. I am sure we will hear more from him soon.

The minister then proceeded to nominate 1 June for the implementation date, except for certain provisions related to sprinkler systems and the like. I understand the genuine logistical problems with that particular aspect. Clearly there was a significant lack of industry-wide consultation over these updates. This not only confused but also appears to have aggravated some industry bodies responsible for implementation of the changes. In a sense, this chain of events is not the end of the world. But the erratic changes in direction could disrupt industry and confuse their chains of communication. Of course it could have impacts on costs and the purchase of the property.

In retrospect, for the benefit of industry and this chamber, I believe it would be useful to see the brief which the minister's original announcement was based on and also the brief delivered on the Monday arising from the weekend consultations on 4 and 5 May that led to the minister's revised decision. It was these events that have sparked this motion.

I acknowledge the daunting task confronting the responsible directorate and the minister in this area. And we, by no means, are of the belief that this is an easy task. But I do not think we can casually overlook the devastating impacts of getting building regulatory management wrong. As we have all seen, it can devastate people's lives and their financial security. This is an area that can be readily fixed.

But as we have seen, it is not just the National Construction Code that has the hiccups. We have also spoken in the past, and I mentioned earlier in this speech, the government's own building regulation reforms. A number of these reforms remain in abeyance and have certainly fallen well past the 2017-18 deadline for their full implementation.

I suspect a basic cause is resources in the right areas of the EPSD Directorate. And to some extent I think that has been acknowledged and to some extent, by the looks of the amendment from the government, has perhaps in some way been dealt with. It is also possible, of course, that the government is having second thoughts about some of the 43 reforms. But we will see.

I hope this motion gives some impetus for ensuring that skilled staff are allocated, properly trained and made effective in clearing up the building regulatory reform mess. We all know it is all well and good to have the staff but they must be backed up with the right training and development to ensure full effectiveness. And this includes not overloading them to the point that they leave way too soon because they are stressed out.

It is obvious that there is also a yawning gap in the minister's inclination to embrace the need to personally engage with advocacy and industry bodies. And I do not say that as a snide political remark. That is my perception based on what I have seen and

heard. Even if he feels somewhat uncomfortable in that part of the role, I think it is a role that he must embrace and become adept at. Perhaps I have read that situation wrongly but all I can do is reflect on the feedback that I have got.

My motion calls for some unsophisticated but simple outcomes that are well within the reach of the government. It is obvious the minister needs to put more resources into the governance and technical processing areas to make sure the standards and their adoption are effectively facilitated, including through effective consultation by the minister. The NCC updates will be implemented against the 1 June deadline with another tranche in place by 1 September. The minister must ensure these targets are met. And if they can be implemented sooner and the industry is comfortable to do so, then all the better.

Finally, this motion calls for completion of the government's own reforms which will serve to plug major gaps in our regulatory capability. No doubt other reforms could emerge to reinforce these even further, including any provisions which might be redundant or near impossible to comply with.

MR RAMSAY (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for the Arts and Cultural Events, Minister for Building Quality Improvement, Minister for Business and Regulatory Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (5.50): I am pleased to rise today in response to the motion from Mr Parton in relation to building quality. As part of that response, I move:

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

“(1) notes the:

- (a) importance of harmonised building codes across jurisdictions;
- (b) need to prepare for building code updates and building regulation reforms within required implementation dates;
- (c) necessity for effective stakeholder relationships and consultation to ensure government regulators and industry bodies responsible for applying regulation are harmonised to guarantee proper implementation; and
- (d) most recent National Construction Code amendments were adopted by all other states and the Northern Territory on the recognised due date of 1 May 2019 and that:
 - (i) Western Australia allows the previous code to be used for a period of up to 12 months after a new code is adopted;
 - (ii) Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Tasmania have provisions in their law that allow a certifier to disapply the new version in circumstances where substantial progress has been made on the design of the building before the new provisions are adopted;
 - (iii) in New South Wales and South Australia, if an application for approval is made before the adoption date, it can be assessed against the version of the code in force at the time of the application; and

- (iv) in the ACT, an application for building approval must be assessed against the code as adopted on date of approval, rather than the date the application was made, with no other transition provisions available;
 - (e) Minister for Building Quality Improvement approved a delay in adopting the recent National Construction Code amendments to 1 September 2019 after hearing from a number of individual licensees on the change;
 - (f) further talks conducted with industry representative groups over the weekend of 4 to 5 May which indicated many practitioners did not require further time to adjust for most of the changes;
 - (g) Minister then decided to adopt a majority of the changes on 1 June 2019;
 - (h) rollout of building reforms has been delayed and the Government is continuing to actively roll out its building regulation reforms as a matter of priority; and
 - (i) team within the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate responsible for this has been augmented since the beginning of 2019 to include an additional qualified building surveyor, a qualified structural engineer, as well as experts in policy development, regulation and design, raising the team from three FTE to eight FTE; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) ensure adequate consultation with industry on building regulation reforms;
 - (b) expedite implementation of outstanding elements of the National Construction Code update; and
 - (c) as a matter of urgency, complete implementation of the Government's own building regulation reforms."

The government takes building quality very seriously. That is why we have been strongly advocating in the building ministers forum for strong and progressive measures in the code, lifting the quality of buildings not just in the ACT but nationwide. The code is implemented in a number of different ways throughout the country. Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Tasmania all have provisions that allow a certifier to disapply the new version of the code in circumstances where substantial progress has been made on the design of the building before the new provisions are adopted.

Western Australia has a different way of doing the transition period: it provides for a transition of 12 months after the date the code is adopted. In New South Wales and South Australia there is a different way of working for that transition period: if an application for approval is made before the adoption date it can be assessed against the version of the code that is in force at the time of the application. The ACT, however, applies the code in force on the date of the building approval. That is why it was important to consider how we transition to the new provisions in the code.

Concerns were communicated to EPSDD, including at an ACT Fire & Rescue industry day on 9 April and at an NCC seminar held by the HIA on 17 April this year,

in relation to the lack of transition in the ACT for new provisions. Master Plumbers Australia and the National Fire Industry Association wrote to me seeking further clarity about how new fire sprinkler provisions would be applied in the ACT, including the resolution of the interaction between the plumbing and the building systems.

That is why I delayed the introduction of the code to 1 September. When it became apparent that not all stakeholders had been adequately consulted on the decision, I asked for urgent advice from EPSDD on whether we could bring this forward for at least some less controversial or less significant amendments. As a result of listening to that further consultation with the many stakeholders involved in the industry, I have brought forward the implementation of all other provisions, with the ability to use either the 2016 or the 2019 code until 1 September on measures regarding fire sprinklers and condensation.

The sprinkler provisions, while important, include changes to practices across both building and plumbing design and installation. We want to manage any potential risks and make sure that the specifications take into account our local plumbing and our firefighting requirements. This is a matter of detail that we need to ensure is done correctly. We also have an interest in improving energy efficiency and building sealing, which can affect the management of condensation in buildings in the ACT. So we are considering further guidance for industry for situations where the risk of condensation is high.

We will work tirelessly to improve the quality of buildings across the territory. That is why we undertook a thorough review of the framework, which resulted in the comprehensive reform package. The system includes a process of stages of construction, all requiring checks and compliance with standards. It includes inspection stages and a regulatory system for oversight and enforcement and for the protection of building owners. It requires that building work is adequately supervised by a qualified and a licensed person. Our reform program is making sure that this system operates as a system and as intended.

To date we have made a series of legislative amendments giving new powers to the construction occupations registrar and increasing protections for building owners. We have introduced provisions that will help prevent licensees avoiding their obligations and starting up another licence. We have also expanded statutory warranties to all new residential buildings in the ACT, regardless of their height and scale. We have also created a public register of information about licensees so that anyone who is thinking about engaging someone to do construction work will be able to see if any actions have been taken against them in the last 10 years.

We recently introduced exams for applicants for class A and B licences to make sure that people understand the obligations of a licensee before they are granted a licence. A similar assessment for building surveyors is in development, as well as an online training course for building surveyors on the ACT regulatory system and the role and obligations of a building certifier. Completing the assessment and the course will become mandatory for new building surveyor licence applicants.

We have also released a preview of new documentation guidelines for building approval applications for apartment and commercial buildings. These guidelines will make clear to people who are commissioning design work and people undertaking that work what the minimum information is that must be included in an application for building approval.

New codes of practice for building, for builders and for building surveyors will also be released for consultation shortly. The code for building surveyors recognises the important regulatory role that they play in the system and includes requirements in relation to building approvals and stage inspections. For builders the code will provide guidance and practice standards for supervision and for verifying the compliance of building work at critical points in a building project. We look forward to hearing industry's views on each and every one of these documents.

We are also working on reforms to help people entering into contracts for residential building work to know their rights and obligations when they are entering into contracts for building work or for a home off the plan. We are also soon to launch our new build and buy web portal, which will be a central point for the community and industry to find information about the building system.

When it comes to resourcing this work, the government has allocated significant budget resources to improve the building quality here in the ACT. The investment includes \$3 million to undertake work in the building sector, including reforms within the Environment, Planning, and Sustainable Development Directorate and Access Canberra. This includes 43 reforms spanning compliance, policy and design quality, licensing reforms and dispute resolution, just to name a few. In my ministerial statement of 20 March 2019 I advised of the program and of the reforms, including those that were completed, those that are to be completed by 30 June this year and those that are scheduled for completion by the middle of next year.

The team in the EPSDD has been augmented since the beginning of 2019 to include an additional qualified building surveyor and a qualified structural engineer, as well as experts in policy development, regulation and design. Since this significant investment the team within EPSDD has increased from three full-time equivalent to eight full-time equivalent. This will ensure that the government can deliver on this comprehensive reform package.

I note and welcome federal Labor's commitment to working with the states and the territories on the implementation of the Murray review. It is yet another reason why people across the ACT should be voting Labor this weekend in the federal election, as they will work with us on the issue of the security of payments, which the current federal Liberal government has not committed to do.

Since the reforms began we have included new and enhanced powers in building and construction licensing laws. The ACT government has a renewed focus on building quality regulation, and much progress has been made in this space. Since July last year Access Canberra has resolved over 400 building and planning cases. Almost 200

of these were resolved by the new rapid regulatory response team, which is a great initiative by the people in Access Canberra. It has been key to resolving complaints in a timely manner and reducing ongoing cases by 20 per cent. Access Canberra is still working hard to resolve over 150 active building and planning cases.

The ACT government's focus has meant that there has been increased enforcement activity, especially for multi-unit developments. We are working towards positive change within the industry as a result of the increase in enforcement activities. Access Canberra has issued a total of six notices of intention to issue a rectification order for multi-unit developments. The regulatory actions also include eight notices of intention to issue a rectification order, with three rectification orders being issued; 15 show cause notices, with six controlled activity orders being issued; 178 demerit points to construction occupation licensees; and 28 stop work notices.

In addition to the new exams for class A and B builders, we recently introduced laws to give the construction occupations registrar the power to require exams at the time of renewal. Access Canberra's plumbing, drainage and gas inspectors continue to enable owners to occupy their buildings as soon as possible, with the time frame for inspections being two to three business days.

In the last four months alone, Access Canberra has conducted almost 5,000 inspections in this space. The electrical inspectorate within Access Canberra continues to undertake inspections in a timely manner, including inspecting 100 per cent of new electrical installations. This means that they have conducted almost 30,000 inspections this financial year.

The progress that has been made to improve building quality so far is impressive and ongoing. A stronger regulatory response requires more time, and there is still much more to do in the building quality space to benefit the community, as it is our commitment and our dedication as a government to do. I have asked the directorate to continue to roll out these reforms as a matter of its highest priority. We have committed to having completed at least 28 reforms by the end of this financial year, and I have asked the directorate to see if there are more that can be brought forward and implemented before then.

I look forward to updating members further as the reforms continue to progress and we see the benefit of these in improving building quality. We are committed to ensuring that we have the highest quality buildings and the highest confidence in the sector, and also a strong regulatory response on those few occasions where it is necessary.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (6.02): The Greens support the thrust of Mr Parton's motion but also support the ALP amendment, which clarifies some facts and, even more positively, reveals some very good news on resourcing. Mr Parton's motion deals with two issues: a government bungle with the rollout of updates to the National Construction Code, and progress on industry building reforms, which have been disappointingly slow. There is not much I can say about the bungle, lack of consultation et cetera. The ALP amendment clarifies some of the facts and,

importantly, owns up to the stuff-up. I think it is a positive thing that the government acknowledges what did not go so well. I hope the government has learned its lesson and will consult better in the future.

The building reforms are in the long run much more important. The Greens have been concerned about the delays in these for a long time. I regularly hear from distressed constituents about building reform issues. The bottom line is that people need to build trust in the regulatory system. We, as normal punters, cannot look at a building and say, “Has it been well built? Is it safe? Will it be waterproof if there’s severe rain?”—all of those things that we rely on the regulatory system to get right. Even more worryingly, maybe, we are building some really tall towers these days, and that is where it appears that quite a few of the problems are. The issues involved in fixing those and potentially demolishing them are rather worrying, to put it mildly.

The positive is that I am very happy to hear that the staffing of the building policy team has been increased to eight full-time equivalent. Last November, we know from annual reports, there was only one person, which was grossly inadequate, no matter how positively you may feel about Ms Morris. Given that, Mr Parton’s item 2(a) needs to be changed. We do not really need to review the resourcing, because they have just increased it. The ALP amendment replaces that with a commitment to better resourcing, which is a sensible alternative.

Apart from the fact that we need to have enough resourcing to build trust in our regulatory system, which clearly has not been the case in the past, the lack of building quality resourcing has also led to other important issues being on hold: the parliamentary agreement review of the EER scheme and the parliamentary agreement item on minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties. I look forward to both of those progressing now.

I thank Mr Parton for his very timely motion. I thank Minister Ramsay for his sensible amendment and, even more than that, I thank him for the fact that he now has some more staff employed in this area. Hopefully, things will get better and we will see rapid progress on building industry reforms and the energy efficiency work.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Dr Enrico Taglietti—tribute

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (6.06): I rise to mark the passing of Dr Enrico Taglietti, and to advise members of a condolence book available for signing at the

Dickson Library. Dr Enrico Taglietti was one of Canberra's foremost architects from 1956 onwards. Almost all Canberrans will have seen or used one of his buildings. These are well-known Canberra buildings, including the Dickson Library and the neighbouring health centre, the Flynn primary school, the Giralang Primary School, the building on Bunda Street in the city that used to be the Centre Cinema, and the Polish White Eagle Club in Turner.

Dr Taglietti's buildings are distinctive landmarks around Canberra. For those members not familiar with them, they usually have exposed concrete walls and one or more flat metal roofs. The Polish club is a good example of the use of roofs because four separate roof levels line up in close parallel when seen from David Street. You can see a similar effect with the two roof levels of the Dickson Library when you look at it from the car park on either side of the building.

Dickson Library is the building by Dr Taglietti that I have spent most time in; as a former Downer resident, it was my local library. Among its notable features are the small courtyard gardens in each of the building's four corners. Unfortunately, these have been somewhat neglected. The other thing which is a bit unfortunate is that the sunken floor in the middle has been removed. It was really nice for groups, particularly when groups of little kids got together there and did things. It was a wonderful place for giggle and wiggle, and that was the sort of thing it was designed for.

Dickson Library was added to the ACT Heritage Register in 2008, and it is worth quoting from the listing:

The Dickson Library is significant in being the earliest civic building to demonstrate the National Capital Development Commission's ... move to introduce modern architectural styles to Canberra ... The library is significant as an innovative and significant work by Enrico Taglietti, one of Canberra's noted architects, in his first commission from the NCDC. Its design significance is widely recognised by professional bodies and architecture critics in listings and publications on significant architecture.

I had the privilege of meeting Dr Taglietti in association with Flynn primary school, which is no longer functioning as such. There have been some significant issues with its preservation.

I conclude by spreading the word about the condolence book. It is at the Dickson Library and is available for anyone who would like to write a note to Dr Taglietti's family. I understand the National Trust ACT branch have arranged for it to be at the Dickson Library until the end of May. I urge anyone with appreciation for his work to sign it.

Anzac Day—events

MR RAMSAY (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for the Arts and Cultural Events, Minister for Building Quality Improvement, Minister for Business and Regulatory Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (6.10): It was a privilege

to represent the people of the ACT at a number of events over Anzac Day this year. It started at the national ceremony, where I represented the Chief Minister and laid a wreath on behalf of the people of the ACT. The national ceremony is particularly important on that day; it gives veterans and their families the chance to march and to be acknowledged by the Governor-General, and in this case also the New Zealand Ambassador. It was a moving ceremony, with the Governor-General providing his final Anzac Day address in that role.

From there I attended the ceremony at the French Embassy, where I was again privileged to lay a wreath on behalf of all Canberrans. We heard moving speeches from the French Ambassador and others on the closeness of the bonds between Australia and France that have grown since the First World War and how grateful they are to Australia and Australians for what we did in France.

It was also great to hear from Joseph Zimet, the director-general of the centenary partnership program, and to be there for the launch of their new program to help preserve and share the history and stories of the connection between France and Australia in the First World War. This is to ensure that the stories of what occurred during that time are both preserved and actively shared.

Following that, I attended the last post ceremony at the Australian War Memorial. We heard the story of Sergeant Charles Backman, who was killed in action in Gallipoli. We heard how he landed on the beaches in the early waves on the first day of that operation but that his body was never found. His name is memorialised at the Lone Pine Memorial at Gallipoli.

It was a day of sombre reflection; reflection on how we should remember those who died more than a century ago, on how we should honour their memories and how we should honour those who have served since then and those who are still serving, as well as the families who support them. It was, indeed, an honour that I had in my role as minister for veterans.

ACT Heritage Library

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (6.12): I rise today to speak about the ACT Heritage Library, which I visited recently as part of the Heritage Festival specifically to see the space exhibit that they have on at the moment. The Heritage Library has recently moved from Woden to Fyshwick. They have some lovely new facilities. The space exhibit specifically showcases one of the important moments in our city's history, when we were part of an international endeavour to put a person on the surface of the moon and, indeed, we played such an important role in that.

Many of the items and the artefacts provided to the exhibit at the Heritage Library in Fyshwick were provided by ex-tracking station employees, including Mike Dinn and John Saxon. It was wonderful to see the items, many of which I had seen before from my own work out at the tracking station. It was great to see them again and see the way they were combined with other items within the Heritage Library's collection.

When we arrived we were warmly greeted by library staff and offered a tour of the facility, which was wonderful. I put on record my thanks to the manager of the Heritage Library, Antoinette Buchanan, who very kindly accommodated us without any prior knowledge. She is passionate, knowledgeable and dedicated to the work there. She is so enthusiastic, and we really enjoyed the tour of the facility.

It is a treasure trove of local information and history. It includes items such as plans and government documents. It has newspapers and maps. It has artworks and novels; local journals and books; and all sorts of trinkets, knick-knacks and ephemera, some of which relate to elections in the ACT, for example. It is advertised as “helping to tell the stories of Canberra and its people” and that is very true.

Yet it provides so much more. It provides the assistance and facilitation of easy access to historical data for researchers who go there and use the facilities. There is the preservation aspect, where information and historical items are secured, organised and catalogued. It is a very safe area. They engage with the community and promote history with other libraries. They encourage local groups with an interest in the history of Canberra to use the space for meetings and for their research purposes.

We saw some wonderful items in the collection, including some of the early Floriade posters; some contracts for farming land in the parliamentary triangle; collections of decades of political material; local academic journals on cacti, for example; souvenir medallions with the territory logo; and much, much more.

It is a great asset for the community, perhaps not well known. I really enjoyed my visit there on two fronts: to learn more about not only the Heritage Library and view its new facilities in Fyshwick but also the space exhibition running as part of the Heritage Festival. I believe it is running for a while longer at the Heritage Library. If you are interested in space, I encourage you to go out there and have a look. I am sure you will learn more about what is in the Heritage Library as well.

Thank you so much to Antoinette and her team for accommodating us when we went to visit and for offering us a tour. Thank you for all the work that they do towards preserving, curating and maintaining those important links with Canberra’s history.

Environment—textiles industry

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (6.16): I rise tonight to call for greater action on containing the harmful impacts on our natural environment as a result of the textiles industry. I especially want to draw your attention to the widespread social and environmental consequences of fast fashion. Fast fashion is a relatively new phenomenon where big name fashion retailers copy looks from the catwalk and mass produce garments at a low cost with a high turnover. Due to the convenience and affordability of these items, the fast fashion movement has generated poor consumer habits.

People would rather spend \$50 on a new pair of jeans than pay for them to be repaired. Clothing is now sold in supermarkets and is considered disposable. The temptation to impulsively shop for unnecessary items simply because they are cheap has become

increasingly more common. Fast fashion has perpetuated an overwhelming sense of carelessness for sustainability. This is having a devastating impact on our environment.

To give you a bit of an idea about the intensity of these environmental impacts, I want to present you with some hard-hitting facts. The textiles industry is one of the top five polluting industries in the world. It can take between 10,000 and 15,000 litres of water to manufacture just one pair of jeans. In Australia we send approximately 85 per cent of the textiles we buy to landfill each year. This equates to about six tonnes of clothing every ten minutes.

A significant proportion of the textiles we import into Australia each year has been manufactured in developing countries such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. These countries lack regulatory systems. Further, they put at risk their natural resources. This leads to the contamination of waterways due to the use of harmful pesticides and toxic chemicals.

The international expansion of fast fashion has created such a demand that the working conditions of textile workers are often compromised, which has resulted in the emergence of social injustices such as modern slavery. The rise of fast fashion is entirely exploitative, with the primary example being the 2013 Rana Plaza building collapse near Savar, Bangladesh, where 1,134 textile workers died. It was exposed after the collapse that these workers were operating under conditions of modern slavery. Their deaths were completely preventable. It just goes to show the level of disregard for ethical considerations when it comes to supply chains meeting growing consumer demands.

I know that Canberrans care about our natural environment. They support initiatives designed to contain the impacts of climate change and social justice. I know this because just last month I stood among hundreds of Canberrans, young and old, at the school strikes for climate change.

I am confident that poor consumer habits are not a result of sheer disregard for the environment or human rights. I believe it comes down to a lack of awareness. As a local representative who cares about our environment, I want to do what I can to endorse better consumer behaviour here in the ACT. I want people to know about the increase in pollution, the exploitation of human rights and the draining of non-renewable natural resources associated with the fast fashion industry. I believe that if people were provided with the information I have just shared with you there would be greater support for the ethical and sustainable fashion movement.

There are so many ways we can improve. We can start with small changes, by investing in better quality garments, reducing the need to replace items of clothing regularly. We can support brands that have been ethically audited and meet the requirements for safe working conditions and a fair working wage. Another alternative is to buy second-hand items. Some great options include op shops or vintage clothing stores, even Facebook second-hand clothing forums. Instead of discarding unwanted clothing items in the rubbish, Zara and H&M offer donation boxes, with materials being repurposed to produce things like housing insulation.

I finish up by pointing out some of the amazing work being done in this field in the local community. I recently met with Nina Gbor, who runs her own fashion line Eco.Styles. Nina's line uses recycled textiles to reduce landfill waste and uses non-harmful dyes and chemicals. Other than being a style icon, she is also a huge advocate for better working conditions for garment workers and recognises how these issues disproportionately affect women in developing countries. I stand before the Assembly today to discuss this topic because I want to show how we as consumers hold the power when it comes to making decisions about how we shop.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.21 pm.