



Debates

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Wednesday, 21 August 2019

MADAM SPEAKER (Ms J Burch) took the chair at 10 am, 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.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Lawder for this sitting due to illness.

Mental health—services for the hearing and sight-impaired

MR WALL (Brindabella) (10.01): Pursuant to standing order 127, at the request of Ms Lawder, I ask that we fix the next day of sitting for the moving of this motion.

Taxation—increases

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) rapidly increasing taxation by the ACT Government is driving Canberrans into financial hardship; and
- (b) the ACT Government and the Legislative Assembly have a duty of care and obligation to put the best interests of Canberrans first; and

(2) calls on the Labor-Greens Government to stop their punitive increases to rates, taxes, fees and charges.

We owe it to all Canberrans, particularly those on low incomes, that we change this punitive rates regime. There is no doubt that the increases in rates, taxes, fees and charges that this Labor Party is imposing on Canberrans are hurting thousands of Canberra families. There is no doubt that these increases are punitive. They are regressive. They are hurting those on the lowest income the most.

From a Labor Party that claim to be about social justice, claim to represent those who are doing it tough, it is a very nasty regime that they have imposed on these families. After 18 years of Labor, 19 years come October next year, they are obviously far more interested in their own pet projects, far more interested in their own vanity, than they are in the welfare of the people that they are meant to represent.

The original plan that we were told about back in 2012 was that the rates reform would be more efficient and would be revenue neutral. Nobody can claim that this is revenue neutral. If efficiency means simply gouging Canberrans more, it has been a roaring success. There is no doubt about that. They have gouged Canberrans to a huge extent.

From 2012-13 through to 2018, own-source taxation increased at a rate of 6.8 per cent per annum—6.8 per cent! In the same time, population growth was about two per cent, perhaps even a tad lower. We have had taxation increasing at 6.8 per cent and population increasing at two per cent. If we put inflation on top of that, it is still nowhere near that 6.8 per cent increase that we have had since 2012.

For all this talk that it is more efficient, for all this talk that they have abolished taxes, the insurance duty and stamp duty savings are pretty much in the margins, especially for that family that still live in their own home, and have for years, for that family that paid stamp duty all those years ago.

The majority of home owners in Canberra who have recently purchased a property know all too well that stamp duty is alive in the ACT, because people are still paying huge amounts in stamp duty. That is why, despite the fact that stamp duty was abolished, despite the fact that stamp duty was going out the door, stamp duty today still brings in \$260 million in revenue. That is \$260 million from a tax that was supposedly abolished.

Canberrans have been conned. Canberrans do not make the wrong decisions. Canberrans have been deceived. They were told by their government back in 2012 that it would just be a cup of coffee a week: it would be marginal; it would just be \$2.80 a week; they would hardly notice it. Well, Canberrans are noticing it, and it is those on the lowest incomes that are noticing it the most.

There is no doubt that there are many families in Canberra that can manage the increases in the cost of living that this government is imposing. But I also know of many families in Canberra that are doing it tough, many families that would have been part of the Labor base: the working poor, the people that were doing it tough but were having a go. They are the people that the ACT Labor Party has left behind. They have not left Labor; Labor has left them.

The Labor Party of today is not the Labor Party they once supported. This Labor Party needs a massive reset. This Labor Party needs to recalibrate. This Labor Party needs to go back to its roots, because it is hurting so many families that should be its natural constituency.

Since 2011-12 the fixed charge has increased by more than 60 per cent. There is the fixed charge of rates. That is why it is regressive; that is why it is punitive. The fire and emergency services levy has increased by more than 240 per cent. Again, that is a fixed charge, a punitive charge with a regressive impact.

Further to that, this government has impacted low income households by numerous changes to the structure of concessions regimes and other policies. They have eroded concessions; they have increased the flat charges or the flat fees. They have increased taxation beyond the revenue replacement that they promised, and beyond population growth. There is a regressive transfer of costs as part of that revenue replacement. And then there are distributional impacts from the revenue replacement of stamp duty to general rates. We are not just talking about people who are buying homes; we are talking about everybody paying even more.

As Mr Stanhope and Dr Ahmed said, there is a real impact from the increase in taxation for families on low incomes. The \$100 increase in taxation for a wealthy household is not going to have the same impact that a \$100 increase is going to have on a poor household. Even if you are talking about this notional cup of coffee a week, \$2.80 a week for a family with \$200,000 a year in income may well be a drop in the ocean, but \$2.80 a week for a family on \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year becomes far more significant. Of course, there are many households that are not even on \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year.

What is more, we are not just talking about a cup of coffee a week, as the Chief Minister promised back in 2012; we are talking about considerably more than that. In fact, the increases to the fixed charges, the fire and emergency services levy and the fixed component of rates alone are considerably more than that cup of coffee a week. Now we are talking about a cup of coffee a day, and then some.

When you talk about \$20 to \$30 extra a week, you are starting to impact people's quality of life pretty significantly. You are starting to impact people's expenditure choices. People start to have to forgo things; they start to have to sacrifice. Often, that is going to mean sacrifice as to whether they turn the heating on in winter, on Christmas, on that trip to the coast, on that schnitzel down at the club once a fortnight.

It is all very well to look at budget papers and just see numbers scattered across hundreds of pages, but there is a personal impact from all of these decisions. It is all very well for the Chief Minister to sit up in his office, meet with treasury officials and just dial it up slightly—a bit more, a bit more—year on year. That dialling it up, that magnification, has a huge impact, especially on the lower quintiles in our community.

This goes to fairness, it goes to justice and it goes to deception. If you said back in 2012 what the situation would be in 2019, a lot of people would not believe you. But that is exactly what did happen. Back in 2012 the Canberra Liberals said that rates would triple. We were accused of fearmongering; we were accused of lying.

Let us have a look at the numbers today. Let us have a look at what is in the budget papers for 2020-21. Let us have a look at the distributional impact of this rates regime. Let us have a look at just how many families in Canberra are doing it tough. People in 2012 were conned; they were deceived by their government.

Surely there are members of the Labor Party—surely there are MLAs in this place, on the other side of the chamber—who know that this regime is hurting Canberrans. Do any of them speak out? Do any of them speak up internally? Do any of them say, “Enough is enough. Let's just put it on hold. Let's just put our pride away for a moment and put the brakes on”? We do not hear it. How can they just ignore the emails that they must receive from the people that we receive emails from? They say they are doing it tough as a result of the cost of living; they are doing it tough because of the rates, taxes, fees and charges imposed by this government. I am afraid the stock standard line that we have a more efficient tax system does not quite cut it when you are cold in winter.

This is a nasty government. It is a government that has forgotten about its base. It is a government that is abusing its position by gouging so many Canberra families. These increases have to stop.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Social Inclusion and Equality, Minister for Tertiary Education, Minister for Tourism and Special Events and Minister for Trade, Industry and Investment) (10.17): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

In paragraph (1), omit all text after “notes”, substitute:

- “(a) that, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the ACT’s tax per capita is in line with the national average and significantly lower than New South Wales and Victoria;
 - (b) the financial volatility experienced in other Australian states and territories which has led to multi-billion-dollar budget write-downs as a result of shortfalls in stamp duty revenue caused by the boom and bust cycle of the Australian property market;
 - (c) the recommendation contained in the final report of the *Australia’s Future Tax System Review*—informally known as the *Henry Tax Review*—for Australian states and territories to undertake a tax-mix switch away from inefficient taxes such as stamp duty to more efficient broad-based taxes;
 - (d) that the ACT Government is currently undertaking such a tax-mix switch through its 20-year tax reform agenda, which is designed to create *stability* in the ACT Budget and avoid the financial volatility experienced in other Australian jurisdictions; and
 - (e) that the heaviest lifting of this reform process has now been achieved and the rate of growth in rates will now begin to slow as the ACT *Government* moves towards the next five-year phase of tax reform;
- (2) further notes that the ACT Government and the Legislative Assembly each have an obligation to put the best interests of Canberrans first; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to continue putting Canberrans first by maintaining its focus on raising revenue in a way that is responsible and ensures the ACT Government is able to continue delivering the public service and infrastructure needs of a growing Canberra.”.

The amendment substitutes all words after “(1) notes” and inserts a series of facts in relation to ACT taxation and the volatility that has been experienced in other states and territories as a result of an undue reliance on the worst tax levy by state and territory governments, being stamp duty; highlights the recommendations contained in the Australian future tax system review undertaken earlier this decade, the ACT’s progress through a tax-mix switch over a 20-year period and that the most significant elements of that reform have now been completed; and notes that the ACT government will maintain its focus on raising revenue in a way that is responsible and ensures that the territory government is able to continue delivering the public services and infrastructure that our city needs.

I believe that, in spite of the challenges associated with any reform of the taxation system, be it at a national level or indeed locally, what we are doing is the right and responsible thing, because it ensures the sustained ability of the territory's finances in the long term. It avoids the financial volatility that we have seen in other Australian jurisdictions, such as the very significant revenue writedowns that the New South Wales and Victorian governments have had to undertake as a result of the collapse of their property markets.

State and territory governments are principally responsible for the delivery of public services and infrastructure needs for growing communities. This means providing more and improved schools, more teachers, more teacher assistants, more nurses, more doctors, more allied health professionals, more police officers, more firefighters, more ambulance officers—more people who go to work every day to make our community lives better.

It means providing more infrastructure, such as transport infrastructure, more community facilities, more parks, more playgrounds—all of the things that improve our quality of life. We have been, and we remain, absolutely committed to raising revenue in a way that is fair, where everyone contributes every year to the services that we all consume. That is the most efficient form of raising revenue available to state and territory governments, and, importantly, it is sustainable in the long term.

It is also important to look at what has been happening in other jurisdictions. The ABS do this on an annual basis, and their most recent report confirms that Canberrans are not paying more taxes than other Australians. Taxation per capita in the ACT is on the national average, and is in fact lower than in New South Wales and Victoria. Taxation per capita has increased in all Australian jurisdictions since 2011, and the average annual increase in the ACT has been below our closest neighbours. So we are not a high-taxing jurisdiction and the Australian Bureau of Statistics has confirmed this.

What we are achieving is a shift in the way that we collect revenue to a simpler, fairer and more efficient system. Since 2012 we have abolished stamp duty for eligible first homebuyers and we are phasing out stamp duty for all other buyers. Stamp duty on every property value has been cut. The rate of taxation is progressively being reduced over 20 years.

We have completely abolished insurance duties. They were collecting around \$50 million annually. If they had remained in place, they would now be collecting more than \$60 million annually. For the average Canberra household, that represents a saving of \$300 to \$400 per annum on duties they were paying on their insurance products.

The benefits of the stamp duty cuts and the other taxation changes are saving households with an average mortgage between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per year. Those who are receiving stamp duty savings are saving in the order of between \$10,000 and \$20,000, depending on the nature of their stamp duty transaction. We have reformed our concessions. We have directed them in a way that allows those who are renting to

benefit more from utilities concessions. For example, under the previous arrangements, a lot of utilities concessions were going to property owners rather than renters. So that was an important reform.

From the business perspective, we have removed stamp duty for around 70 per cent of commercial property transactions in this city and we have raised the payroll tax free threshold so that about 90 per cent of Canberra businesses do not pay any payroll tax at all. The savings across the board for those who are now no longer paying stamp duty is in the tens of thousands of dollars for average properties.

It is important, of course, to analyse what would have been the case if we had just left the tax policy settings the way they were in 2011. Stamp duty would have peaked at a number over half a billion dollars. General rates would have increased each year, the way they had for the previous century, at around four per cent, and stamp duty would have gone to over half a billion dollars. Insurance taxes would be raking in about \$60 million annually and payroll taxes would be bringing in tens of millions of dollars extra if we had not undertaken those reforms. The mix of taxes would have been different in terms of how much revenue they collected, but the total amount of tax collected would be no different.

What we have avoided through these tax reforms is the sort of volatility and the sort of gouging that the New South Wales government in particular has been responsible for in relation to stamp duty. Nearly \$10 billion was coming in to New South Wales government coffers from stamp duty—the worst tax that can be levied by state and territory governments.

Our population continues to grow very strongly. Our economy is the fastest growing in the nation. We have the lowest unemployment rate in this country. So our economy is performing very well. All of the naysaying and all of the doomsday predictions from the Leader of the Opposition that these reforms would lead to a mass exodus of people from Canberra have proved not to be the case.

We have thousands of additional businesses operating in the territory, a very rapid rate of growth. It is cheaper to set up a new business in Canberra because you would not be hit by payroll taxes and by commercial stamp duties if you were to purchase commercial property, particularly for small and medium enterprises.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: What we are seeing, in spite of the interjections from those opposite, is that the ACT economy has, for the last three years, grown at around four per cent per annum, faster than the rest of the nation, and in the last 12 months it was the fastest growing economy in the country. That reflects the fact that the economic policy settings for this jurisdiction are encouraging business development and employment creation. We are seeing a very strong labour market in a period when the commonwealth government, traditionally our largest employer, has in fact been shrinking.

Those opposite very publicly claim, as a great achievement of their time in federal administration, that the Australian public sector is smaller. We are seeing the ACT's service export industries growing very strongly. Higher education and tourism, for example, are setting all-time records in terms of their economic contribution and their level of employment within our economy. It is important to acknowledge, through any change process, that there are winners and there are losers. Any change process will involve such an outcome. It is impossible to change tax settings that will see everyone better off, while seeking to maintain the same level of revenue.

What I want to focus on in the remaining time is the personal circumstances particularly of younger Canberrans, who often go for years without even having a meal out, in order to save the money necessary for home deposits and, previously, to have to pay stamp duty. This is a section of our community who, according to the Grattan Institute, are going to be worse off than their parents. We will see, for the first time in Australian history, that the generation younger than us will be worse off. They will have accumulated less wealth and will be financially worse off than their parents. They will be the first generation to go backwards unless something is done to assist that generation.

One of the things I am most proud of is our work to abolish stamp duties for first homebuyers and to undertake these reforms in order to support the next generation of Canberrans, to give them some opportunities and a leg-up, because I do not think it is acceptable that the next generation will be worse off than the current generation. I think that is unacceptable. It will be the first time in our nation's history that the generations that follow those who are currently in power will be worse off. If we do not do something to address this, it will be a major national catastrophe, and it does need addressing. The Grattan Institute has absolutely identified this as an issue of national priority, and I agree.

There are many things that can be done to assist younger Canberrans and younger Australians—some wage growth, increasing the rate of Newstart, abolishing stamp duties, supporting more education and training investment, and giving younger Canberrans and younger Australians more opportunities. There is a particular benefit of these reforms. I want to ensure that younger Canberrans do not miss out on the wonderful opportunities that this city can offer. This is an important reform that delivers those opportunities for younger Canberrans.

There are many lenses through which we can view taxation reform. One of them is intergenerational. It is important that governments across the nation do something to address this significant problem—that is, that younger Australians are being burdened with an extraordinary level of debt from their education, and that they are facing a housing market that is much more difficult to enter into than was the case for generations older than them. Governments at the moment, particularly at the state and territory level, by levying stamp duties are making it even harder for those young people to enter into the housing market.

I say to Mr Coe that, for those Canberrans who never get to go out because they are saving every cent for their home deposit—or what used to be the case, to have to pay

stamp duty—these reforms are very significant. Pensioners who are downsizing and who are not hit with a massive stamp duty in order to move out of large properties into something more suitable for their needs in their later years benefit very significantly from these reforms. Anyone whose family increases, who has the joy of adding a new child to their family, who needs a bigger home, who has to move as a result of having more children, is paying less stamp duty as a result of these reforms.

These are the personal stories. For those whose relationships end and who, for reasons often beyond their control, are often left in a situation where they have to move out of a family home because their personal circumstances have changed, lower stamp duty means they can move into that next phase of their life without being hit with a tax of tens of thousands of dollars. These are all the personal circumstances of people who benefit from these reforms.

Tax reform is really hard. It is why no-one else is doing this. The easy path to take is the cheap, opportunistic political response of those opposite. It is what they did in 2012, it is what they did in 2016 and clearly it is what they are going to do in 2020. Reform is difficult and it is worth fighting for. (*Time expired.*)

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (10.32): As will surprise no-one, the Greens are not going to support Mr Coe's motion. Instead, we will vote for the ALP amendment, although I must say that, as I said to the ALP, the simplest and most reasonable thing to do would be just to vote against Mr Coe's motion. As we all know, every time this year we get this kind of motion from Mr Coe and it is basically, as Mr Barr has said, a very simplistic political attack on the Greens and the ALP. It would be really much more interesting if this was a serious attempt to consider the pluses and minuses of taxation and taxation reform, because taxation and taxation reform are really important issues.

As both previous speakers have said, it does make a difference to people how much money they have to pay in taxes and charges and who pays them. This is important work that the Assembly should be working on. Unfortunately, that is not really what Mr Coe's motion comes to grips with. Mr Coe's motion is disconnected from the reality of the ACT government's taxation.

You would think from Mr Coe's motion that the overall tax take in the ACT was outrageous compared to that in other parts of Australia. I suggest that Mr Coe should read the budget papers, and he would find that that is not the case. Actually, I am confident that Mr Coe has read the budget papers and the updates to the budget papers et cetera. If he did that, he would find, amongst other things, that that is not the case. In fact, the ACT's own-source taxation revenue as a percentage of gross state product is towards the lower end of the pack. That is not the impression you get from Mr Coe's speech.

Mr Coe's motion completely misses the real issues in taxation and the funding of government services. While Mr Barr's amendment is better, I think we need to think about the real issues that we need to be talking about. First off is: should we be increasing funding for government services, keeping it the same or cutting funding for government services, which is the only way that we could cut taxation?

On Wednesdays of every sitting week, on every single private members' day, I imagine that there has been at least one motion from the opposition which calls, in effect, for increased government spending. I am not quite sure why Ms Lawder's motion, which was looking for mental health resources for deaf and deafblind residents, did not get debated. I assume that there would have been a cost in that.

Mr Wall: The services have been cut on your watch.

MS LE COUTEUR: Even if they are replacing services that have been cut, my point is that all these things have a cost. It does not appear that the opposition is looking to cut government services. In that case, it is hard to see how they can reasonably be suggesting cutting taxation. Obviously I have missed something here.

Both speakers talked about fairness in the taxation system. I think this is a very important issue. It is one that the Greens—me, in particular—having been banging on about all this term. Members will be aware that the government is undertaking a review of the rates system. We talked about this at some length in budget estimates. The review of the rates system is going to be looking at fairness, amongst other things. It is going to be looking at fairness in terms of individual people; it is going to be looking at fairness in terms of units versus houses.

I was really surprised that Mr Coe, in his speech, and Mr Barr did not bother quoting from the limited analysis that the budget already has on these issues. Mr Coe should remember, from the Seventh Assembly, his former colleague, Mr Smyth, introducing an amendment which meant that the budget paper is required to have a cost-of-living statement. That goes through, at some length, the cost of government charges and also the cost of utilities for different households in the ACT.

I think possibly more interesting is the socio-economic analysis which has been introduced in the last couple of years as a result of the Greens amendment to, I think, a motion by Mr Coe originally. If you look at that, you will find that, of the various households in the ACT, the one that is doing the worst is the Garran aged pensioner who would be paying probably 15 per cent of his or her income in rates. I am quite happy to agree with anybody that that is too high. These are the sorts of issues that need to be looked at. But if you look at that list of the amounts that people are paying, everyone else is paying quite a bit less than that.

I understand that, on average, rates are just under two per cent of the average ACT household's income. It would be good to save that, sure, but in exchange for the government services that we get I do not think this is a particularly major issue.

I would like to have seen Mr Coe's motion talk more about, as I said, the real issues: fairness, balance between units and houses, the role of deferrals, the role of concessions and particularly the role of market versus land value for our rating system. This is something the Greens have been talking about for some time, and I note that the New South Wales IPART has just recommended that in New South Wales councils should move to the market rate. That includes the house as well as the land for their rating system.

I think that the ACT would do well to look at that as an option. It solves a couple of problems. It solves the problem of the relativity between units and standalone houses, because both of these have a very clear market value that includes the capital part. Also, in terms of increasing the fairness in our taxation system, there is a better correlation between household income and wealth and the total value of their real estate, including the value of the house as well as the value of the land, rather than just the value of the land.

We all know the problem of the worst house on the street that is often owned by someone who has been there for a long time. They have become an age pensioner. They are no longer in a position to keep up the level of maintenance that they once did. But they have lived in that house for 20 or 30 years and it would possibly break their heart to have to move. I think these are the sorts of issues that we should be looking at.

There are other issues. How on earth can our health system be funded sustainably when it takes up 31 per cent of the ACT's budget and federal funding is not growing as fast as costs? I point out again that quite recently this has been an area where the opposition would appear to be advocating for more, not less, expenditure. What can the government spend less on to make room for the very expensive but important areas like health, schools and public housing?

What is going to be the impact of changing the GST rules? I understand that the GST rules are likely to be changed or have been changed in a way which will be better for WA in particular, it having had significant political issues with the proportion of GST it gets. If it is good for WA, it probably is not going to be good for the ACT. Federal government spending is also not looking like being good for the ACT. There is a move to relocate parts of federal government expenditure to anywhere other than Canberra.

But Mr Coe has the luxury of not talking about these real issues that whoever puts together the ACT budget has got to look at. He has the luxury of just rolling out promises to freeze taxes without addressing the issue of what that means for health, for schools, for public housing, for public transport. He has the luxury of bringing demands on government expenditure into this chamber through private members' business and petitions every sitting week without having to worry about what it actually costs.

Just because Mr Coe and the rest of the Liberal Party have the luxury of not dealing with the real work of balancing taxation services does not mean that Mr Coe and the Liberal Party as a whole should not do it. Sooner or later the Liberal Party will be the government in the ACT. Thus, at some point the promises that are being made will actually need to be delivered. So far the promises have largely been on the tax side. He has been talking about freezing rates and phasing out payroll tax.

This is actually fairly concerning for people like me who think that the ACT government is not providing too much in the way of services to the ACT public. I am sure of some things I would like to see cut. The Greens have banged on forever about whether we really need to spend a couple of hundred million every year on new

roads. But the Liberal Party has not joined us in those views. It is worrying because the ACT budget is not a magic pudding.

In conclusion, I will be supporting the ALP amendment rather than the Liberal motion which misses out all the important issues related to taxation and the funding of government services. Personally I thought the motion was so far from reality that the simplest solution was just to vote it down. But the Chief Minister's amendment is broadly factual and sensible, so I will vote for it.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (10.44): I was not intending to speak too much on this motion, but it seems that there is a very large disconnect between the reality that Mr Barr operates in and the reality of his constituents. He wants a gold star and a merit certificate for the hard work of tax reform whilst countless Canberra families are doing it worse now than they ever have simply because of the unfair, punitive nature of this tax reform process. We have heard the impact on home owners. We are hearing some of the impact on businesses.

Some of the questions I raised last week with the Minister for Transport and City Services were about commercial property holders, who are paying the highest level of rates in the ACT and for that are receiving no garbage service. They get nothing in the way of service that you could expect for a domestic property, yet they pay a factor of more than 10 times what a residential property owner does. They are also having to pay, out of their own pocket, to fix damage that is being caused to their property by trees on government land. Why does a government that charges so much in rates fail to deliver the basic amenity that you would expect to be received for it?

I spoke of the Calwell shopping centre, whose tenants have had to argue with government to get permission for two trees on territory land to be removed. Then the government has had the hide to say, "You pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in rates a year, but you can also pay to get those trees removed. You are in business. You are rich. You should be able to afford it." That is the attitude that we have seen from those opposite.

Mr Barr says it is easier to set up a business here in the ACT. But those businesses are very often sole-person operators. They are certainly not buying property. I do not know how he is managing to conflate it. Yes, they are starting up here, but as soon as they get to a size where those taxes are biting hard they are leaving town or they are looking for an escape. We have seen that time and again.

The Chief Minister was quick to point out that 90 per cent of businesses do not pay payroll tax. Yet it was this Chief Minister and Treasurer that closed an exemption that existed for contractors, predominantly doing work for the commonwealth, from paying payroll tax. He sought to money-grab on that provision that was established to see a large and successful contracting sector here in the ACT. He sought to close it and grab the money for the ACT government coffers instead. That has caused significant damage through the contracting sector here in the ACT. He talks about seeing fewer people pay payroll tax than ever before, but it would be reasonable to guess that more small entities are now liable for an element of payroll tax than have ever been before under this Treasurer.

We also heard the absolute ramblings of the Greens, who want to see property value based taxation. Ms Le Couteur was quick to say that there are often people that have lived in the street for 30 or 40 years and it would be sad to see them go. It is that exact kind of policy that would see people unable to stay in their homes.

You have got a position here where government wants to tax people and the homes that they own and the business premises that they bought to better themselves, to get themselves ahead more and more, aided and abetted by two Greens members who want to see the reform go further, to the point that it chucks people out of their family homes. That is what she has said here today. For the pensioner who has lived in, say, Braddon for 40 years, the value of that property will have skyrocketed. That is just the nature of the property market in most major cities.

What Ms Le Couteur has advocated here today is that the market value of that property be taxed, not the underlying land valuation, which is a very small proportion of the property's values. I think that is very scary. The electorate should be well aware that voting for Labor and the Greens is opening the door to those kinds of extreme policies.

Home owners and commercial property owners have borne the brunt of this government's largesse and recklessness. And it continues. They have a little over 12 months before there is an opportunity to vote the government out of office. I hope that they take that opportunity at the next election. It is becoming more difficult for businesses to grow in the ACT. It is becoming more difficult for home owners to make ends meet. We have seen electricity costs spiral out of control under this government, through some reckless policies. Labor are saying that the Liberals are focused on reducing taxes. Absolutely we are. We believe in a lower taxing government. We believe that people's money is best served in their pocket, being spent on the things that they deem necessary.

We also have a government that is reckless in its spending. There is a spending problem in the ACT, more so than a revenue problem. The revenue is increasing but the spending is increasing beyond compare. Mr Barr claims that he is concerned about the next generation and leaving a legacy. The deficit has continued to grow under his tenure as Treasurer. Net debt in the ACT is on the increase and we are now trying to move things off the books in a different fashion. We are entering into public-private partnerships that go for generations, for 20-plus years. That is what you call tying a weight around the feet of the next generation. Do not come in here and lecture us that tax reform is all great and it is about serving the next generation when you are signing the documents that are spending the money, tying that debt to the next generation.

There are about 14 months to go until the ACT public get to have their say on the future of this territory. I think they are going to be voting very hard in favour of a change of government after 18 years of reckless spending.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (10.50): Under standing order 47, I seek leave to speak again to correct the misinterpretation of my words by Mr Wall.

Leave granted.

MS LE COUTEUR: Mr Wall has misconstrued—I am not quite sure if that is the right word to use—my words to suggest that I want to see older people forced out of their homes. That is not what I said; I categorically reject that implication. What I did say, Mr Wall, was that in working out the rateable value of a property, we currently have a system which works on land value only. I suggested that it would be fairer to have a system which worked on both the land value and the value of the house. In that case, it has been found that there is a better—

Mrs Dunne: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker, standing order 47 allows for a member to correct the record where the member believes that they have been misunderstood, not to recommit the debate. Speaking under standing order 47 should be brief and to the point.

MADAM SPEAKER: I understand that. I think Ms Le Couteur is explaining that. Ms Le Couteur, it is a Wednesday morning. Can you please conclude your remarks.

MS LE COUTEUR: Sure. In brief, what I was suggesting would, in my opinion, have the opposite effect of what Mr Wall suggested: in other words, make it easier for older people to stay in their homes.

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.52): Thank you, Ms Le Couteur, for providing clarity on that issue.

Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that people in Canberra are doing it tough. But those opposite are in complete denial. We on this side hear the stories; we meet the people whom this government has left behind.

Take Raymond from Kambah. He said:

Sounds like a government that does not represent the people but like to line big business pockets. Poor form from Barr. A real sad time for a Labor government working for the constituents of this city.

Or Robert:

They have been clinging on to office for far too long and are arrogantly taking us all for granted.

Lisette:

It is a simple case of fairness and should at least be reviewed.

Or Rowan:

While Canberra is a rich city overall, this change hits the middle and lower class more.

Or Jenna:

The rates are insane, especially for us hardworking single parents trying to pay off a mortgage and raise kids in Canberra.

Or Debi:

We work hard to make sure we are not a burden on the welfare system. This does not support the effort we make. Why are we continually punished for having a go?

Or James:

We are PENSIONERS struggling to stay in our own home and have been hit by a whopping \$1,025 increase in our Rates—an increase of 67% on last year. This follows a 30% the previous year. How can this be allowed to happen through a supposedly ‘caring’ government.

And John:

A grave injustice has been perpetrated by the ACT government.

Or Janet:

Another burden for oldies to carry!! My husband and I are at the stage of saying ‘What next?’

Madam Speaker, that is just a snapshot of the thousands of Canberra households that are struggling as a result of this government’s decision. To have the Greens again come into this place and run interference for the Labor Party demonstrates just how tight that coalition is. Despite the fact that one of the Greens is not contesting the next election and would surely have a bit more freedom to say what they really think, they come in here and toe the Labor Party line.

That begs the question of whether perhaps it is what they really think. In that case, why not be a member of the Labor Party? Why not run on the same ticket next year? Why not have a combined Greens-Labor ticket? That is what it has come to. When every single vote in this place is a red-green coalition, why not run on the same ticket? Why not formalise it? Why not be honest with the people of Canberra?

The Chief Minister spoke about the next generation. He is spot on that many people in Canberra fear that their best days are behind us. Many people in Canberra feel as though the future is not getting any better. When you do not have optimism and you do not have hope, things can deteriorate pretty quickly.

The Chief Minister seems absolutely determined to make sure that surrounding New South Wales councils thrive. The mayors of the adjacent councils must really love this government. Mayor Tim Overall must really love the Chief Minister. Nothing has done more for growth in Queanbeyan than the actions of Mr Barr. He has been a

stimulus package for Queanbeyan. Whether you are talking about families looking for a block or businesses looking for premises, nobody has done more for Queanbeyan than Mr Barr.

The Chief Minister may say that stamp duty is going to be decreased. We have heard it all before. He can try to make up this line that people are somehow better off, but people do not buy it. How many people in Canberra think that they are better off because insurance levies have been abolished? There is this idea that there are going to be mass savings because of stamp duty and insurance levies. What about the person who does not buy a house? What about the person who does not take out insurance policies because they cannot afford to? What about the person who does not have insurance policies because they have nothing to insure?

It is all very well to say that insurance levies are bringing about great relief for Canberrans. I know a lot of people that do not have insurance at all. If you are living in a group home or you are a single mother with a couple of kids in a rental property, my guess is that you are not taking out contents insurance. My guess is that the 10-year-old car with 150,000 kilometres on the clock has third-party insurance and not much else. These are real situations. These are real people that the Labor Party and the Greens are happy to turn their back on.

We need to stop these increases. We cannot just govern for the top end of town. There are many people who are doing it tough. That is why the punitive increases in rates, taxes, fees and charges must halt.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11

Noes 8

Mr Barr	Mr Pettersson	Miss C Burch	Mr Parton
Ms Cody	Mr Ramsay	Mr Coe	Mr Wall
Mr Gentleman	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Mr Gupta	Mr Steel	Mrs Jones	
Ms Le Couteur	Ms Stephen-Smith	Mrs Kikkert	
Ms Orr		Mr Milligan	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Question put:

That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11

Noes 8

Mr Barr	Mr Pettersson	Miss C Burch	Mr Parton
Ms Cody	Mr Ramsay	Mr Coe	Mr Wall
Mr Gentleman	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Mr Gupta	Mr Steel	Mrs Jones	
Ms Le Couteur	Ms Stephen-Smith	Mrs Kikkert	
Ms Orr		Mr Milligan	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Gungahlin—multicultural event venue

MR GUPTA (Yerrabi) (11.06): I move the motion standing in my name and that of Ms Orr:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the Gungahlin region is the most culturally and linguistically diverse region in Canberra with 33.2 percent of people born overseas and 33.3 percent of people speaking a language other than English at home;
- (b) the important contribution that culturally and linguistically diverse organisations make in building and fostering inclusive communities across the ACT;
- (c) that, with a rapidly growing population in Gungahlin, the ACT Government will need to continue investing in social infrastructure to ensure the community has access to essential facilities;
- (d) that, whilst existing community and private facilities in Gungahlin and across the city provide a range of spaces and services for multicultural groups to engage in performance and events, these venues have limited capacity to facilitate larger events of more than 350 people;
- (e) that the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre can host a maximum of 300 people in its function room and is in consistently high demand, especially at peak times, with events on most days and an average of six large events per month;
- (f) the ACT Government's commitment under the *ACT Multicultural Framework 2015-2020* to ensuring Canberra is an inclusive and cohesive society that celebrates and promotes cultural diversity;
- (g) that, in March 2019, the ACT joined the *Welcoming Cities* network to demonstrate this commitment to inclusiveness; and
- (h) the ACT Government is currently undertaking a review of EPIC to inform its future requirements as a venue; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) explore the feasibility of a large-scale venue suitable for hosting multicultural and other community events to be located at EPIC;
- (b) include scoping of alternative potential sites for such a centre in the wider Gungahlin region; and
- (c) report back to the Assembly on the feasibility of such a centre within 12 months.

I rise today to speak to the motion calling on the ACT government to explore the possibility of a large-scale venue for multicultural organisations at EPIC. A multicultural community facility will greatly benefit the Canberra community by providing a quality venue for our wonderfully diverse Canberrans to come together and celebrate inclusivity and a harmonious society.

I am pleased to be working with Ms Orr on this motion calling on the ACT government to continue to invest in social infrastructure for our growing community which also responds to the needs of our multicultural community.

I have lived in Gungahlin for nearly 20 years. Gungahlin is one of the fastest growing regions in the country. Gungahlin is driving our capital's growth, particularly in the northern area, which increased from 30,000 people in 2011 to more than 71,000 people in 2016. It is essential that our government is working to ensure that we have the appropriate infrastructure for services we rely on and that our city is ready to service new Canberrans in the next decade, and that includes our multicultural community.

I am incredibly proud to represent Yerrabi and the Gungahlin region. Canberra has a diverse and multicultural community who contribute so much and have had so many wonderful achievements in the ACT and beyond. Gungahlin is the most culturally and linguistically diverse region in Canberra, with 33.2 per cent of people born overseas and 33.3 per cent of people speaking a language other than English at home. I am very proud to stand here in this chamber as a multicultural Australian and represent such a multicultural electorate that I am a part of.

We have great facilities and structures in this city that support our diverse Canberrans. However, we can do more, and there is currently a need for a new multicultural centre in our society, particularly for events that can cater for groups larger than 350.

One of our more popular venues is the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre, for example, which is across the road from us. Theo Notaras has had functions hosted by the Sudanese, Persian, Indian, Chinese, Congolese and Muslim communities, and it is a fantastic venue for diverse Canberrans. I have no doubt that we have all attended or been a part of an event at the Theo Notaras centre. The centre is a great place for multicultural communities to come together and hold events. However, its function room only has capacity for 300 people and it is consistently in high demand, particularly in peak times. The Theo Notaras centre has an average of six large events per month, for example.

This type of work has been an ongoing priority for me, and I am delighted that our ACT Labor government is committed to improving the infrastructure for our multicultural community in Gungahlin. I have had my fair share of attending and organising multicultural events. Over the years I have attended and organised multicultural events of various sizes. Many of these events are large, colourful and joyful occasions for my community.

I founded the India in the City showcase at the National Multicultural Festival and the Diwali gala dinner in Canberra. In 2015 I founded the World Curry Festival and chilli eating competition. I have also been on the steering committee for the National Multicultural Festival, among many other multicultural and community events that I have been a part of. These have all been big events. My personal style when organising multicultural events is as big as Ben Hur, so it is no surprise that I am passionate about having a larger venue for these events.

I know firsthand that organising these events takes a great deal of work, and in the past I have struggled to find an appropriate venue at the right place, the right time and the right price. Unfortunately, things like capacity issues mean that people cannot attend community events because of the limited seating and taking into account community safety considerations. These events are fundamentally about community, inclusivity and coming together, and physical restrictions or not having an appropriate venue are a barrier to this.

Our multicultural communities have raised the possibility of a larger venue in the ACT to host multicultural events, and we are listening. I would like to thank various multicultural and community organisations that have raised this with me. I would like to thank them all for raising this need for our multicultural community.

The ACT government's commitment under the ACT multicultural framework 2015-20 is to ensure that Canberra is an inclusive and cohesive society that celebrates and promotes cultural diversity. Multicultural communities will greatly benefit from better facilities to showcase the rich culture and diversity of our Canberra community. Building the appropriate infrastructure will further embed this government's commitment to diversity in the ACT.

My vision is for Canberra to become a cultural and multicultural destination in Australia. A new, large multicultural facility will allow Canberrans to come and witness the wonderful diversity in our city. It will also attract people from interstate and even overseas. The space can be used for various purposes, such as functions, weddings, ceremonies, symposiums and felicitations, to name a few of the purposes.

The venue will benefit not only the multicultural community but also the wider Canberra community by providing a venue for cultural events, celebrations, conferences and exhibitions. A multicultural venue at EPIC will have benefits for and impact on our broader community, particularly in the way that we use existing infrastructure in the ACT and how local businesses operate. A cultural facility at EPIC will also allow Canberrans to make use of the fantastic infrastructure in our city.

Our government is responding to the growing needs of our city through building essential infrastructure and transport networks. This includes the light rail project, which has a light rail stop right outside EPIC. Light rail has been the catalyst for renewal and growth in our city, and the light rail will be a fantastic way for Canberrans to access a community and multicultural venue that they will love.

A new, large-scale multicultural facility will also help to support local businesses. A larger facility will allow organisations to hold significantly larger events that can hold more people and require more input from external organisations and businesses. The venue will boost local business through catering, event management and transport needs. As a government we are committed to a sustainable future. Providing a permanent facility for multicultural events will also be likely to reduce single-use plastic waste and other forms of waste, as cutlery and crockery can be stored and re-used at large-scale events.

In conclusion, I am very pleased to stand here to advocate for the infrastructure needs of our multicultural community. A large-scale venue suitable for hosting multicultural community events will create a wonderful space for all Canberrans, including our diverse Canberrans, to meet and celebrate our commitment to a vibrant and harmonious society. I would like to thank Ms Orr for her work on this important motion for our local and multicultural community. I call on our government to explore a feasibility study for a large-scale venue suitable for hosting multicultural and community events to be located in EPIC. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (11.16): I am pleased to co-sponsor this motion that calls for the ACT government to explore the feasibility of a new, large-scale venue for multicultural community events at EPIC. In moving this motion today, Mr Gupta and I are responding to requests from people within Canberra's multicultural organisations who want a larger community venue where they can celebrate their cultures and traditions.

I am proud to represent the Gungahlin region in this Assembly, which is home to Canberra's most culturally and linguistically diverse community. The 2016 census tells us that 33.3 per cent of people living in Gungahlin were born overseas and 33.2 per cent of people speak a language other than English at home. Our region's population is made up of people from a diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds who all contribute to the cohesive society in which we live. It is important that, as a government and as an Assembly, we embrace this diversity and support people from all backgrounds to be able to celebrate their cultures and traditions.

As a member for Yerrabi, I know just how vibrant our community is because of the contribution of multicultural organisations. These organisations bring people together to meet one another, celebrate, learn language and cultural practices, and support one another to be happy and healthy.

Groups and associations that support Gungahlin residents, including the Telangana Association, the Telugu Association, FINACT, Initiatives for Women in Need, BAPS and the Canberra Muslim Community, are all vital to ensuring that people from

migrant, cultural, religious and linguistically diverse backgrounds are provided with the opportunity to engage with others in the community and the wider population. By providing these groups with more spaces for events, we will enable them to continue growing and expanding right across the territory.

It is important that, as the Gungahlin community grows, the ACT government continues to invest in the social infrastructure that the people of Gungahlin need. As a government we have already made significant investments in Gungahlin, with new and upgraded schools that will ensure every child has access to a great local public school, by opening our very own nurse-led walk-in centre that provides free public health care to residents when they need it, by delivering convenient and reliable public transport through light rail stage 1 and the new bus network, and by creating the Hibberson Street share-way, which has improved pedestrian access in the town centre and given the whole area a face lift. Further to these delivered investments, the government has committed to doing even more to keep up with the demand of Gungahlin's growing population.

Earlier this year I secured a commitment from the government to explore the feasibility of a new community centre for Gungahlin. The motion that was passed by this Assembly noted that community services and organisations across the region would benefit from a dedicated centre that would provide opportunities for the community to come together. Today, along with Mr Gupta, I am calling on the government to commit to exploring the feasibility of a new, large-scale venue that is suitable to host multicultural community events at EPIC.

A new venue at EPIC would provide Gungahlin's multicultural community, and in fact the entire ACT multicultural community, with a bigger and better space to meet and celebrate. There are currently facilities in Gungahlin and across Canberra that provide a range of spaces and services for the multicultural community, and within my electorate the Gungahlin College Theatre is often host to large celebratory events. However, the space can only provide capacity for up to 350 people.

The success of Gungahlin's multicultural organisations and the strength of the community coming together mean that even the venues that we do have, such as the Gungahlin College Theatre and the Theo Notaras centre, are starting to be too small to facilitate events that everyone can attend. I have attended dozens of events at the Gungahlin College Theatre that have been fantastic celebrations. However, time and again, the organisations hosting the events have asked whether the government could look for a larger community space.

As a local member for Yerrabi, I am committed to supporting our multicultural community, particularly as it is such a vibrant contributor to our broader Yerrabi region. That is why I am calling for a new venue at EPIC to provide our culturally and linguistically diverse Canberrans with more opportunities to connect with each other and celebrate our diverse and inclusive city.

In calling for the government to explore the feasibility of a new venue, we are asking the government to report back to the Assembly within 12 months. With the ACT government currently undertaking a review of EPIC to inform its future

requirements as a venue, it makes sense for the consideration of a multicultural events venue to be considered in this review.

It is important that work is undertaken to determine the suitability of EPIC as a site and the broader requirements that would need to be met with any new venue being established. With any new social infrastructure project, the government must undertake a proper study of such a proposal, which is why we are calling for the feasibility study to be undertaken now through the review of EPIC.

It is my view that a new, large-scale venue at EPIC would be easily accessible for Gungahlin residents and would also allow for these events to be attended by the wider community. Since speaking with the community and listening to their feedback, this would be the most appropriate for their needs now and into the future. I will be advocating for EPIC to be home to the new venue, and I look forward to working with my government colleagues to ensure that our multicultural community is provided with the necessary support to flourish.

I value the incredible contribution that the Gungahlin multicultural community makes to the life of our region. We are better as a region and a city overall, thanks to their involvement in our community. I look forward to the government undertaking this review and hope to see a new venue delivered at EPIC for all of our multicultural community. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Transport and City Services) (11.22): As Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I am very pleased to speak in support of this motion. I thank Mr Gupta and Ms Orr for bringing this forward to the Assembly today. The ACT government is committed to maintaining Canberra's standing as a welcoming, inclusive and cohesive city where diversity is celebrated. As we outlined in the ACT multicultural framework second action plan, our city celebrates diversity and encourages participation and contribution from all Canberrans to ensure that we continue to grow as an inclusive and welcoming place to be.

We understand how important it is for groups in the community from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to access facilities and spaces where they can engage in performance, host events and share their culture with the wider community. As the minister, I have the privilege of attending so many of these events throughout the community, and they are events that make a real contribution to making Canberra a thriving city and supporting our multicultural communities.

There are, of course, already many places across Canberra that provide support for our multicultural communities, including through the 156 facilities managed by ACT Property Group that are made available for use by community and multicultural groups. I will give a couple of examples. The Chifley community hub is home to a Buddhist centre. The Chinese Australian Early Childhood Centre is provided space in Mawson and hosts the Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia. For events, the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre, established by the ACT government in 2005, provides fantastic facilities to support Canberra's culturally and linguistically diverse communities to meet and engage in performance, and it is a very popular venue.

The ACT government knows, however, that more can be done to provide larger scale venues that would be suitable for hosting multicultural events. Mr Gupta and Ms Orr's motion today makes a very practical suggestion about addressing that important issue. Despite the great value that the Theo Notaras centre provides to the community as the primary venue for multicultural events, demand for the centre is consistently very high. We acknowledge that its facilities are not large enough to support the growing needs of multicultural organisations and communities who wish to engage with them.

The centre currently provides office space for 24 multicultural organisations, and three meeting rooms and a function centre are available to book. However, the function room can only host a maximum of around 300 people and faces consistently high demand, particularly for daytime and Saturday evening bookings. Functions are held most days, and to date there has only been one Saturday this year when the centre has not been booked.

We are also clearly seeing the community's demand for large-scale events, with an average of six such events held each month at the Theo Notaras centre. Whilst most of these booking requests can be met, it is sometimes not possible for the centre to be offered at an organisation's preferred date and time. I have attended many multicultural events which often have over 500 people attending, and I know demand for venues that can cater for large groups will only grow as our city continues to grow.

It is very heartening to see that our community are demonstrating their commitment to diversity, inclusion and celebrating our multicultural community by using the Theo Notaras centre, and we want to encourage that commitment to grow. A venue that can host large multicultural events, as suggested by Mr Gupta and Ms Orr in their motion, would demonstrate our commitment to an inclusive city by providing alternative facilities to meet these additional needs and ensure that the Theo Notaras centre can continue to provide venues suitable for smaller and more intimate cultural gatherings.

To be most effective, a venue like this would need to facilitate upwards of at least 350 people and may need to include things like kitchen facilities, be accessible and well located, and be readily available for the community to book. Mr Gupta and Ms Orr's suggestion of establishing such a venue at Exhibition Park in Canberra provides a practical idea for consideration. It is a place that has already hosted many multicultural events. I recently attended several community events there, including the Canberra Moon Festival, which has moved out there. I think they have found that location to be quite suitable for their celebration.

As the motion states, Gungahlin is home to a huge number of Canberrans from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and that population is growing. It makes sense to consider EPIC as a venue which is located close to them. But it is important to remember that Canberrans across the city, not just on the north side, would want to take advantage of such a facility as well. EPIC is a venue for all of Canberra that is quite accessible for all Canberrans.

EPIC is well located and accessible to all people, given its proximity to Gungahlin Drive, and with the GDE and the Tuggeranong Parkway connecting with it. Of course, it is walking distance from our light rail line, which connects with our broader integrated transport network.

Establishing a venue capable of hosting upwards of 350 people would also support Canberra's commitment to become a welcoming city. As members may know, the Welcoming Cities standard values public places and facilities that enhance livability, social cohesion and inclusion for all residents. That means creating public spaces and facilities in Canberra that encourage communities to facilitate their diverse cultural expression and celebration. Our commitment to being a welcoming city also extends to demonstrating leadership by supporting activities and initiatives that connect people from migrant and receiving communities.

Providing a large-scale venue suitable for hosting multicultural events, as has been put forward in the motion today, is a real opportunity to signify that the ACT government are ready to take action on our commitment. This motion is not an idea that has come out of nowhere, as Mr Gupta mentioned; this is the result of feedback and deep engagement with communities, our multicultural communities, from around Canberra. I applaud Mr Gupta and Ms Orr for representing these views in our Assembly today. I congratulate them on bringing this matter forward and I commend their motion to the Assembly. I hope it can be supported by all members in this place.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (11.28): I thank Mr Gupta and Ms Orr for bringing this important motion before the Assembly. It is quite laughable that they talk about listening to a community and having a larger scale place for our multicultural community to come and have their festivities when our German cultural community here in Canberra were speaking to the government about having their cultural event at EPIC. What did they get?

Mr Wall: They got taxed over the border.

MRS KIKKERT: Exactly. They had to move across the border because they could not negotiate a reasonable, affordable place to host their activities and their cultural festivities at EPIC. I do not know what they are talking about when they are talking about speaking and listening to the community. Perhaps they have to reconsider that.

Mr Wall interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Cody): Mr Wall, you will have your chance to speak.

MRS KIKKERT: This motion addresses issues that I have been raising since becoming a member of this Assembly. I am happy to see the opposite side of the chamber recognise and begin to address these issues.

The first serious opportunity I had to question this government regarding multicultural matters was during the 2015-16 annual report hearings. I asked the then minister

about the high demand for the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre and its incapacity to meet that demand. I also asked Ms Stephen-Smith the following: “What plans have been discussed to guarantee that the ACT’s growing multicultural communities will have access to suitable, affordable venues in the future?” You can understand how much it satisfied me to see this Assembly note the very worries that I raised with this government 2½ years ago.

The minister’s response to my question, by the way, was not very satisfying. She said, that the government’s solution was “encouraging culturally and linguistically diverse communities to utilise existing community facilities and other suitable government infrastructure across the ACT for cultural events”. In other words, this government had no plan whatsoever to deal with the future needs of a rapidly growing multicultural population to ensure that, in Mr Gupta’s and Ms Orr’s own words, the community has access to essential facilities.

The solution was to encourage the use of existing facilities, despite nearly everyone knowing that existing facilities had already been outgrown and the situation was worsening. It appears that just 2½ years ago the Labor-Greens government had no idea that their own backbench would be calling on them to note that existing venues cannot meet the requirements of Canberra’s vibrant multicultural communities. This situation highlights an incapacity or an unwillingness to look forward and plan accordingly, possibly both. It is, to be blunt, not what good governments do.

But it is what this government does, so we have arrived where we are today, with a motion pointing out that we have venues of limited capacity amidst increasing demand, something that should not have caught those opposite by surprise.

In 2017, we were told at estimates hearings that the government was receiving “increasing requests for facilities” from multicultural groups that could not be met. In November of that same year, the minister replied to a question that I put on the notice paper by confirming that multicultural groups were being denied meeting space bookings due to room unavailability. Still nothing was done. There was no planning, no exploring and no feasibility studies, as requested in this motion.

I should point out here that when the minister said that the Labor-Greens government’s best plan for a growing multicultural population was to tell community groups to keep using existing structures, it came with a promise. The ACT multicultural framework released in 2015 included action plans for the next three years. One of these to be accomplished in 2016-17 was “an online community coordinated venue booking system” to assist “culturally and linguistically diverse communities to utilise existing community facilities”. When I asked the minister what plans the government had to meet known future needs of culturally and linguistically diverse residents, she repeated this promise: people were, she assured me, “working across government to implement this Action”. Nevertheless, like most of the actions in the framework, this promised booking system was never delivered. And I note that when the framework was updated just three months ago, under the direction of Minister Steel, the second action plan included no mention whatsoever of providing access to suitable venues.

Here we are debating whether we should call on the Labor-Greens government to engage in a task that they should have completed years ago: exploring “the feasibility of a large-scale venue suitable for hosting multicultural community events”. Considering how sluggish this government has been in taking any meaningful action, I welcome this step forward.

I do, however, find it interesting that Mr Gupta and Ms Orr have not provided any greater clarity to the government in their motion. It is one thing to have a large-scale venue; it is an entirely different thing for such a venue to be genuinely accessible to multicultural community groups. This is a central concern for nearly all community organisations, many of which struggle to pay the booking fees at current venues. I want to make this point perfectly clear: a large-scale venue intended for hosting multicultural community events will be completely worthless if multicultural community groups cannot afford the use of it.

On this point, this government does not inspire confidence. Many multicultural groups feel as though they are being priced out of full participation in the ACT community. For example, numerous groups have told me that they no longer even consider participating in the National Multicultural Festival, because they simply cannot afford to pay the fees. In recent years, many organisations have participated in the festival as a fundraising endeavour and have lost money. The general consensus is that those opposite seem to have little real world understanding of what it takes to run a volunteer community group.

This extends to venue hire. This motion focuses on the possibility of providing a large-scale venue at EPIC. EPIC already hosts a diverse range of events and seems to have spaces that suit them all, including car parking. They include the Cancon games conference, the Craft & Quilt Fair, the Lifeline book fair and the Wedding Expo.

The fact is that EPIC, which is run by this government, hires out facilities to community groups at a prohibitively high cost. I have very recently spoken with one multicultural group that hired an indoor venue at EPIC for a cultural celebration. The cost was \$10,000. That is ridiculous. They were shocked to be told that this was the not-for-profit rate. Since the event was not ticketed, they have to cover this cost out of their organisation’s very limited budget. Not only that; they were told that they would be required to pay extra for electricity used and rubbish removal. The final bill was much more than the estimate they had been given beforehand. Needless to say, this community organisation will not be holding any more events at EPIC. Many other multicultural community groups, even large ones, operate on a budget that simply would not allow them to even consider booking a small venue at EPIC at current prices.

Some multicultural community organisations have dealt with the rising cost of everything under this government by moving their events to Queanbeyan. The most high profile of these has been the Harmonie German Club’s decision to shift their annual Oktoberfest event from EPIC to Queanbeyan after venue hire fees increased from \$6,000 to \$41,000 over just a five-year period. But they have not been alone. In 2019, I have already attended several cultural events in Queanbeyan hosted by Canberra-based multicultural community groups.

One organisation that spoke with me earlier this week said that they would love to hold their events in the ACT but simply cannot afford to do so anymore. This organisation pointed out that it was not just the exorbitant cost of hiring publicly owned venues, but also the rising fees of everything else in the territory, as well as what feels like ever-increasing compliance obligations. I quote the head of this organisation:

If we could get access to a significant venue for cultural events and government support to manage the cost of these events, this would be of great benefit to the community.”

But he added:

This is currently a pipe dream.

In conclusion, I welcome the feasibility study included in this motion even though it should have been done years ago. At the same time, I put those opposite on very clear notice that multicultural community groups are already finding it difficult to afford to operate in this territory. Having a venue that almost none of them can afford to hire will be seen as further evidence that this government is completely out of touch with their essential needs.

Our multicultural communities need affordable, large venues with adequate parking space for larger crowds. Having attended many events at EPIC, both large and small, it has proven to be a good venue, but the hiring costs are pushing community organisations away and forcing them to hold events somewhere else. I urge this government to reconsider hiring costs for community groups.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.39): I rise today to speak in support of the motion put forward by Mr Gupta and Ms Orr. I thank them for agreeing to amend their original motion to include scoping of alternative sites in the Gungahlin region for a multicultural centre and to not limit the use of any new or revitalised venue to multicultural groups only. It is well known that a significant proportion of Gungahlin’s population are from culturally diverse backgrounds. When compared to other town centre regions in Canberra, Gungahlin has the highest proportion of people born overseas or with one or both parents born overseas.

The 2016 census tells us that over 71,000 people were living in Gungahlin at that time and of course it has grown since then. At that time 62.2 per cent of them were born in Australia. This means 37.8 per cent of them were not. The most common other countries of birth were China at five per cent, India also at five per cent, England at 2.3 per cent, Vietnam at 1.4 per cent and the Republic of South Korea at 1.3 per cent. Forty-three per cent of people in Gungahlin had both parents born overseas, and a further 11 per cent had one parent who was born overseas, compared to almost 40 per cent who had both parents born in Australia.

All these stats and figures certainly show that there is a strong multicultural presence in Gungahlin particularly, although of course that is the case right across the city, with

many residents identifying with the land and culture of their ancestors simultaneously with their Australian identity. It is a multicultural presence that makes us richer as a community, with all the diversity that it brings. This means that Gungahlin is indeed an appropriate region to consider when thinking of the development of facilities that will host multicultural events.

It is my understanding that the type of facility that is being considered is one where large cultural celebrations, banquets or weddings can be held. And certainly in the conversations I have had with people in the community over the past handful of years this has been an issue that has been raised with me as well and a recognition that some events just get very large numbers of people and do not fit into existing venues—venues that will hold at least 400 to 500 people, with a commercial kitchen and a perhaps a theatre.

Canberrans are already fortunate to be able to participate in a number of multicultural events across the city. Of course there has been discussion today of the Multicultural Festival in Civic, and that has been spoken about many times in this place before. Every Chinese New Year we see Dickson come alive. We are also home to many embassies, all of which celebrate their own significant cultural dates and many of which involve celebrating by inviting members of the local community to come and join in. We are certainly very fortunate in that respect in that we get those opportunities in a way that other Australian cities do not, by dint of having the embassies here.

The second action plan of the ACT multicultural framework 2015-2020 has a strategic objective to enhance citizenship, participation and social inclusion. It states that this will be achieved in part by a shared commitment amongst all members of the ACT community to strengthen our cultural capacity and promote cultural diversity and inclusion and by ensuring that the ACT multicultural community are recognised in the ACT wellbeing index. The third objective of the framework is to capitalise on the benefits of our cultural diversity and ensure that the legacy and contribution of established multicultural communities are acknowledged and valued.

The establishment of a new or revitalised multicultural facility is not mentioned specifically in the framework but I think that undertaking a feasibility exercise to scope for a large-scale venue that would be appropriate for hosting large or significant cultural events would be a part of achieving the objectives I have just described and facilitating a range of activities that both the communities themselves but no doubt the rest of Canberra would enjoy as well.

This motion combines addressing both the needs of the multicultural community and the future of EPIC. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive objectives, which is certainly why we requested some amendments to the motion. For the sake of the multicultural community, it is important that there is a venue suitable for large, culturally significant events such as Eid, marking the end of Ramadan, or Diwali, or the many other important festivals that occur each year and that it also includes the potential for private events such as large weddings or banquets. All members will have been invited to significant events over the years that cover a broad spectrum along the lines I have just described.

We are certainly clear that any venue should be available to all members of the community regardless of their background because there is a significant diversity of events in our community. We are also clear that any feasibility study should not be limited just to EPIC as the only potential site. It may turn out to be the most suitable location but I think we should not preclude alternative sites in the Gungahlin region without at least considering their viability in the first place.

Members may recall that the Greens called for a feasibility study for a new multicultural centre in Gungahlin during the 2016 election campaign. That was because we had representations from members of the multicultural community to that effect. We were listening and we engaged actively with the Bangladeshi and Indian communities in Yerrabi particularly in order to come to that view. It was clear at that time that there was a strong desire for a facility in Gungahlin.

I am really mindful in this discussion, as we think about the various communities in Canberra, that those significant immigrant communities that arrived particularly in the era of the 60s and 70s have established clubs in the city. And we can all think of the various clubs: the Italo Australian Club, the Harmonie German Club and various others from that era. But for those communities that have come in greater numbers more recently those opportunities have not arisen and that is why a venue along these lines is particularly important for, I think, the various Indian and Bangladeshi communities and also elements of the Chinese community. I think these are communities that, having come in greater numbers at different times, do not have the opportunities presented to some of those earlier waves of immigration.

We understand and support the need for communities to have places where they can get together, meet, celebrate, support each other, have language classes, all those sorts of things that are very important as part of maintaining cultural linkages. While some of our more established communities have their own premises, as I already touched on, many of the new and emerging communities are left waiting for access to existing facilities or for land to build their own community centres.

The Gungahlin town centre also offers opportunities. The land release program includes many sites in Gungahlin town centre which have a suitable zoning for a multicultural community centre, including one site which is in the community facility zone, and we Greens believe that these sites should also be considered in the feasibility study. The territory plan variation for the Gungahlin town centre refresh, which will include community engagement, is also an opportunity to identify a site for a multicultural centre in the town centre. As I said, the needs of the multicultural community and the future of EPIC are not necessarily mutually exclusive objectives.

I have spoken previously at some length about the need to secure the future of cultural venues including Exhibition Park or EPIC. The venue holds a special place in the cultural heart of our city. It is home to great events like the Lifeline book fair, the Royal Canberra Show, Capital Region Farmers Market and the National Folk Festival. It is a fantastic venue that hosts hundreds of events and draws thousands of Canberrans every year, and its future needs to remain secure. It is too important a community asset to lose.

The advantages of having EPIC within seven kilometres of the city and some seven kilometres from the Gungahlin town centre, and on the light rail route as well as the various other transport options that Minister Steel identified in his remarks, make it a very attractive spot that is easily accessible to both residents of Canberra and tourists. That is why I can understand the attraction of simply renovating an existing building on the site to provide a large venue for multicultural events.

I am also on the record calling for EPIC to be identified as an entertainment precinct to protect the long-term future of the music and entertainment industry without exposing residents or businesses to unreasonable or unexpected levels of noise. That, of course, is another attraction in considering EPIC as a suitable location for hosting multicultural community events.

We have been calling for community consultation in regard to entertainment precincts and suggest that any such consultation could also engage the multicultural community, as a significant proportion of our community, with a desire to celebrate their culturally significant events, some of which tend to be pretty vibrant and just a bit noisy, purely because of the number of people attending but also because of the joy and the animation of some of those events. If we are thinking about a venue anywhere we also need to be mindful of that as we provide the right noise insulation built into the venue to ensure that it does not result in neighbourhood conflicts down the line.

Ultimately what is clear is that there is a need for a large-scale venue, suitable for housing multicultural community events, that is larger than the existing Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre here in the city. That is a much-used and a much-loved venue by multicultural communities but it is often already booked or not large enough for some significant cultural events to occur. What is clear is that we also need to ensure that the purpose and the use of EPIC remain first and foremost for events and is protected for community and cultural events, as has been its use for many years.

I am very pleased to support the motion today. There is important work to be done in this space. We look forward to the report back to the Assembly on the feasibility study.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Social Inclusion and Equality, Minister for Tertiary Education, Minister for Tourism and Special Events and Minister for Trade, Industry and Investment) (11.50): I thank Mr Gupta and Ms Orr for bringing the motion forward and I thank members for raising their various issues and for their contributions.

I note that EPIC will continue to be Canberra's pre-eminent large-format events space, and that it will need in the future to continue to accommodate a wide and diverse range of uses for the benefit of the community. I acknowledge the points that Mr Rattenbury has raised around its pre-eminence as an entertainment precinct, the current arrangements there in relation to noise credits, for example, how the many major events reflect its current setting, in the context of surrounding suburban development, and that, if there were to be any change to that, as in allowing more noisy events, that would clearly be something that the community would have a view

on. I think it is an important conversation that needs to be had, because EPIC's future will be to host more events more often. The work that the government is undertaking at the moment would see a significant expansion in both the number and variety of events that will be held in that precinct.

EPIC currently has the facilities to cater for large functions of around 1,500 attendees in its largest building. However, some elements of EPIC's infrastructure are clearly ageing, and the government will be investing new resources in the coming years to improve the quality of the venue.

We also need to take into account the new ways to access the venue. A very practical thing will be EPIC's reorientation towards Flemington Road as a major access point for the facility, given the light rail stop in that location and the fact that it also presents an opportunity to renew facilities within the broader EPIC precinct.

The principal issue that needs to be addressed to meet the identified needs that Mr Gupta and Ms Orr have identified is around self-catering kitchen facilities; also, clearly, there is what would be a degree of tension between commercial and community hiring demands. There is no doubt that EPIC continues to attract many large-scale commercial activities. In recent times it has become the home for large-scale music festivals, Groovin the Moo, for example, having moved from the University of Canberra to Exhibition Park.

It will continue to be our pre-eminent large-format event space. So it is timely, through this motion, to look at those opportunities to accommodate future major multicultural events within the bounds of the EPIC precinct.

We are very happy to support this motion today. We will continue the work that is well advanced in relation to EPIC's future needs. I look forward to being able to make some significant announcements on large-scale investments in Exhibition Park to enhance its event capability in the coming 12 months.

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.54): I rise to reiterate the comments made by Mrs Kikkert with regard to this motion and also to reiterate the need for EPIC to offer affordable services.

We talk about EPIC as if it is a wholly separate entity. It is owned by the government and it is run by the government. So every time we hear about EPIC being too expensive, EPIC gouging someone or EPIC driving someone out, we can substitute for "EPIC" "the ACT Labor government", because they are responsible. The ACT Labor government were responsible for not negotiating good terms with the Harmonie German Club and the German community when it comes to Oktoberfest. EPIC is responsible, the ACT government are responsible, when we talk about the prohibitively expensive cost of doing business out at EPIC for our community groups.

While we, of course, welcome the idea that we will have facilities that will be more accessible and more affordable, we hope that it actually happens, rather than having just another commitment that the government has no intention of honouring.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (11.56): I am sure every member of this place has been to countless fantastic multicultural community events in our city. They have probably taken place in a school hall, maybe at EPIC itself or across the square at Theo Notaras. I am sure that many of them have been quite cramped because the events have been incredibly popular.

These are all inherently wonderful venues but they are not spaces designed to accommodate increasingly large events. Not having suitable community spaces for emerging communities to engage with each other limits the reach and impact of community events and it makes large-scale events uncommon.

Gungahlin is in need of a designated event and community space that can accommodate larger events, in particular, large multicultural events. Gungahlin is a vibrant multicultural community. It is the most culturally and linguistically diverse region in our city. Thirty-three per cent of Gungahlin residents were born overseas; 33 per cent speak a language at home other than English. It is important that our government supports different communities across Canberra and helps these communities to develop and thrive.

This is an essential part of the government's plan to foster a welcoming and open city. In March this year the ACT joined the Welcoming Cities network to continue our commitment to inclusiveness. Community groups need spaces to put on events and to have meetings. Without access to suitable spaces, events can become expensive, be in an inconvenient location or in a space that is just not suitable. Currently, there are not enough of these locations in Canberra. I think now is the right time for the government to explore options for the creation of a venue for hosting large multicultural community events.

Given its demographics and undeveloped spaces, and maybe a little bit of bias on my side, I think Gungahlin is the perfect location for a venue such as this. As we are the most culturally and linguistically diverse region in Canberra, this is where a large-scale multicultural venue should be built. Gungahlin is already home to so many active community groups that struggle to find suitable venues to host their events. There is nothing quite like turning up to a community event in Gungahlin and having someone whisper in your ear that they desperately want a larger space. It happens every time.

I think EPIC is the right location. I listened with interest to what Mr Rattenbury had to say about the town centre, but I think EPIC is a good location. It is between the city and Gungahlin. It is surrounded by a precinct that could really be vibrant with the addition of a facility like this. Whilst existing buildings in Exhibition Park are currently used for events such as this, often they lack some of the facilities that are needed to really make these events happen.

A venue like this would mean more events. More events mean more community engagement. As a government we must nurture and develop community groups as they are a net good for the wider community. A key indicator of a livable city is its social connectedness, or social capital. Social capital is the idea that the ties that bind

communities together are themselves a value in the same way that physical capital is. Vibrant community groups and interconnected communities are a key element of social capital. Public spaces, social connection, community groups, activities, religious organisations, trade unions, sporting clubs and volunteer associations all contribute to social capital.

It is unsurprising then that, on almost every metric, Canberra has the highest levels of social capital in Australia. We are more likely to donate to charity, volunteer our time, play an organised sport, go to an art gallery, the movies or the zoo, watch a sporting match or go to a concert than other Australians.

Clearly, Canberrans want to be able to spend time in their community and contribute to making our city such a great place to live. We are so lucky to have great spaces and venues that currently facilitate this leading level of engagement. Canberra's town centres and suburbs are the sites of many of these spaces. They are not in the city; they are spread across this city.

This is all the more reason why a multicultural community venue in EPIC is such a good idea. As the saying goes, "Build it and they will come." More community spaces are necessary for our city to continue to lead the way in developing an interconnected and social community. If we build it, they will come, and our city will be further interconnected.

Our government has been dedicated to growing cultural and community spaces in the Canberra community. For example, there are a couple of projects across this city that are particularly noteworthy: Belconnen Arts Centre stage 2, new football pitches and the home of football in Throsby, planning for a new community centre in Woden, bringing elite sports to major ovals across this city, upgrading Canberra Theatre, and developing the Kingston arts precinct. This government has a great story to tell in making our city more connected.

A multicultural centre in EPIC would clearly fit into the ongoing work of this government in enriching our city's social and cultural life. It would be an ideal investment given that the government's ACT multicultural framework will ensure that Canberra is an inclusive and cohesive city that celebrates diversity. It would fill a gap in services that currently exist for multicultural group engagement, as well as providing a venue for all community groups, not just multicultural ones, in the Gungahlin region.

It is important that as a government we listen to the needs of the communities we represent. We should build community assets where communities want them. This project is something for which the multicultural community has been advocating for quite some time. I think this venue should be located in Gungahlin, close to the communities that have been advocating for it.

I support this motion and I urge all members of this place to do so as well. I commend the motion.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (12.03), in reply: I would like to thank the majority of the members for what was a very positive and encouraging debate. I think our multicultural communities would be very encouraged to hear the support that is coming from the Assembly.

I acknowledge that the opposition's comments were perhaps not as positive as we might have hoped, but if I can be quite frank, Madam Assistant Speaker, I was almost expecting that, given that every time the government, and particularly backbenchers, move something that is a good idea, we hear the same lines from the opposition about how terrible we are; yet they still vote for the motion.

In closing, I thank members today for what was a positive debate. I am looking forward to moving this project along, because it has come about after requests and feedback from the multicultural community, and we do work to deliver for them.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sitting suspended from 12.04 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—planning

MR COE: My question is to the Minister for Health. How much of the expenditure on expanding the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children is due to the fact that the ACT government did not plan for it properly in the first place?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The expenditure on the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children is an investment in the future of Centenary hospital. It has nothing to do with its previous development.

MR COE: Minister, why did the government build the Centenary hospital with fewer beds than the building it replaced?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Coe for the question. I am not going to take the premise of the question as read, given the record of the opposition's accuracy in asking its questions. What I can say is that the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children is an excellent service and its expansion will be welcomed by the community.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what lessons has ACT Health learnt from the problems with the maternity hospital, and how can they apply that to planning future projects?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for the supplementary. Obviously, Health Services are learning lessons all the time about the delivery of their complex services. I am not entirely sure what aspect of the delivery of maternity services Mrs Dunne is referring to, but Canberra Health Services is learning lessons all the time about delivery of services in a wide range of ways. Of course, there is a

maternity services inquiry currently underway, which we have welcomed. We have certainly welcomed people sharing their experiences with that inquiry. Canberra Health Services and I appeared before that inquiry, and we await the recommendations with much interest, acknowledging that health services are learning organisations. They are organisations that are constantly seeking to improve.

Transport—safety

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the minister for transport. When was the last women's safety or disability access audit undertaken for any of Canberra's public transport infrastructure such as bus interchanges or bus stops?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question and I am happy to come back to her on notice with the detail and the exact timings of any audits that might have been undertaken of the transport system. I am certainly aware that, as a result of the ABC segment last night, the Women's Centre for Health Matters is currently conducting a survey of women around Canberra in relation to transport and I am looking forward to seeing the outcomes of that survey and any feedback that can help us to plan for transport infrastructure in the future.

Of course, as we continue work on bringing light rail stage 2 down to Woden from the city, I think that there is a real opportunity to engage in relation to the design, particularly at a stationary level: how we make sure that connections to the station are good for people who are walking and cycling and also with regard to different cohorts in our community, making sure that those environments and stops are safe for people to use.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, what is the government doing to ensure that the journey from the bus stop, the bus interchange or the railhead to home is safe, particularly noting that under network 19 some people are walking further than they did before?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. There is a range of things that we look at. Some stops, particularly for light rail, have things like CCTV installed, and there are cameras on board light rail as well, and other elements. I am happy to provide a list of those to the Assembly on notice. It is capital improvements but also on public transport it is how the staff operate. I will provide that on notice.

Ms Le Couteur: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order. I specifically asked about getting home from the bus stop or the light rail stop. The minister's answer has not dealt with any of that.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister did say he would get some information on notice. Maybe we can clarify. Would that information would include a response to that, Minister?

MR STEEL: I am happy to provide some information about that. There is a significant number of bus stops across the ACT. We will consider those issues. I am happy to provide some information about the outcomes of any audits that might have

been undertaken. Of course the government is also undertaking work in relation to new interchanges. New interchanges have been completed in places like Dickson and Gungahlin but we are looking at building a new Woden interchange. The design of that will, I hope, deliver a much safer experience for those who are using public transport. It is currently tucked away at the north-eastern side of the centre. There might be opportunities through the design to improve that location, for example, which is obviously a major centre for people who are transitioning between different modes of transport and for pedestrians throughout Woden town centre using that space.

MR COE: Minister, what security and risk assessments were undertaken by Transport Canberra with regard to closure of the 750 bus stops and also the cancellation of many school services?

MR STEEL: I am happy to come back with some detail in relation to that. We continue to work with school communities in particular around bus arrangements, and we have undertaken around 100 tweaks to the network, some of which have been designed to improve accessibility, particularly around schools. We are certainly taking each of those things in. With a change of this magnitude, with network 19, there are things that we need to continue, now that the network has rolled out, to improve over time. Some of that requires consideration of capital upgrades; some of it requires tweaks to the network itself. We are open to receiving feedback, and I am looking forward to receiving feedback particularly from the Women's Centre for Health Matters.

Mr Coe: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe.

Mr Coe: Just on relevance, I wonder whether the minister could clarify whether he is taking that on notice.

Mr Steel: I am.

Health—emergency department bypass policy

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in June this year the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine issued a position statement on hospital bypass. The college said that it does not support the use of hospital bypass as a measure to manage access block and overcrowding in emergency departments as, it says, this is a symptom of mismatching hospital inpatient service capacity with increasing patient demand. Minister, with three bypass incidents so far this year at the Canberra Hospital, what are you doing to reduce the likelihood and severity of hospital bypass incidents or are you just happy to go back to sleep when they happen?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. I have spoken a number of times in this place about the investment that we are making in the expansion of capacity both in the Canberra Hospital and of course in the Calvary emergency department. I emphasise again that Canberra Hospital has processes in

place to manage surges in demand. It is rare that we go to ambulance bypass but it is part of a broader strategy.

We are also implementing the timely care strategy which I have also spoken about in this place before. Again, several initiatives under that strategy have already been implemented, including daily multi-disciplinary staff ward huddles, hospital-wide flow management meetings, strategies to reduce barriers to discharge and discharging patients appropriately.

Part of the strategy that I have not particularly spoken about in relation to this is the establishment of the all-care discharge unit which opened on 11 July. It provides a broader model of care than the current discharge lounge, enabling non-ambulant patients to access this service. It is an important element of the timely care strategy that is being implemented across TCH to improve patient flow and ensure that our valuable hospital beds are being used as efficiently as possible.

Again, when Mrs Dunne gets around to being briefed on this in October, she will hear all about it.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what is your government's response to the position statement of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine? Are you aware of it? Will you create a formal response to the position statement?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am happy to have a look at the position statement and consider whether a formal response is required. Again, taking into account the factual inaccuracies that have riddled the opposition's questions over the past few weeks, I would want to be sure that they are talking about a situation like the ACT, where we have two hospitals that work very closely together to manage demand in a territory-wide service system. I will come back to the Assembly if I have more to add.

MR WALL: Minister, are you mismatching hospital inpatient service capacity with increased patient demand in our services?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not believe so.

Building—reforms

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Building Quality Improvement. Can the minister update the Assembly on the progress of the ACT's building reforms and the outcomes of the recent building ministers forum?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Orr for her question and her interest in the quality of building across the ACT. This government is committed to reforming our building regulatory system to ensure that we have the highest quality buildings in Australia. That is why we are rolling out a series of reforms to achieve this.

I am happy to advise the Assembly that we have now completed 28 of the 43 reforms, meeting the commitments that I made in this Assembly. We have finalised the certifiers code of practice, so that certifiers are clear on what is expected of them. We

have expanded our builders licensing exams so that we have the toughest licensing in the country. We have continued to roll out reforms to make a real difference in the industry here.

As many in this place will be aware, I attended the building ministers forum last month. It was an incredibly productive meeting where all states, territories and the commonwealth agreed on the further action to be taken at a national level to improve building quality.

All the states and territories have agreed to fund a new implementation team within the Australian Building Codes Board to develop an amendment to the national construction code to specifically address the design, construction and certification of complex buildings. This will give further guidance to the industry on how we expect these buildings to be built and specify the extra steps that will be expected to ensure that they are built well.

At the meeting a number of states also approached the ACT to find out about our nation-leading builder and surveyor codes of practice, including asking to come and speak further with us about how they can be implemented in their jurisdictions.

MS ORR: Can the minister outline how these reforms will help the regulator improve the quality of building in the city and ensure that the building industry is held to account?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. Our reform program is designed to give the regulator the tools that he needs to better enforce building quality standards here in the ACT. Our certifiers code of practice makes clear what we expect of them. Our minimum documentation guidelines set out what we expect in building plans so that more thought goes into the design of buildings early on and so that builders are not left guessing.

All of this is linked to the builder's and the certifier's licences. If they do not follow the rules, they risk their ability to work in the sector. We have introduced builders licence exams to check that those entering the industry have sufficient skills and sufficient knowledge to do the work. We are re-testing those who renew their licence who have a history of non-compliance or who let their licence lapse. We will not allow people whose skills and knowledge are not up to scratch to work in this industry.

We have created a mandatory course for certifiers so that they understand their responsibilities. We have made changes to the licencing system so that those who phoenix are unable to shift their licence to a new company. We call on the federal government to reform the corporations act to better target those who do engage in phoenixing.

We have expanded statutory warranties to cover buildings over three storeys to 10 years, so that builders remain responsible for their work regardless of building height. We have delineated agency agreements from building contracts so that consumers are more aware of when they are appointing a certifier. Our reforms are

nation-leading. They are meaningful. They will have a positive impact on the building industry and they will hold to account industry participants.

MR PETTERSSON: Can the minister outline what is next on the agenda for the ACT's building reforms?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Pettersson for the important question because these reforms are ongoing and we are focusing on finalising our building reform program. We will finalise our builders code of practice shortly and that will mirror the code of practice for surveyors and it will be linked to the licences of builders. We will be creating new dispute resolution pathways which will make it easier for consumers to get builders to fix defects. We will also be ensuring the security of payment for subcontractors, to ensure that they get paid for their work.

I note that this ongoing work stands in contrast to those opposite. As we have heard stated over the past couple of days, Mr Parton seems to want industry to reform industry. Also yesterday we learned that Mr Parton wants to take responsibility for the problem. If we look to the problems that exist around the privatisation of certifiers, let us look to see who it was that brought in those particular features. It was in 1998 under the Carnell government. So I assume it is the case that Mr Parton expects taxpayers to pick up the tab for the work of dodgy builders, because I would not like to think that Mr Parton is loose and careless with his words when we put him in front of the media.

On this side we do not think we can trust industry to fix itself. We know that industry has shown that certain players cannot be trusted. We know that industry associations are not working hard enough to remove them. So this will be our focus. We will continue to roll out reforms to hold them to account. We will continue to resource our regulator to enforce this. We will continue to change the industry and we will continue to root out those who do the wrong things, unlike those opposite who would like industry to reform industry and who are too concerned about what they think might be red tape and not interested in ensuring that Canberrans' buildings are well built. (*Time expired.*)

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: during his answer Mr Ramsay said words to the effect that Mr Parton was free with his language and the truth. I think that is unparliamentary and should be withdrawn.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not believe—

Mr Ramsay: Madam Speaker, on the point of order: I said specifically that I would not like to think that that Mr Parton is loose with his words.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker, the minister has just confirmed that he made the imputation and he should withdraw it.

MADAM SPEAKER: If I draw everybody's attention to what comes out from your benches—

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker, I took a point of order, and it is up to anyone in this place at any time to take a point of order. What Mr Ramsay has said—and he confirmed what he said—is an imputation on Mr Parton and it should be withdrawn.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not believe so, Mrs Dunne.

Canberra Hospital—master plan

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I refer to reports in the media of 14 August of a tender for a master planning process for the Canberra Hospital campus which will not finish until late next year. Minister, will the master plan be completed before the government selects a tender to build SPIRE?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Parton for the question. Yes, the ACT Health Directorate has commenced work on a Canberra Hospital master plan. SAFM Solutions has been contracted to carry out the first phase of the master planning project, which will take place in two phases. The first phase will include a comprehensive review of all previous planning documentation, utilising this existing information, and also set out the visions and principles that will underpin the master plan. The second phase of the project will be undertaking the development of the actual master plan, which at this stage is expected to be finalised in late 2020.

The master plan will help to structure future infrastructure at the campus. It complements the work that is already underway looking at the expansion of hospital services on the north side and also the planning for the SPIRE project. It takes into account the fact that planning for a number of major infrastructure projects at the hospital campus is already underway, including the SPIRE project and the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children. As a result of these projects it was considered that there was a need to look at the bigger picture for health infrastructure across the campus.

Taking that time frame into account, to come specifically to Mr Parton's question, I do not expect that the master plan will be finalised before tenders are entered into in relation to the development of SPIRE. The master plan will take into account the planning for SPIRE, which is well underway.

MR PARTON: Minister, when will you turn the first sod for construction on SPIRE?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Parton for the question but I do not think that anyone in this Assembly could expect that I could provide a level of specificity about what date the first sod is going to be turned on any project.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why didn't the government develop a master plan to refurbish the Canberra Hospital campus some years ago, before it started work on individual projects?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for the supplementary question. As I mentioned earlier, the first phase of the master planning process will include a

review of all previous planning documentation, and utilise this existing information. So it should not be seen by anybody that the development of a master plan now is an indication that there has not previously been planning. As I said the planning for the SPIRE project is well underway. Everybody in this place knows that there was a change in the proposed location of SPIRE. That was part of this planning work. That planning is well underway, and I look forward to making some further announcements about that in due course.

Government—election commitments

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, what does the passage of the 2019-20 budget mean for the government's election commitments to the Canberra community?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. We went to the last election with around 200 commitments across nearly every aspect of service delivery and infrastructure for the city. I am pleased to say that, with the passage of the budget yesterday, we have now funded or started work on nearly 200 initiatives. This includes delivering new walk-in centres, recruiting more school psychologists, planting new trees, building a second Common Ground and undertaking a range of transport infrastructure improvements.

The passing of the budget delivers a range of further commitments that we undertook at the 2016 election. Light rail is up and running, the green bin rollout has taken place across the territory, education is more equitable, walk-in centres have been opened in Gungahlin, and work is underway on the new facility in Weston Creek.

We have made a series of commitments during this parliamentary term and we work progressively on their delivery.

MR PETTERSSON: How has the government approached funding its election commitments through successive budgets since 2016?

MR BARR: Through a determined, steady and responsible delivery of those commitments. We have prioritised the delivery of key commitments over the past three years. We have been able to significantly expand services and facilities available to Canberrans. We are very alert to the importance of delivering what we said we would deliver. That remains our focus over the balance of this parliamentary term.

MS CODY: Chief Minister, what are the government's next priorities for investment, with election commitments now funded and underway?

MR BARR: We know that our city's population will continue to grow rapidly and we need to look ahead to our city's needs in the next decade and beyond. Shortly we will be releasing a forward infrastructure plan for the territory that will take a detailed look at how Canberra is growing and changing and how future infrastructure investments can ensure that we remain the world's most livable city.

The infrastructure plan will of course look beyond a budget cycle to a pipeline of projects that will need to be prioritised for government investment over the coming decades. It will take into account factors like our growing population, the changing geography and demography of our city and the urgent need to increase our resilience to the effects of harmful climate change. It will set out clear priorities for investment so that we can work with industry, stakeholder groups and the wider community to effectively design and deliver the infrastructure that our city needs as we continue to grow towards half a million people.

Health—flu season preparedness

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, why has your flu season plan for 2019 failed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, without accepting the premise of Mr Wall's question, I have no idea on what basis he determines that the flu season plan has failed. What I can say in relation to the winter strategy is that a number of measures to support seasonal demand were implemented prior to 11 July 2019. This included the introduction of strategies to improve discharge planning, removing barriers to discharge, increasing access to pathology, rapid testing to enable early diagnosis of influenza, and commencement of additional recruitment to address this seasonal demand.

A targeted external communication strategy also commenced in June to promote the utilisation of walk-in centres and to help Canberrans better understand the difference between a cold and the flu. The opening of an additional 16 winter beds at the Canberra Hospital and the all-care discharge unit that I spoke about earlier in question time commenced on 11 July. Twelve additional beds have been progressively opened at the University of Canberra Hospital since June 2019 to provide additional capacity into the system.

I spoke earlier about the all-care discharge unit, which provides a broader model of care than the previous discharge lounge, enabling non-ambulant patients to access this service, an important part of the timely care strategy. The commencement of both the additional beds at TCH and the all-care discharge unit were aligned to the completion of critical infrastructure works across the campus.

Unfortunately, a flu season does not give advance notice of the fact that it is going to arrive earlier than it has in any year over the past 10 years, but Canberra Health Services responded and is managing the situation.

MR WALL: Minister, will you be sharing ACT data and analysis with other jurisdictions and discussing with them how all jurisdictions can be better prepared in 2020? If so, what arrangements have been entered into?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Wall for the supplementary question. Of course, all jurisdictions share this kind of information routinely. The management of flu seasons is done at both the national and local levels and people share that information.

I cannot provide the precise timing, but every year Canberra Health Services reviews the winter strategy and what happened in the flu season, and works towards the next winter season. They do that in sharing information with other jurisdictions.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, when did you expect the flu season to start this year? Did you have any contingencies for an early start to the flu season?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I had no particular expectations about the start of the flu season myself.

Mr Coe: Yet you said you were surprised.

Ms Stephen-Smith: No, I said it does not provide notice.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, Mr Hanson has the floor.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am sorry; it is—

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, please.

MR HANSON: So rude.

MADAM SPEAKER: To the question.

Legal Aid Commission—domestic violence service

MR HANSON: My question is to the Attorney-General. Yesterday Julie Tongs, the CEO of Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services, made a statement:

... the ACT Labor/Greens Government had moved to deny almost all Aboriginal and working class women and women otherwise from low income households ... access to legal advice and assistance when they are seeking to protect themselves and their children from violence.

She continued:

It is inevitable, if the Legal Aid Commission domestic violence service is not maintained, that there will be a dramatic and frightening increase in the number of women and children having no access to legal assistance and protection and who will, as a consequence remain in violent and abusive relationships.

Attorney-General, why are you denying almost all Aboriginal and working class women access to legal advice and assistance by making these cuts?

MS BERRY: I am responding as Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. I understand the question from Mr Hanson refers to the change in the way the family safety levy will fund services in the ACT, including funding for legal aid. As has been said in this place a number of times, including during estimates, the family safety levy will stop funding legal aid services from next year.

It is the intention of the government that those services will continue and the government will work very closely with legal aid and the Legal Aid Commission to ensure that those services continue. The government takes very seriously making sure that people who are experiencing domestic and family violence—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS BERRY: Madam Speaker, a number of times during answers to a number of questions that have been asked today Mr Hanson has constantly interrupted. He might not like the answer that he is being given but he is getting an answer. It is the same and consistent answer that has been provided to him through this place and through estimates hearings.

I can assure the legal aid community that the government, including the Attorney-General and me, will continue to work with that organisation as well as providing services for all women in the ACT, particularly through the family safety levy.

MR HANSON: Minister, what specific steps are you taking within your department to deal with, as Julie Tongs says, the inevitable, dramatic and frightening increase in the number of women and children who will face remaining in violent and abusive relationships?

MS BERRY: There are a number of steps that the ACT has taken, particularly with asking the community to contribute to the work towards addressing this complex and often very complicated issue across our community but particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, who we know are particularly affected by this issue.

Mr Hanson: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, minister.

Mr Hanson: I have asked what the specific steps are. The minister said there are steps, but she has not explained what they are. I ask her to explain what those specific steps are.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, you have a minute and a half left if you could target that area.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My very first part of responding to that question was with regard to the family safety levy and implementing—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: Pardon me?

MADAM SPEAKER: Do not respond to interjections.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, allow the minister to respond to the question. Minister.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The levy is about making sure that the government, working very closely with front-line services, looks at new and innovative ways to address issues that people in our community are facing. One of those programs, which has been talked about in detail in this place, is the room for change program, which not only ensures that women and children can stay safely in their home but ensures that perpetrators can also get support to change their behaviour so that they can move back safely with their family and that the domestic and family violence ends. That is again a measured, nation-leading project that the ACT government is working on through the family safety levy, through co-design, working very closely with the domestic and family violence crisis service to make sure that there is a program that can keep women and children safe in their homes but also looking at how perpetrator change programs can support everybody to get on with their lives. *(Time expired.)*

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why was the funding for this service not locked in and legislated as promised?

MS BERRY: I have responded to that question. I can refer members opposite to the numerous responses that both I and the Attorney-General have provided around funding for legal aid and the purpose of the family safety levy.

Government—support for emergency services

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, what update can you provide on the construction of a fire station in my electorate of Murrumbidgee?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Cody for her interest in protecting the Canberra community. The Molonglo Valley region is a growing area of the ACT that includes the suburbs of Wright, Coombs, Denman Prospect and the future suburb of Whitlam. It is anticipated that by 2030 the population of this region will be approximately 35,000.

As part of the 2019-20 ACT budget, the ACT government announced funding of \$456,000 so that work can commence on the due diligence and preliminary design for the new combined ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Fire & Rescue station in the Molonglo Valley. The due diligence investigation and preliminary design for a Molonglo Valley station will include site identification, confirmation of the station requirements, specification development, consultation, station design, approval requirements, and construction cost estimates. I look forward to working with Ms Cody as this project progresses. This is just one example of the support we are providing to our firefighters, paramedics and other emergency services.

Before concluding, I want to congratulate Georgeina Whelan on becoming the first woman to be the ACT's Emergency Services Commissioner. She brings tremendous experience to this role, and I am delighted at the example she will set for women across our services, showing that there is no job that women cannot do. I look forward to talking about this more, and about her achievements, in this place in the near future.

MS CODY: How else is the government supporting firefighters across Murrumbidgee and the ACT?

MR GENTLEMAN: In 2018 work was completed to upgrade the existing Molonglo Rural Fire Service shed. The project was funded as part of the natural disaster resilience program funding in the 2016-17 ACT budget. The project included both internal works to male and female locker rooms and ablutions and external works to the vehicle storage bays. The work on the locker rooms and ablutions were in line with the ESA's women in emergency services strategy and assists in the recruitment and retention of female firefighters.

Also I recently attended a meeting with community fire unit (CFU) volunteers, where I was made aware of the establishment of CFUs in the Denman Prospect area. CFUs provide an invaluable service to communities in high bushfire risk areas on the urban edges of the ACT such as Denman Prospect. CFU volunteers complement the work done by ACT Fire & Rescue and the ACT Rural Fire Service, where the whole community can contribute towards maintaining a safe and secure city. I want to acknowledge the positive response from the residents of Denman Prospect and want to thank Capital Estate Developments as well, who arranged to donate two CFU trailers to support the Denman Prospect community.

While the ACT government continues to provide support and infrastructure for growing areas of the ACT like Molonglo, the government also continues to invest in established areas like the Woden Valley. The ACT Fire & Rescue station, ambulance station and ACT State Emergency Service unit, all located in Phillip, have ensured the safety of Woden residents over many decades. Like all Canberrans, the people of the Molonglo and Woden valleys will benefit from the ACT government's recent announcements about providing additional front-line firefighters and paramedics to meet the increasing demands of a growing city.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, what help is being provided to other emergency services?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Cheyne for her interest in safety across the city as well. While the government has a proven record of increased investment in its emergency facilities and services, it is also keen to invest in its emergency services personnel. Examples include the women in emergency services strategy, through which we have implemented a variety of activities such as come & try day, boot camp for ACT Fire & Rescue, and the tool time workshop. This allows a hands-on approach to understanding the practicalities of being an ACT firefighter.

There is the empowering and diversity program. Three ESA staff members were recently provided an opportunity to attend the national police, defence and emergency

services women's leadership summit, which resulted in this program. It brings together volunteers and staff across ACT government directorates to share experiences, build networks, learn how to get the most out of career development and gain the tools to be a leader at any rank. The everyday leaders program, a ground-up initiative led by a number of junior operational staff in ACT Fire & Rescue, is happening as well.

It is important that we respect our first responders. I must call out the outrageous attack from Mr Parton on social media last week in which he likened members of ACT Policing to thugs. I table Mr Parton's Facebook post for the benefit of all members. The imputation against ACT police officers is there to see:

Tweet by Mr Parton MLA, 14 August at 19:44.

The shadow minister for police must apologise for the slur from the Canberra Liberals. It is very clear that it is only this side of the house that backs our first responders and invests in them. Those opposite do not believe in public service.

Legal Aid Commission—domestic violence service

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Minister, what efforts did you make to represent the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children in relation to the funding cuts to the Legal Aid Commission domestic violence service?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Milligan for the question and I understand that the Attorney-General has on a number of occasions assured members of the Assembly, including, I believe, in the estimates hearings, that the funding that will be moved as part of the redesign in relation to the family safety levy will in fact be replaced from another bucket of money from 1 July 2020. I am assured by the attorney that he has told members of the Assembly that before and that that is the case.

Mr Coe: I have a point of order on relevance. Mr Milligan's question was specifically about "what efforts did you make"? That is, what efforts did the minister make? She has gone on to try to describe what Mr Ramsay did in estimates but we are yet to hear what efforts she actually made.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, I spoke to Minister Ramsay, the Attorney-General, in relation to this matter to seek assurance in relation to it. I also worked very closely with Minister Berry in relation to the development of the response and the commitment to respond to the *We don't shoot our wounded* report, a report received by the ACT government in, I think, 2009 from the best of my recollection. It is a long time ago. What we learned from talking to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and listening to the community was that it was an ongoing sore for the community that the government had never provided a formal response to that report. So Minister Berry has committed to doing that and I have been part of those conversations with her, with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and the Domestic Violence Prevention Council. I have been actively part of those conversations and part of that commitment.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why have you failed, then, to convince your colleagues to retain the funding for the domestic violence service?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Milligan for the question and refer him to my previous answer.

MR HANSON: Yes or no: will the job cuts be restored at Legal Aid, or not?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Hanson and refer him to the comments that the Attorney-General, I believe, has previously made in relation to this matter.

Health—adult mental health unit

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, what is the national capacity benchmark for adult mental health units, and at what level will the ACT operate through the 2019-20 financial year?

MR RATTENBURY: I will provide that significant level of detail to Miss Burch on notice.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, how do you know that patients will not continue to be, at worst, turned away or, at best, held in the emergency department for unacceptable lengths of time during 2019-20?

MR RATTENBURY: I do not accept the premise of Miss Burch's question, but what I can say is that we are working very hard to ensure that Canberra residents who present with mental health concerns get the service they need. That will be in a range of places. Some will be through the emergency department; some will be through their local GP; some will be through our community mental health centres.

Last year we implemented a new model of care for the adult community mental health centres. That has reduced the waiting times and seen a significant improvement in morale for our staff as well because they are able to see their patients in a more effective way. They feel less stressed by the reduction in pressure through that system. This is an example of the sorts of measures that Canberra Health Services and the ACT Health Directorate are putting in place to ensure that we provide the services the community expects.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, will work to remove ligature points in the adult mental health unit continue to create bed availability problems during this financial year and, if so, for how long and why could you not provide Miss Burch with two simple figures?

MR RATTENBURY: The ligature work is currently well underway and the completion will be over the coming months. I am pleased to be able to inform the Assembly that there has actually been some spare bed capacity at the adult mental health unit in recent times. The concerns that Mrs Dunne is raising have not been a significant issue for us.

Municipal services—dog management

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the minister for city services. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the implementation of the Canberra model for dog management?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Cheyne for her question. The Canberra model for dog management outlines the government's vision for best practice dog management in the ACT. Our new model for dog management is based on three key principles: a safe community, responsible dog ownership and animal welfare.

The government is well underway with implementing the six objectives that will lead to best practice dog management for Canberra. One is that all dog owners are responsible for their dog. We have had one free microchipping day, at the million paws walk, and we are planning more events in the year and beyond. We are encouraging productive partnerships with organisations like the RSPCA, vets and pet businesses. We have begun building education and awareness of being a responsible dog owner across the territory with a new campaign: "own a dog, own the responsibility".

We are ensuring that compliance has enforcement to keep the community safe from dangerous dogs, supported by our new six-member compliance team, which has joined our existing team of domestic animal rangers, to improve community safety and to better educate dog owners. We are ensuring that the rules are clear, so that dog owners know their responsibilities and obligations. We have recently released changes to off-leash dog areas, which are available online.

Also, we are ensuring that responsible dog owners are rewarded. As part of that aspect, we are providing dog bags and bins at all dog parks across the ACT and at other locations that are highly frequented by dogs and their owners.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, what changes have been made to these off-leash areas?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Cheyne for her interest in this area. We are making common-sense changes to off-lead areas in the ACT. By default, if you have your dog out in public in Canberra it must be on a lead unless otherwise specified. Apart from Canberra's seven dedicated dog parks, there are numerous areas that have been made designated off-leash areas as part of the changes, including ovals when formalised sporting events are not on and some schools when classes are not in session. Importantly, almost all Canberra households are within 800 metres of an off-leash dog area.

Even in designated off-leash areas, owners must retain effective control of their dog at all times, meaning that the dog can be prevented from approaching other animals or people and can return to the owner at their command. This makes it easier for dog owners to do the right thing and also improves community safety for non dog owners.

Maps are available to view via the “Recreation with my dog” page on the TCCS website in PDF format and on ACTmapi. We will continue to make changes to the maps as required. I have previously flagged a review of the lakes heading into summer to ensure that there are adequate areas for dogs to have a swim.

MR GUPTA: Minister, what have been the initial results of the compliance team announced as part of the Canberra model for dog management?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Gupta for his supplementary. The government’s new six-member compliance team has been out since the end of June helping to educate the community about responsible dog ownership and taking compliance action as necessary. Since 1 July, the compliance team has been undertaking engagements with the community across the entirety of Canberra, including all dog parks, sportsgrounds and suburban streets. So far, 133 engagements related to dog matters have been taken with the community.

Overwhelmingly, Canberrans are doing the right thing. Most of these engagements were about educating dog owners on their responsibilities. The initial focus of this compliance team will be on education as part of the compliance approach. Of the 133 engagements, only a handful, three, resulted in compliance being enforced, with one dog found roaming in public, one dog that was not desexed and one dog found off leash in an on-lead area. For most other members of the community, where issues were identified, copies of the new Canberra dog model were handed out to educate the community in the first instance. Members of the compliance team will continue to receive training from other experienced rangers at DAS. We will be examining the success of the new team at the end of the six-month trial.

Schools—Miles Franklin

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, what will it cost to fence Miles Franklin School and the adjoining south-west Evatt oval?

MS BERRY: There is no decision to fence Miles Franklin School or the adjacent oval at this time.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, why does the proposal to fence the Miles Franklin School include the south-west Evatt oval?

MS BERRY: That was a proposal put forward by the P&C of the Miles Franklin School.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, how will a two-metre high steel spiked fence enhance the environmental amenity currently presented by open green spaces between the school and the local residents? Will you correct the record because the proposition of the fencing was put forward by the department, not by the school?

MS BERRY: On the second part of Mrs Dunne's question, that is not the advice I have. It is still a proposal. Yes, the directorate is helping with the consultation with the community, but there is a proposal, which everybody is clear about. There has been correspondence to my office about this matter. I understand that there are people who are concerned about a fence around the oval. I am very happy to hear, and encourage people to continue to provide, feedback on the proposed fence.

But at this stage it is just a proposed fence, for a couple of reasons. One is to ensure the safety of the students and staff at the Miles Franklin school. It is also to prevent damage and vandalism that could occur at that school. They are very good reasons. At the end of the day it will be the school community that needs to agree and have the support of the community to have a fence constructed there or on the oval, although it is less likely that the oval will be accepted by the community, judging from the correspondence that I have received and from what I understand the community are saying. So this is not an issue that needs to be used to divide the community. It is a chance—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please.

Mrs Dunne: They are not divided; they are unanimous.

MS BERRY: That is okay because it is just a proposal at the moment. The most mature way for everybody in this place to approach this matter is to encourage people in the community to provide their feedback in a respectful way—

Mr Wall: But you never listen. The government seldom listens.

MS BERRY: Madam Speaker, to suggest that I do not listen to members of the community about issues—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MS BERRY: I raise a point of order, Madam Speaker, on the behaviour of those opposite towards ministers who are trying to give honest answers to issues that are affecting our communities jointly—Mrs Dunne's community in her suburb, I might add. It is an opportunity to bring people together, yet all they can do is sit here and make fun of me because I am actually taking this issue seriously, making sure that people have the chance to provide their feedback, providing information about how they can do it; that is what this place is supposed to be about: openness and transparency in governance.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat, please.

Mr Hanson: That is not a point of order; that is a rant.

Ms Berry: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, that interjection is a very gendered interjection towards a woman. It might be considered that when I have an issue to raise with those opposite, it is described as a rant. It is completely unacceptable and it should be withdrawn.

Mr Coe: On the point of order, it is worth noting that numerous members opposite, including the Chief Minister and the Minister for Health, laughed.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I remind everybody that the minister has a point, in that the noise and the interjections from members of the opposition are at times loud and sometimes verging on being unparliamentary. I understand that there is theatre and there is the cut and thrust of political debate, but you should all have respect for and be respectful to other people in the chamber.

Crime—property damage

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I refer to an incident which occurred on 25 July 2019, in which a self-confessed drug-affected Labor politician repeatedly kicked in and destroyed a door at a hotel in Kingston. Media reported that the incident was so serious that guests at the hotel were advised to stay away from the area and that multiple ACT police officers attended the scene. Minister, why were no charges brought against this person, given the damage, destruction and violence that was caused in the hotel?

MR GENTLEMAN: That would be a matter for the operational side of ACT Policing. I very much trust their work across the ACT. They are a fantastic group of people that we continue to resource. It is important that they are able to do their job independently from government, but that they are supported by government in a resourcing sense.

Yesterday the opposition voted against the biggest resource appropriation for ACT Policing. We will continue to support ACT Policing. But I will not interfere, as Mrs Jones indicates I should, as she would if she were the police minister in the ACT.

Mrs Jones: Point of order on relevance.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister is responding to your question. I think he is being relevant to your question. Resume your seat.

Mrs Jones: I would like to make a point.

MADAM SPEAKER: You raised relevance. I believe he is answering.

Mrs Jones: Yes, but I would also like to point out standing order 47. I ask that in this case you consider standing order 47 in relation to being misrepresented. This is a very important point. The minister makes a case that I did something, which I did not. I have been misrepresented.

Mr Rattenbury: Madam Speaker, on the point of order. I think that the opposition regularly reinterprets ministers' comments. If Mrs Jones's point of order is to stand, we will spend a lot of time in this chamber dealing with standing order 47.

Mrs Jones: Madam Speaker, I ask to speak to the point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: No, resume your seat Mrs Jones. I repeat: resume your seat. Standing order 47 does not apply to this because it goes to a point of a debate. There is no debate; it is question time.

Mrs Jones: Standing order 46?

MADAM SPEAKER: It is 47. For 46 you can stand if you like at the end of question time.

MRS JONES: Minister, when did you first become aware of this incident and what briefing, if any, did you have on the subsequent process?

MR GENTLEMAN: I think the first time I became aware was from reports in the press. I have not been briefed in specificity by ACT Policing about this particular incident. As I said, it is an operational matter. I have full confidence in ACT Policing resolving the matter and I have full confidence in ACT Policing as a whole. I think they do a fantastic job for the ACT.

Madam Speaker, you would have noticed that crime statistics for the ACT have been dropping across the forward program. That shows that the resources that we are providing for ACT police are taken up and are being used and crime is trending down.

MR PARTON: Minister, have you received any briefing on this matter? Has it been mentioned in any briefing, and is this the standard of behaviour that you accept as the minister in charge of law and order here in the ACT?

MR GENTLEMAN: I am the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. In regard to law and order, I am not sure if I can take that cudgel up. However, I have not received any specific briefing about this matter.

Disability services—justice strategy

MR GUPTA: My question is to the Minister for Disability. Minister, what will the recently released disability justice strategy and action plan mean for Canberrans with disability?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Gupta for the question. The aim of the disability justice strategy for the ACT, of course, is to ensure that all people with disability are treated equally before the law, have equal access to justice and that their rights are upheld.

National and international research shows that people with disability face many barriers to accessing justice, which leads to an increased level of contact with the justice system. The disability justice strategy will address this inequality and increase the responsiveness of the justice system to the needs of people with disability, which will improve the justice system for everyone.

The disability justice strategy is for people with disability, their families and carers, the justice system and the wider community. The strategy is a 10-year plan and has three primary goals: to ensure that people with disability are safe and their rights are respected; that the ACT has a disability responsive justice system; and that change is achieved and measured.

The disability justice strategy will support a series of action plans and review points. The first action plan released with the strategy describes the first four years of work and the commitments made by stakeholders to ensure that the ACT provides equal access to justice for people with disability. Almost \$4.9 million over four years has specifically been allocated for the implementation of the action plan, with a primary outcome of the development of a community of practice, of disability liaison officers across our justice system, working together to build an understanding of the needs of people with disability within the justice system, and to support people with disability as they interact with a range of justice and legal sector partners. This will, of course, be supported by the establishment of the intermediary scheme announced in the budget.

The disability justice strategy and first action plan deliver on ACT Labor's election commitment, and it is part of our vision for building a more inclusive Canberra.

MR GUPTA: Minister, how were the strategy and action plan developed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Gupta for the supplementary question. Of course the lived experience of people with disability and their experiences with the justice system were at the core of the consultation work and the development of the strategy.

In May 2018 we held an important public conversation in which criminologist Eileen Baldry, Victims of Crime Commissioner Heidi Yates and advocate Yenn Perkis shared their knowledge and experience of people with disability and accessing justice, at a public forum during Law Week.

Then through June to September 2018 the government asked for feedback through surveys, face-to-face meetings, community events and written submissions to hear directly about the community's views, priorities and experiences. This was continued through a survey on your say. We sought the views of the community on the issues, concerns and responses that could be included in the strategy, focusing on the three central themes of knowing your rights, exercising your rights and your experience of the justice system.

A disability justice reference group was formed to provide advice on key issues and priorities for the strategy to guide the strategy's development and to build relationships across the sector. The reference group's membership is made up of people with disability, lived experience of the justice system and representatives of the community sector and government.

I acknowledge the important and critical role that the reference group, led by Dougie Herd, the co-chair of the disability reference group, and Heidi Yates, played in the development of the strategy. Their commitment to the strategy has delivered us a stronger strategy and action plan that will drive change across the ACT.

As a result of this extensive community engagement and internal consultation with relevant ACT government directorates, the first action plan has been developed with the voice of the community at its heart. I

I particularly want to thank the staff who have been involved in this very important work and been absolutely committed to it over the past couple of years.

MS ORR: Minister, what difference is the strategy already making in the lives of people with disability engaged with the justice system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. I am pleased to say that the process of developing the disability justice strategy has already raised awareness and brought change in culture and attitude in the ACT.

The strategy's focus areas will guide this work into the future, from small service delivery improvements through to system-wide changes. The focus areas are information and communication; education and guidance; identification, screening and assessment; better service delivery; and data, research and review.

Through the development of the strategy a series of training courses from other states were piloted. Around 100 people attended these courses and now have a much greater awareness of issues facing people with disability and the justice system. They now know what to look for in determining the needs of people with disability. Justice agencies are already making changes in how they communicate with people with disability by using easy English and plain language. These changes make the system more accessible for everyone.

In this financial year we will see the start of a package of training tools developed and delivered by local advocacy agencies: the first in a series of easy English workshops in September 2019; the commencement of the first two of the practice positions in ACT Policing and Legal Aid; and the implementation of a handbook for child protection staff on how best to support people with disability, as well as a whole range of other workshops and activities to ensure that our systems see and respond to the needs of people with disability.

In a recent conversation with the Director of Public Prosecutions he told me that the DPP are already utilising the work of the strategy to assist them to better meet the

needs of all people they come into contact with. This just shows how important the strategy is and the real impact it will have on Canberrans with disability and the wider community. Again I thank everybody involved in its development.

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

Supplementary answer to question without notice Canberra Hospital—emergency department bypass

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I want to respond to a couple of questions I was asked yesterday by Miss Burch in relation to patient transfers to the National Capital Private Hospital on the night of 14-15 August. I can advise the Assembly that eight patients were transferred to the National Capital Private Hospital; of these, three patients were transferred back to Canberra Hospital and five were discharged home.

Miss Burch also asked about the agreement in place with the National Capital Private Hospital. I can advise that there is no formal agreement in place in relation to these matters. However, during periods of high demand, the Canberra Health Services executive make immediate arrangements with the general manager of the National Capital Private Hospital to identify the capacity and ability to safely transfer clinically appropriate patients.

Personal explanations

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.05): Pursuant to standing order 46, I seek leave to make a personal explanation. I wish to address some comments made by Minister Gentleman about me in response to a question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Do you claim to have been misrepresented?

MR PARTON: Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MR PARTON: Thank you. I completely and utterly reject the characterisation made by Mr Gentleman in his rant in his response to the question and his incorrect perception of a slur against our hardworking police made by me on my much-visited Facebook page. If he had bothered to read even the first comment on the post, he would have seen a question from Gregg Helden that said: “Are you blaming the police for following orders?” My clear response was, “Not at all. That is what we need our police to do. I am just questioning those orders.”

I have the utmost respect for our police force. I believe that when you consider the diminishing per capita number of police here in the ACT, at the hands of this minister, we would all agree that they are performing over and above our expectations.

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (3.06): Pursuant to standing order 46, I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

MADAM SPEAKER: Do you claim to have been misrepresented?

MRS JONES: Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MRS JONES: The minister misrepresented my perspective from my question, suggesting that I somehow disrespected the law enforcement officers of the ACT. I particularly go to the defence that Minister Rattenbury made that something that someone else does excuses what other people do. This is a tactic called “accuse to excuse”. It is not an acceptable form of argument in this place. Each and every person must answer for their own actions. I will answer for mine; each must answer for theirs. Mr Gentleman misrepresented the perspective put in the question.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Advanced Technology and Space Industries) (3.07): Madam Speaker, Mrs Jones raised in her personal explanation that I had misrepresented her. She failed to explain any misrepresentation.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think we will just let the matter rest there, members.

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2019-2020

Statement by member

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.08): I seek leave to make a brief statement to correct the record.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Madam Speaker and members. Yesterday in the appropriation debate in relation to the Legislative Assembly I made a statement that the government had not agreed to an appropriation for the Legislative Assembly. I was incorrect, because I was working from memory, and not from my notes, which I did not have with me. It was in fact for the Electoral Commission that money was not approved. My comments still stand, but I need to make it perfectly clear that I was mistaken yesterday. I thank the Clerk for drawing the mistake to my attention.

Planning—development application assessments

Debate resumed from 30 July 2019, on motion by **Mr Parton**:

That the motion be agreed to.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (3.08): It is topical that today we touch on DA processing times at a time when the minister for building quality is trying to state that he is about

to get to the problems of the industry. It seems short-sighted of him to seek to address some of the industry's problems without paying the proper respect to other issues that exist within the industry. This is a motion that Mr Parton brought to the Assembly many months ago. Due to procedural backlogs, it seems, it has taken as long to debate this motion in the Assembly as it takes to process many DAs in the ACT; perhaps quicker than many.

The processing times for DAs have a multifaceted impact on the ACT, not just in the construction industry but on the economy as a whole. We are seeing the statutory processing time for development applications under the tenure of this government and under the tenure of this minister continue to exceed those statutorily obligated time frames. There are instances that I am aware of where development applications are taking in excess of 12 months to be processed. In excess of a year to get a building permit approved? That just reeks of incompetence, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Under the oversight of the department and the minister—this is a Westminster government; the minister is ultimately responsible—there are continuing to be failings.

It is worth adding a bit of history and context around my personal interest in this issue. As many members know, I come from the construction industry. It is also worth noting that in 2008, when the Labor government sought to amend the Territory Plan and overhaul the planning system, our small business went from getting things approved in a matter of weeks to having it take four months. For a small business, that is crippling. But compare that to what we have today. Four months to get a DA approved would be really good. The minister has been overseeing a continual deterioration in the processing and scrutiny of applications over the six years that he has occupied the office. In six years it has gone down rapidly.

The reason I say that there are broader implications from the delay in DA processing is that it is not just the time it takes to get an application through. Suppose someone in the industry is holding a block of land. Particularly if you are talking about new homes or unit developments, someone has had to purchase the block and go through the planning phases—getting architects to design the site, estimate it, cost it and make sure that it is a viable project—only then to then go through the regulatory hurdles of getting the project approved. This is where the time delay comes. While the department is dragging its heels in trying to determine whether or not a project should be approved, that is costing money. If it is for new homes, it is the home buyer that has to foot the bill at the end of the day. If it is for units, often there are pre-sales, and the margins get tighter and tighter, be they for the developer or for subcontractors.

What we have been discussing in the Assembly over a number of weeks—it was touched on again during question time today by the minister for building quality—is the absolutely lax standard of construction in the territory at the moment. That is a legacy issue from years and years of failure to enforce the regulations as they stand in the industry and as a result of the delays that continue to plague the bureaucracy and the government in determining their regulatory obligations when it comes to assessing development applications.

If it takes a year to get a DA processed, that time and money needs to be made up somewhere else. It is an easy conclusion, a fair correlation to draw, that there are often unnecessary and unreasonable rushes being put on construction projects because there is a need to finish a project by a certain deadline and the government has drawn it out longer than it should have, excessively.

We are also seeing—I am hearing this from a number of people I speak to who are still in the industry—a lack of consistency and an inability to go from one project to the next, as would normally happen. You would send your civil works into one project; as they finish that, they can start the next. Then the formwork carries through and so on. That is not able to happen on many projects at the moment. Staff are being let go. At this minister's hands, people are losing their jobs. He is unable to administer his directorate and his ministerial responsibilities appropriately.

Madam Assistant Speaker, I seek leave to move an amendment to Mr Parton's motion.

Leave granted.

MR WALL: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. I move:

Insert new paragraphs (2)(d)(v) to (ix):

- “(v) total cost to process DAs for the quarter;
- (vi) average cost to process DAs in the quarter;
- (vii) the number of DAs processed within prescribed timeframes;
- (viii) number of DAs processed beyond prescribed timeframes; and
- (ix) number of DAs still waiting to be processed that have exceeded prescribed processing times;”.

The amendment seeks to expand on the reporting that the directorate is required to undertake on a quarterly basis. It is in the public interest to know the cost to the ratepayer in the delays to process applications. That is what is called for through the first two items in my amendment. That is the total cost to process applications in that quarter, both as a whole and on an application-by-application basis. It is also time that there were far better accountability measures for the time it takes.

For a merit, impact or code application, there are statutory stipulated time frames in which the decision must be made. I am well aware that the assessors have that time to come up with some very creative ways of stopping the clock and having it then restart in the way that they deal with the applicant in asking for additional information to circumvent those statutory time frames, but there needs to be clearer reporting of the actual delays and the extent to which they exist. We are calling for the number of DAs that were processed within the prescribed time frames to be reported on a quarterly basis; likewise, the number of applications that were approved beyond their statutory processing time and the number of applications that have exceeded their statutory time period that are still awaiting a decision.

This is much needed additional transparency for the directorate. I can see that the minister himself is foreshadowing some amendments which do not go anywhere near far enough. He has been in this position for far too long. He has failed to address the issue. He has only overseen it getting worse. I do not think that the Assembly should be trusting him at all by accepting his statement that “It is okay; we have made some changes; things are getting better.” He has been saying that for far too long. It is the best part of six years since he became the minister for planning.

I commend Mr Parton on bringing this motion to the Assembly back in April. It is as timely now as it was then. The government has failed in that four-month period to address the issue with any great impact on the processing time or on the backlog of applications that exists. I also commend the amendment that I am proposing to the Assembly and look forward to its support from other members.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Advanced Technology and Space Industries) (3.17): I thank Mr Parton for his motion. Mr Wall has moved an amendment, and I have circulated an amendment in my name. I will speak to Mr Wall’s amendment and I will move my amendment after we deal with that.

Mr Wall raises some interesting points of course, and I will take those on board. What I can say though is that the information that Mr Wall has asked for in his amendment for me to report back on is already available on the EPSDD website. Monthly they update that. So I do not see any reason to support that part of Mr Wall’s amendment to Mr Parton’s motion. But Mr Parton raises some interesting points, and we are trying to deal with this increase in DAs as best as possible.

I take the opportunity to thank the hardworking development assessors in EPSDD. The team will be growing in the coming months as this year’s budget funded an additional six development assessors.

I make no apology for the government’s strong economic management which has seen Canberra grow. We in this place know how wonderful Canberra is to live, work, raise a family and do business in. Our strong economy and jobs growth mean that our city is welcoming nearly 8,000 people each year. The ACT planning strategy announced last year outlines how this government intends to manage this growth and change across our city.

We are experiencing an increase in development activity as the development industry has taken up the urban renewal agenda of government. This has involved finding the appropriate balance between providing land release options in greenfield areas and renewing the older parts of our city. We are reducing our urban sprawl by achieving greater density in town and group centres and along major transport corridors. And we also dealt with the Mr Fluffy legacy and delivered a significant level of public housing stock within the territory. These factors, as well as the usual development activity that occurs within the territory, have led to a significant, sustained increase in the number of development applications lodged with the Planning and Land Authority.

I will leave it there. We will go to the vote on Mr Wall's amendment and then come back to mine.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (3.19): I think this is the point at which I have to talk, given that I am basically going to be talking about Mr Parton's motion and Mr Wall's amendment. I thought I would be talking after the ALP amendment had been moved but I think that timing is wrong. What we have got here is not really necessary, as Mr Gentleman has said. Most of this information is already available on the website.

The other thing is that it is only looking at one part of the world: efficiency. I am not anti efficiency. Efficiency is very important. But you do not want to efficiently do the wrong thing. I think we need to ensure that what we are actually doing is improving, disapproving, modifying or whatever, DAs correctly. That is equally important.

The amendment seems to assume that the issue is probably one of staffing or efficiency but it is not at all clear that it actually is. Part of it, I think, might be due to the fact that DAs are getting an awful lot more complicated. If you compare the DA for the Republic, for instance, with a DA for a simple single dwelling, the DA for the Republic is going to take an awful lot longer than a DA for a simple dwelling or house extension.

We do not want to see DA staff being pressured to do things more quickly at the expense of quality. I know very much that neighbours do not want to see that. I am sure all of us have had emails and representations from people who believe that the DA for the thing next to them is not legal under ACTPLA's rules. ACTPLA may or may not agree with that but it is very important that these things, even the smaller developments, are well looked at for safety, if nothing else, and good neighbourly relations. We have rules for a reason and enforcing them is important. Enforcing them quickly is also important.

I do not support Mr Wall's amendment and I flag that I will be supporting the ALP amendment when it is moved.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.22): When it comes to problems in the planning system it really is a case of where we start, is it not? It is a case of where we start. In recent days we have had the long-running building quality saga thrust into the limelight courtesy of *Four Corners*, and Canberra has found itself in the spotlight. It shone very brightly on us and it is not the sort of spotlight that we really wanted directed our way. But it is no great surprise.

Today's motion brings to the Assembly a matter which is brought up with me by constituents at least three times a week. Our development application system is a shambles. I am fully supportive of Mr Wall's amendment because I think it enables us to have a closer look at exactly what is going on.

It is no surprise that when this motion first came before the chamber the government and their bodyguards, the Greens, did whatever they could to stop us debating it. They

do not want us talking about this failure, and why would they? It is very easy to draw a link between the logjam that is the DA system and building quality issues in the ACT.

I refer to the shutdown of the Republic site at Belconnen last month. Granted, I wrote to the minister about that site and asked some questions about how it was progressing. But what I was not aware of was that the builder had submitted a DA amendment back in February which had simply not been assessed in what any normal individual would consider to be a timely manner. I guess we can put two and two together and guess that the builder got to a point on the build whereby they had to make a decision on whether to shut down their own site or just wait for this DA assessment process.

Bear in mind that we are talking about the biggest building site in the territory. Because of an unacceptable delay in the DA process the builder—and again I am just extrapolating—had to choose between shutting down their own site or pushing on in the hope that their amendment would be approved. Neither of those options is palatable at all.

But what we see time and again from this government is that they have no understanding of how to run a business. They have absolutely no understanding of the concept that time is money and that if you have to sit on assets, if you have to blow out construction time, if you have to stand down workers because the DA has not been fully assessed, it costs money. It forces some builders into a situation where they must rush to complete some tasks in what become unrealistic time frames. And that scenario does not play out well for anyone. That is just the reality. That is just the practical reality of the situation.

As I stressed back in April, development applications are very much the vital gateway in getting things built in Canberra, everything from extensions to the family home, the addition of so-called granny flats, through to the largest of residential and commercial projects. The essence of this motion, in its original form and with the amendment tacked onto it, is the enhancement of the community's understanding and the appreciation of what is happening with the development application production line.

Our confidence has been shaken somewhat as processing times increase and impose damage and stress on those impacted by the delays. What we are asking for is a greater focus on transparency of the resource inputs dedicated to DA assessment and how these relate to the associated outputs. It is a classical input-output ratio analysis, which I would presume all directorates within the public administration utilise to help them decide how to optimise their efficiency and effectiveness.

In no way does this motion seek to highlight the personal details of individual staff, which has been suggested to me by the Greens, but it seeks an insight into the process and its throughputs. These insights would help in finding opportunities not only in improved efficiency and staff productivity but also in greater client responsiveness and satisfaction.

I had hoped that this government would have no hesitation in supporting the motion because what I am calling for is nothing less than a core tenet of best practice

governance. The amendment that we seek today will give the government an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to these obligations. And in doing so it will give consumers and stakeholders in the development assessment process a welcome boost to their confidence.

Amendment negatived.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Advanced Technology and Space Industries) (3.28), by leave: I move:

Omit all text after paragraph (1)(d), substitute:

“(e) Planning and Land Authority has introduced a new staged assessment model to efficiently assess DAs and manage staff workload; and

(f) ACT Budget 2019-20 provided funding for an additional six DA assessors; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

(a) undertake regular monitoring of compliance with statutory timeframes for assessment of DAs;

(b) undertake regular monitoring of DA workloads to ensure applicants’ requirements are met within prescribed timeframes; and

(c) ensure staff in the DA assessment and processing areas are appropriately oversighted to avoid negative health impacts arising from stressful workload levels.”.

As I was saying earlier, the directorate has seen an increase in the number of applications. In 2017-18 it saw a 20 per cent increase compared to the number of applications lodged in the 2016-17 financial year. The trend has continued in the 2018-19 financial year.

In addition to the significant increase in the number of applications, the authority is continuing to receive a large number of complex development proposals that are attracting significant community interest and demand substantial resourcing in the assessment and decision stages.

To address this increase in demand, we have funded an additional six development assessors as part of the 2019 budget. If those opposite were truly committed to improving the DA process, they would have voted for the budget. Instead those opposite have again showed their lack of support for development assessment by voting against the budget for a second year in a row.

In addition to the extra staff that this government has funded, the authority has undertaken a number of initiatives to increase its output and respond to the increased demand. This includes reassigning staff to assist in key areas, implementing voluntary overtime opportunities, having external resourcing through short-term contract arrangements, and implementing a new staged assessment model. This new staged

assessment model has allowed the authority to increase its efficiency, and it is currently determining more development applications than it is receiving. I want to reinforce that: it is now determining more development applications than it is receiving. The new staged model has seen the authority reduce the number of DAs in the system quite considerably since it was introduced in August 2018. I am confident that the authority is constantly investigating and implementing measures to improve and manage DA processing times.

As the minister responsible for planning, I am aware of the effects that delays can cause in the assessment and determination of DAs and for those who lodge DAs. I am assured by the authority that they are committed to business improvements to meet industry and community expectations. The authority has already seen positive results in these measures so far, with the authority determining more DAs than it is receiving, as I mentioned earlier.

While these measures will take some time to fully address the backlog, I am confident that the authority is on the right path and that there will be a return to the regular meeting of statutory time frames.

If Mr Parton is interested in knowing the DA process statistics, he can simply check the EPSDD website that I mentioned earlier, where the data is recorded each month. But we know it is easier for Mr Parton to turn it into some point-scoring exercise than do the actual work. Requiring this information to be reported to the Assembly is a poorly researched thought bubble, which Mr Parton is renowned for. He is treating the Assembly like he treats social media: putting random thoughts out there, with no consideration of the facts.

The government is committed to investing in our public service and our public services. We trust and we employ professionals who can exercise judgement over their workloads and work together as a team to deliver solid planning outcomes for our city. The government does not micromanage staff by reporting publicly on individual performance or periods of leave. This government does not pit public servants against each other. Instead we invest in our public services by ensuring that we have the workforce in the areas where they are needed most.

I am deeply concerned that this motion demonstrates that Mr Parton does not trust our public servants, much like his friends on the hill. We all know that those opposite do not trust and respect our public servants, which is why the first thing that Liberals do when they are in government is to cut, cut, cut. We do not cut public service jobs. Instead this government will continue to ensure that public services, including DA assessments, stay in public hands.

I thank Mr Parton for the opportunity to talk about the good work that the planning and land authority is doing and the positive investment and economic development environment that this government is delivering for the territory.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.33): I was not intending to speak to this motion but after that speech by the minister I think it is important that I do. We did not hear anything substantive from the minister about what action will actually be taken to

resolve these matters. He spent much more time on trying to smear Mr Parton for raising these matters in the Assembly, for bringing them forward in order to try to see real change. We are seeing this real trend, particularly from Minister Gentleman but from other ministers as well. Rather than addressing the legitimate concerns in their portfolios, they try to turn this back on the opposition as some form of smear or political attack. It is disappointing. I accept that that is part of the cut and thrust of this place.

This matter was highlighted to me when I was out doorknocking in Weston a few months ago. I came across a house, the garage was open and inside that garage five men were sitting. I said, “G’day; what are you doing?” It was a builder and his crew. The reality was that the builder had a number of DAs in the pipeline, all of which should have been resolved, under the statutory time frames. They should have been either approved or sent back for amendment. None of them had been. This builder was there, with his crew, who he was still employing, and he was paying them essentially to do nothing, other than to sit around in his garage whilst they were waiting for weeks and weeks for DAs to be approved, or at least to be dealt with, by the directorate. That is the reality of what is happening on the ground.

Mr Gentleman does not see that. Mr Gentleman sits in his ivory tower, he gets his sneering, smearing, vitriolic speeches written, which are less about dealing with the issue than they are about attacking Mr Parton or other members of the opposition. If Mr Gentleman had seen what I saw, which was a frustrated builder, along with his crew who he was paying, sitting there and waiting for DAs to be dealt with by the directorate that had taken weeks beyond the statutory time frames, maybe he would have an understanding of the impact of these delays on so many people. It has an impact not just on the builders but obviously on the customers, the people who have invested money into their dream, often to build a house or to do a renovation, and it simply cannot happen.

I invite Mr Gentleman to spend less time attacking the opposition, less time on his smears, and to spend some more time down on the ground, talking to builders, talking to the tradies that are not working in many cases—and good on this builder for continuing to employ his crew. But for many people out there, the tradies that this government and their members purport to represent, of course, they are the people most disadvantaged as they cannot get the work because there is a DA sitting there and waiting to be dealt with.

I fully support what Mr Parton is doing here. I say: good on you. I know that you are very active in this space. I commend Mr Parton’s motion to the Assembly.

Amendment agreed to.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.36): In closing, there is far too little action from Minister Gentleman in the amendment. The amendment gives the government the chance to do what they have been doing in the DA space for years—that is, to obfuscate and delay. That is the game that we seem to be playing.

What we see so often here is, again, as I say, a reflection of the absolute disconnect between those on that side of the chamber and the real world in Canberra, people like Pat, whom my colleague Mr Hanson met while out trudging the streets of his electorate. Yes, there has been movement in this space in regard to additional resources, and I applaud the funding for the additional six DA assessors. It must be said that at the time of this debate commencing in April, that was not absolutely finalised. I do applaud that, but I think we are moving at a glacial speed here. In regard to the DA logjam, we are dealing with a genuine crisis. I am not of the belief that what Minister Gentleman has allocated to the problem will address the problem in the way that it needs to be addressed.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Plant-based foods

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (3.38): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the International Panel on Climate Change's recent report on climate change and land use emphasises the importance of shifting towards plant-based diets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help address climate change;
- (b) that shifting towards plant-based diets would, generally, be beneficial for overall population health outcomes;
- (c) the animal welfare and environmental concerns related to intensive farming of animals for food; and
- (d) latest research from Roy Morgan estimates that 2.5 million people (12.1 percent of the population) in Australia are now eating all or almost all vegetarian food; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to support a shift to more plant-based foods through its operations and to support a shift more broadly in the ACT through a range of initiatives, including by:

- (a) Events ACT ensuring that all events catered by the ACT Government include plant-based food options in sufficient quantity to adequately cater for vegetarians and vegans—noting that all people eat plant-based foods when on offer, as well as having some events where the food is purely plant-based;
- (b) supporting and encouraging local cafes, restaurants and food retailers to supply low carbon meals and plant-based meals;
- (c) the Education Directorate:
 - (i) ensuring that all school students studying the Australian curriculum subjects of “health and wellbeing” (kindergarten to year 6) and “food technology” (years 7-10) study the environmental, ethical and human health implications of food choices in an age-appropriate way and this would include ensuring that all students are able to prepare a plant-based meal;

- (ii) supporting increased school food gardens and provision of kitchen space for preparation and education about food grown on site; and
- (iii) requiring all school canteens to provide plant-based food options for students;
- (d) updating the health promotion programs including Healthier Choices Canberra, Healthy Food and Drink Choices Policy, ACT Health Promotion Grants Program, and Healthy Children and Young People to better support plant-based foods and include environmental and animal welfare considerations;
- (e) Canberra Health Services changing the “default meal” in hospitals to be plant-based (so that patients who do not choose a specific meal receive a plant-based meal);
- (f) supporting local food production by increased support for community gardens and food forests and considering planting fruit and nut trees on public land;
- (g) where people are in the custody of the ACT Government, such as Dhulwa, Alexander Maconochie Centre and Bimberi, increase the amount of plant-based meals offered, and support residents to learn how to prepare inexpensive and healthy meals; and
- (h) reporting back to the Assembly on progress on the above by the last sitting day in June 2020.

First off, a bit of terminology: plant-based food is food that is made from plants. It can be part of all human diets. Vegan diets have only plant-based foods while vegetarian diets include dairy products and eggs as well as plant-based foods.

The research from Roy Morgan shows that 2.5 million people—that is, 12 per cent of the Australian population—are now eating all or almost all vegetarian food. There are lots of reasons to eat less meat, dairy and eggs. For me, it is the impact on our environment that is most important, and livestock farming has a big environmental footprint.

Scientists say that the world must now start reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and reach net zero by the middle of this century to have any chance of limiting global warming to two degrees Celsius. A recent report last week from the inter-governmental panel on climate change, which focused on climate change and land use, shows how agriculture, deforestation and other human impacts on the land are dramatically worsening climate change.

“A vegan diet is probably the biggest single way to reduce your impact on planet earth, not just greenhouse gases,” says Professor Joseph Poore from the University of Oxford in the UK, who led research published last year into the environmental impact of livestock. This research shows that, without meat and dairy consumption, global farmland use could be reduced by 75 per cent and still feed all of us.

There is a huge variation between different food producers but, as a global average, to produce one kilogram of beef requires 25 kilograms of grain to feed that animal. Of course, that grain could directly feed humans. Growing animals is an inefficient way

of producing human food, particularly red meat. Loss of wild areas of land agriculture is the leading cause of the current mass extinction of wildlife. I hope that we are all aware of the massive land clearing happening in New South Wales and Queensland primarily to allow more beef production. I have been moved almost to tears by the photos of baby koalas cuddling their mothers in what is now just a blank landscape.

Depending on how you calculate it, greenhouse gas emissions due to animal agriculture are variously estimated as between five per cent of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions for direct emissions and 15 per cent for the entire life cycle. More efficient use of water, grain, legumes and land to produce human food and reduce food waste are also essential ways to help reduce human starvation and malnutrition.

Of course, when considering animal agriculture, we should also consider the impact it has on animals. I mentioned the impact of land clearing, but there is also the impact on the animals being farmed. Thankfully, due to the advocacy of the ACT Greens, the ACT has banned some of the most problematic forms of intensive animal farming or factory farming, such as sow stalls and battery cage eggs.

However, most of the animal products eaten in Canberra come from outside our borders and may well be from places with very poor animal welfare. There is a range of serious animal welfare concerns in intensive animal farming, such as extremely cramped conditions. If people saw those conditions they would find them shocking. Anyone who watched the recent film *Dominion* would find it very shocking, as I did. For many people, limiting their consumption of animal products is a way to withdraw support for these intensive practices.

For many people, the very fact that eating animal products results in the death of sentient creatures is a reason to avoid eating them. I am pleased that the Animal Welfare Legislation Amendment Act 2019, which is currently before the Assembly, recognises that animals are sentient beings with intrinsic value. It recognises that they deserve to be treated with compassion and have a quality of life that reflects their intrinsic value, and that people have a duty to care for the physical and mental welfare of animals. Eating less animal products is a good way to care for animals.

Eating fewer animal products is not just good for the environment or animals, it is really good for human health as well. There is considerable evidence that high consumption of animal foods is related to many human health problems, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes and various cancers. Those with cardiovascular issues may be interested to know that there is no cholesterol in plant-based foods, only animal-based foods.

Some people worry that it is impossible to be adequately nourished on plant-based food alone, but no meat does not mean no protein. There are plenty of high protein plant-based foods like tofu, quinoa, mushrooms, lentils, chickpeas and, in fact, basically every bean or legume. Earlier this year, the prestigious medical journal, the *Lancet*, wrote extensively about diet and human health, describing a healthy diet as one which:

... largely consists of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts and unsaturated oils, includes a low to moderate amount of seafood and poultry, and includes no or a low quantity of red meat, processed meat, added sugar, refined grains and starchy vegetables.

They concluded that the global adoption of such a diet would provide major health benefits, including a large reduction in total mortality. For all of these reasons, I do not eat meat and I eat very little dairy and eggs. As I have mentioned, many Australians are making the same choice as I do. Positively, we are finding many more options. It is now a rare restaurant that has only rare steaks as an option. And that pun was intended! For those real meat lovers, there are now a range of fake meats based entirely on plants.

There will be benefits to overall human health, animal welfare and our environment by consuming more plant-based foods and less animal-based foods. After recognising that in the notes, my motion calls on the ACT government to support the shift to more plant-based foods through its operations and to support a shift more broadly in the ACT through a range of initiatives.

I should make it clear: I am not talking about compelling anyone to give up animal foods. I am advocating for making plant-based choices better available, adequately available, so that everyone who makes that choice can make the choice easily and so that people can try out that choice if they have not had the opportunity to try it out before.

I have looked at the things that the ACT government does. I asked a series of questions on notice about this a while ago. I did not get particularly useful answers. First, I am asking that Events ACT ensure that all events catered by the ACT government include plant-based food options in sufficient quantity to adequately cater for vegetarians and vegans.

I note that all people eat some plant-based foods when on offer. Quite often you go to an event and you find that, yes, there were some plant-based foods but they have already been eaten by the omnivores. I then find that there is nothing left to eat. There was just one lucky tray with some vegan food.

It would be really nice if we had some events which were purely plant-based. I did ask a question on notice about Events ACT catering policies and I got one of my favourite non-answers. I quote, "Events ACT ensures that there is a variety of foods." I have to assume that that means that they make sure there is both tea and coffee at events.

Secondly, there is the supporting and encouraging of local cafes, restaurants and food retailers to supply low-carbon meals and plant-based meals. As plant-based food is becoming more popular, more places serve it. However, many food businesses do not really do plant-based food. They seem to think that fine dining means an expensive piece of protein on your dish, be it meat or fish.

If people are able to eat good plant-based foods in most eating establishments in Canberra, I am sure that plant-based foods will become more mainstream. I have in mind a competition for low-carbon meals, which could be entered into by any food business in Canberra. It would have publicity and prestige as the major prizes, possibly some small amount of money.

Thirdly, there is our school system. I have asked questions about this and done quite a lot of internet research on the subject. I have to say that it is entirely unclear to me what our school students learn about food. What do they learn about food?

It is possible that school students who study the Australian curriculum subjects of health and wellbeing, which is kindergarten to year 6 and then food technology in years 7 to 10, already study the environmental, ethical and human health implication of food choices in an age-appropriate way. That is not what the answers to my questions clearly said. I doubt it, but it is possible that they meant it but did not bother saying it. Regardless, I would like to see more support for increased school food gardens and provision of kitchen space for preparation and education about food grown on site. Some schools have them and some do not.

I would like to see all school canteens be required to provide plant-based options for students. This is being done in some parts of California and some parts of Brazil. In many school districts across California they have already successfully introduced plant-based options to their students. When Oakland Unified School District added more plant-based meals, like veggie chow mein and garden burgers to its menus, the district reported it saved \$40,000 and 42 million gallons of water over the course of two years. This is a worthy saving. Brazil, despite being a major beef producer, has areas where they are planning to serve entirely plant based foods at school.

Fourthly, there is our health system. We do have health promotion programs including healthier choices Canberra, healthier food and drink choices policy, ACT health promotion grants program, and healthy children and young people. But it is not at all clear that these include significant information about eating fewer animal products or any reference to environmental or animal welfare considerations.

I would like Canberra Health Services to change the default meal in hospitals to be plant based. That would mean that patients who do not choose a meal get a plant based one. I do acknowledge that they supply vegan meals. Once you get sufficiently into the system, it does happen. But I can speak from recent experience: you do have to get into the system; it does not always just happen.

Fifthly, I would like to see the government supporting food production not only at schools but also in the community. I am very pleased that we have recently announced the nature strip guidelines. I would love to see more veggies on our nature strips. We also have fruit production at Lyneham Commons and Weston.

Lastly, where people are in the custody of the ACT government, such as at Dhulwa, AMC and Bimberi, I would like to see the government increase the amount of plant-based foods on offer. In conjunction with that, support residents to learn how to

prepare inexpensive and healthy plant-based meals. Cooking, and in particular plant-based meal preparation, is a useful skill for residents after they leave the ACT government's control. Of course, I want the government to report back to the Assembly on progress on the above by the last sitting day in June 2020.

If being vegetarian or vegan seems too hard, remember, any reduction in the amount of meat and dairy you eat will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and will probably improve your health, depending on what you eat instead.

However, it is difficult for many of us to take the first step or the first bite. Traditionally of course, eating meat has been a sign of wealth. It is hard to change that cultural connection. However, moving to more plant-based foods is a project that is basically entirely positive. And, good news: it tastes good, it is good for human and planetary health, and it even costs less. The ACT making plant-based foods more accessible to all of us can help with that first bite.

Given that the Assembly has declared we are in a climate emergency, moving to a plant-based diet is one of the easiest and most effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I am very hopeful that the Assembly will see fit to vote for my motion.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Advanced Technology and Space Industries) (3.53): I thank Ms Le Couteur for bringing this motion today. I share the sentiments that the motion contains. However, I think the motion goes too far in prescribing solutions.

Our actions should be guided by the experts, particularly in tackling climate change. The motion before us seeks to prescribe options in health care which rightly should be left to our clinicians and for the best needs of patients. We must also be respectful of the diversity of Canberra. Veganism is not something that some Canberrans can implement, as milk forms an important part of religious rituals, particularly for our friends from the subcontinent.

I do agree we should encourage more plant-based food options, rather than prescribing them. The ACT government already provides plant-based foods through the services it operates. Canberra businesses are also embracing this trend, as are large food service companies. I understand that Hungry Jack's, Schnitz and Grill'd already provide plant-based food on their menus. This is occurring because consumers are wanting these options; they are driving the change.

Businesses are also recognising their corporate social responsibility in tackling climate change. The ACT government recognises the important impact that climate change will have on our environment and food security in the years to come. Indeed, the ACT climate change adaptation strategy 2016 includes priority actions for natural resources and ecosystems, and the ACT biosecurity strategy released in 2016 contributes to the protection of our food production industries.

More broadly, this government is committed to sustainability and environmental protection. The government remains committed to protecting and managing our environment and water catchments and moving to a more sustainable future. A significant proportion of the ACT environment is protected and the ACT has legislative and policy frameworks to conserve, maintain and enhance biodiversity within these protected areas.

Through the implementation of the nature conservation strategy 2013-23 the ACT government aims to further improve and maintain native vegetation and biodiversity and ensure that landscapes are more resilient to climate change. The government also recognises that sustainable management of environmental values on our farms is critical for the long-term viability of rural Australia. Better management of ecological communities and soils can benefit farm and forestry productivity, rural communities and the environment and may help reduce the impacts of climate change. It also provides many ecosystem services such as clean water and flood mitigation.

The ACT strongly supports a sustainable rural industry in Canberra, achieving off-reserve conservation objectives and balancing environmental protection with sustainable agriculture. That is why all rural landholders are required to enter into a land management agreement with the ACT government for the sustainable use of land.

The two principal objectives of the LMA are to provide a basis for a cooperative land management regime between farmers in the ACT and the government and to conserve biodiversity, protect habitats, waterways and species, and provide for productive and sustainable agricultural land use in the ACT.

Intensive animal farming or industrial livestock production, also known as factory farming, is not compatible with these objectives. For this reason and in the interests of animal welfare the ACT does not support intensive farming practices. That is why in 2014 the Animal Welfare (Factory Farming) Amendment Bill was passed by the ACT Legislative Assembly. This bill is noteworthy as it is the first time that certain intensive farming practices, specifically the use of battery cages in egg production and the use of sow stalls and gestational crates for pigs, were banned in any Australian jurisdiction.

The ACT is now credited with having one of the most progressive animal welfare legislations in the country. The ACT now has only one commercial intensive animal production operation, namely the barn-laid egg production facility at Parkwood, which transitioned from a battery cage system in 2014.

The ACT is also working on building a rural sector more resilient to climate change, through the national Landcare program. There are two key projects funded under this program. Resilient farms: supporting adaptation to climate and market variability aims to support ACT farmers to adapt to significant changes in climate and market demands for information on provenance and sustainable production. The other, protecting and connecting endangered woodlands, aims to protect and connect endangered woodlands, primarily on ACT rural lands.

In conclusion, the ACT is working on many fronts to make our environment and farms more resilient to climate change and to mitigate the future impact on our food production industries while protecting the welfare of farm animals. We can achieve this because of strong economic management. Our government has shown that you can grow the economy, help Canberrans and also protect the environment.

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (3.59): I speak today in place of Ms Lawder, who is unwell. I thank Ms Le Couteur for her motion today. Regrettably, however, it is nothing new and nothing unpredictable and, like many of Ms Le Couteur's motions—except for the completely crazy ones—this is like the curate's egg: good in parts but not entirely good.

Ms Le Couteur should not have minced around what she was really advocating. The motion effectively says that eating meat is not good for the human race or the planet and we should all eat more vegetables; sorry; plant-based foods. I think it is more commonly known as vegetarianism, although a high proportion of plant-based eating is also obviously possible. Ms Le Couteur talks about a shift towards plant-based diets being beneficial for health outcomes. She talks about animal welfare concerns in intensive farming. She references that 12 per cent of the population is now effectively vegan. She then calls on the government to “support a shift to more plant-based foods through its operations and to support a shift more broadly in the ACT through a range of initiatives”, which she then goes on to list.

As I said at the beginning, this motion has all the hallmarks of the curate's egg: it is not an even balance of good and bad ideas. A shift towards more vegetables and other plants in a diet has long been recognised as a sound practice, especially as one ages. The benefits include the claims that it can reduce cholesterol, aid with weight loss and reduce the risk of colorectal cancers. But it has to be said that when health experts talk about reduction of consumption of meat they are mostly referring to red meats and processed foods, so it does not apply to all meats, and with red meats it is the fatty red meats that cause most health complications if eaten in significant quantity. Chicken and pork are regarded as low-fat meats, as indeed many red meats are these days.

Moving towards eating less meat as a way to reduce weight is good, but eating less is a personal choice that does not require motions moved in here. There are people who love fresh bread, which is entirely plant-based, but you do not lose weight on a bread diet—I can attest—so weight loss is not necessarily achieved by going off meat. In any event, health experts do not advocate a definitive no-meats policy, just a sensible balanced diet. Some health experts today promote a ketogenic diet, which requires a high proportion of protein and only certain non-starch-based plant foods.

Ms Le Couteur references the animal welfare concerns related to intensive farming of animals. I think that that statement also needs to be put into perspective. Australia is still a major producer of broad scale pasture-based meat productions. Feedlots are developed in Australia largely as a response to overseas markets. Intensive production is under increasing scrutiny to ensure best animal welfare practices. Of course, here in the ACT we have a ban on intensive piggeries, so on that score the motion is not applicable.

I trust that Ms Le Couteur's motion is not an attempt to shame meat eaters into abandoning their eating habits. Some people would have nothing left to eat if they could not eat meat. I trust that she is also not trying to drive out of business the numerous beef and sheep producers here in the ACT who supply meat to our area. We have numerous viable small operators in the region and their livelihoods depend on continuing demand for their products from local consumers, be they families, restaurants or cafes. If her response to this would be that they can instead grow vegetables, that demonstrates an even poorer understanding of agriculture. The land around Canberra is largely unsuitable for vegetable production, save for a small number of plots that have access to significant water supply and endless inputs of nutrients. And what of the struggling butchers who battle daily against the supermarket chains for business? They should continue to do their work too.

It is important that good eating habits are taught at an early age, but I trust that Ms Le Couteur's call to action about what is taught in our schools will not lead students to falsely believing that a carnivorous diet is wrong or somehow unethical. Ms Le Couteur also proposes that ACT Health promotion programs including healthier choices Canberra et cetera be updated to better support plant-based foods. But why should they? Why should meats not be considered part of a healthy diet? The program provides a considerable amount of guidance already. Businesses can choose to use their healthy options logo on their menus if they want, and people can be guided by those logos to make their own choices.

Why does the government continue to treat its citizens as unable to make their own intelligent food decisions? People can work out without prompting that a chicken or a chickpea salad are healthier options than a double Big Mac burger with cheese and fried onions. They just might prefer to eat the Big Mac, and that is their choice.

If you or anyone else chooses to be a vegan, that is fine; it is your choice. Some of my best friends are vegan. But do not come in here and lecture those of us who do eat meat, believing it to be good, that somehow by doing so we are damaging the planet and killing the world.

If we were to produce a hundred per cent of our food from vegetables, this planet could not support the people who are living on it now. Evolution provides us with canine teeth for a very sound reason: to eat meat. As to providing better options at public events—and even having only plant foods, because Ms Le Couteur says people will eat them when they are offered—yes, people will eat plant-based foods if that is all there is to eat. But it does not necessarily mean that it is their preference. It is called availability. If a function provides only vegetarian food, non-vegetarians will of course eat it. That does not in any way suggest a preference for that food. It is simply a matter of availability that drives such consumption.

In all the invitations that come across my desk, I cannot recall one that does not make reference to dietary requirements and asking for information about preferred food types. There are genuine problems in our health and custodial facilities here; until recently the food at TCH needed serious work. The prison has a very significant set of issues, but increasing vegetarian options is not the most important issue right now.

Ms Le Couteur's motion calls on the government to report back to the Assembly next year on how well this new regime has been embraced. I do not believe we need further food guilt trips, and I for one have no interest in hearing about a report on how many vegetarian options have been included in our prisons, hospitals, schools and other food outlets other than for specific individuals who have requested them.

I would hope and expect there to be choice, but my top priority is not who chooses what. However, as Ms Le Couteur knows, I am a fan of growing and sharing veggies from my own home, and I encourage that, particularly amongst those with children, because knowing and understanding how to feed yourselves from your own land is an excellent skill. But I seriously think that this motion is at best an attempt to promote a vegetarian lifestyle; at worst, virtue signalling, something at which the Greens are the ultimate professionals. The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the motion.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.06): This has been a somewhat disappointing discussion in that I think Ms Le Couteur's remarks and her motion have been sadly misinterpreted. It is quite clear. As Ms Le Couteur mentioned in her speech, the recent IPCC—the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—report commissioned by the United Nations has warned that efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions and the impacts of global warming will fall significantly short without drastic changes in global land use, agriculture and human diets.

The special report on climate change and land describes plant-based diets as a major opportunity for mitigating and adapting to climate change and includes a policy recommendation to reduce meat consumption. The report highlights the fact that it will be impossible to keep global temperatures at safe levels unless there is also a transformation in the way the world produces food and manages land.

One of the measures the report discusses is the need for a major shift towards vegetarian and vegan diets. The report discusses how certain dietary choices—and that word “choices” has been used a lot today, so let us think about that—essentially meat from intensive farming requires more land and water and causes more greenhouse gas emissions. It says:

The consumption of healthy and sustainable diets, such as those based on coarse grains, pulses and vegetables, and nuts and seeds ... presents major opportunities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

This is the unfortunate reality. I know we like to choose whatever we like—and many people choose to eat meat—but the factual reality is that this is very damaging to the land and to the planet, is worsening climate change and will hurt us all. This is something we need to very seriously consider. This does not mean we all need to become vegetarian or vegan, and Ms Le Couteur was very clear in her remarks about that, despite the, at best, misunderstanding and, at worst, wilful misrepresentation, of her position today.

Mrs Jones: The Greens have never done that, have they?

MR RATTENBURY: Mrs Jones just interjected across the room as I made those remarks, but she was on her feet today at the end of question time complaining that somebody had misinterpreted her remarks. Yet she just stood up and gave us an outstanding exposition of what, in her case, was clearly, given the patronising tone in which her remarks were delivered, a wilful misrepresentation of Ms Le Couteur's comments. Either that or she did not actually listen and she had pre-prepared her comments, based on assumptions of what she thought she was going to hear.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: I cannot hear the rest of her interjections but I have got more to observe on Mrs Jones and will come back to that.

As I was saying, Ms Le Couteur did not suggest that we all need to become vegetarian or vegan, but what the science tells us is that if we all choose a more sustainable diet—for example, by choosing to eat less meat perhaps just a few times a week—we could make a difference. This is another behavioural change issue that certainly will not happen overnight, but it is something we can take steps towards. Just as we cannot change our system so that people can all stop driving their fossil-fuel powered vehicles overnight, people choosing not to drive perhaps one day a week can make a difference to our emissions. So too if people choose to have one meat-free meal each week, this will start making a difference.

As Professor Mark Howden of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said:

We ignore the interactions between climate change and the land at our peril.

This does not need to be a difficult task, but the Greens believe that this is one step on a journey that we can support people with. Ms Le Couteur's motion went through a range of practical steps that a government could take in order to better support our community to be more sustainable.

I think it is worth observing that Ms Le Couteur's measures were, as I say, very practical. They come from a place that is backed up with science, because we in the Greens prefer science rather than just making things up. And that is what we have heard a bit of today. I heard some most extraordinary observations in this discussion and I think that it reflects poorly on those that bring those sorts of observations to the table when they have got no scientific backing to actually justify their statements.

In Minister Gentleman's comments he talked a lot about prescribing what people should do. Ms Le Couteur was very clear in her remarks. She did not seek to prescribe anything. She sought to ensure the availability of options. She gave an example of attending public events where, as a vegan, when the platters come around and all the vegan options have been eaten by people who are not vegan, those options have been removed. What we are prescribing there in fact is that vegans will go home on an empty stomach. What Ms Le Couteur sought was to ensure more availability of these things, given the predilection of many people to actually eat them. This is not an unreasonable request. This is about acknowledging the variety of requirements that are out there for people.

Minister Gentleman spoke about respecting diversity. He is absolutely right. It is very clear that in our world today there are people with a series of quite serious allergies and we need to be very mindful of those to ensure that people do not have inappropriate and dangerous reactions. People have religious and cultural bases on which they make dietary choices.

What Ms Le Couteur's proposal seeks to do is make sure that options are available for people that choose not to have an impact on our planet. She also seeks to increase awareness, because we have scientific imperatives to make a difference here. I ask members to read more carefully what was on the notice paper and listen more carefully to Ms Le Couteur's remarks.

Let me close with this: one of the co-chairs of the IPCC, Hans-Otto Portner, summed up extremely well the point we are trying to make today. He said:

We do not want to tell people what to eat, but it would indeed be beneficial, for both the climate and human health, if people in many rich countries consumed less meat, and if politics would create appropriate incentives to that effect.

That is the central premise of what Ms Le Couteur is talking about today and I invite members to reflect on that, because as well as the environmental benefits there are significant co-benefits of improved health outcomes and animal welfare. They are things that we can take positive and proactive steps to achieve.

MS CODY (Murrumbidgee) (4.13): I have received this advice sometimes, but today I get to use it. It is wise to stop and think before you leap. And that may be the case today. Ms Le Couteur's motion, as written, would kill me. I am sure that is not her intention. At least, I hope not. But this motion, as written, would not allow many other people like me with food allergies any options. I cannot eat vegetables; I cannot eat fruits; I cannot eat nuts; and I cannot eat other plant-based food products. They literally will harm me. I have to carry an EpiPen everywhere I go. I do not have a choice. I hear references were made to my absence yesterday. Unfortunately, it was caused by some less than accurate food labelling or handling. I am not sure which.

The Greens got some lovely virtue signalling yesterday in the media with this motion. Its deadly content is not virtuous at all. But I am not opposing this motion for the selfish reason of wanting to stay alive. I am also opposed to the implications in the motion. The religious practices of many people include the use of animals and animal products. In some cases this is ritual animal sacrifice.

As Mr Gentlemen pointed out, milk also plays an important part for some in our community. As for insisting that plant-based foods are the default option in hospital, I think this is a matter for the health professionals who are caring for those of us who spend our time in hospitals, not for us here with little or no medical expertise.

Canberra is a multicultural society. We are a tolerant society. The Assembly should and does protect those values. I absolutely respect the rights of vegans in our community to practise their beliefs but I intend to vote against this motion. I note that

Mr Rattenbury had some interesting comments on Ms Le Couteur's motion and I respect that Ms Le Couteur's comments today are very different to how the motion is read and written.

I believe that this community, our Canberra community that we all love, support and work to make a better place, should have all the choices that they believe possible: vegetarian, vegan or, in my case, carnivore options. There are many people that have food allergies and food intolerances and I think limiting our choices does not make us a stronger community. It makes us a weaker community.

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) (4.17): I thank Ms Le Couteur for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. Of course the government is committed to responding to the climate change emergency and we acknowledge the intent of this motion to modify Canberrans' diets so that food consumption minimises the carbon footprint. These concerns are absolutely important and legitimate, but they must be balanced with affordability and the availability of plant-based protein sources.

A range of activities are already underway in schools to support healthy, sustainable food and drink choices. All public schools follow the ACT public school food and drink policy, which states that category green foods should always be on the canteen menu, and this includes fruit and vegetables. The policy promotes a consistent whole-of-school approach to the sale of healthy food and drinks in ACT public schools.

The government consults with school communities and we work with schools to ensure that resources are there to support healthy eating habits. An example of this is the fresh taste program, which is a free and optional service available to any school in the ACT to help embed a culture of healthy food and drink consumption.

Public schools are given resources, such as food&ME, to support teachers to educate students about balanced diets, as well as following the Australian guide to healthy eating. The resources also provide supports for schools to establish and build school kitchen gardens. A significant number of schools have built kitchen gardens where produce is integrated into the Australian curriculum delivery and provides students with opportunities to learn skills in the kitchen.

School communities are supported to make decisions about fruit and vegetable consumption and the obvious nutritional benefits of incorporating these foods in a student's diet. Cultural, religious, dietary and medical requirements are considered by every public school canteen and signed off by the principal.

I support school communities to make these decisions around nutrition within the Australian guide to healthy eating, which makes sense for them. We accept students as they are. This means providing options which meet personal, cultural, religious and dietary requirements which may or may not be wholly plant based.

I also note that plant-based protein sources are farmed using intensive agriculture which has significant environmental impacts as well. I think we need to consider those as a concern that we have not quite got over with regard to that food production as well. Our schools already provide healthy options heavily weighted towards food and vegetables, and the government will continue to encourage them to use resources which promote the Australian guide to healthy eating.

Mr Rattenbury's speech clearly articulated Ms Le Couteur's intentions with regard to this motion, but I can say the Education Directorate is ensuring that school students study the Australian curriculum subjects of health and wellbeing and food technology. Supporting increased food gardens as well as school canteens providing plant-based food options—all this already occurs in our public schools.

I tend to agree with Mr Rattenbury's idea—and I see that promoted around the place—to move to a vegetarian meal a week and move to having different choices and different options. I think that is a good way to start. But that is where it should be. That should be the start. I think that is something that the government could promote in a different kind of way.

Our schools already do great stuff in promoting healthy eating and providing vegetables and fruit for students and in making sure that they have those choices and that they are being encouraged to make, which is not always easy with teenagers, the right choice and the healthier choice when it comes to food options in their schools.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (4.21): Isn't it wonderful when we get into this room and most of us agree? Most of us are on the same page here—most of us, not all of us. I will not be supporting Ms Le Couteur's motion. I think that Ms Le Couteur's heart is in the right place here, as is often the case, but a number of the things that are being suggested are impractical. I do understand that Ms Le Couteur's motion—I think it is probably something that has been misunderstood—would not force anybody to eat a vegan meal. That is probably the thing that has been most misunderstood with this motion.

I still cannot support the motion, for a number of reasons. If there were parts of this motion that the Canberra Liberals would support, and I am not going to suggest which ones they would be, I can tell you that they would not include that Canberra Health Services change the default meal in hospitals to be plant-based. That for us, was an absolute killer when assessing this. More than anything, when I assessed this motion, as is the case with many motions that come to this chamber, I found that I am just not sure that it really is the business of this chamber to be advising the citizens of Canberra in this rather heavy-handed way on what they are doing. I cannot support this one; I am sorry.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (4.23), in reply: I have been very surprised at some of these remarks. There seems to be a wilful misinterpretation of what I wrote. There was nothing that I wrote which would suggest that anybody anywhere was going to be forced to eat a plant-based meal or that that would be the only alternative available to them. I do not know why people have done it, but it is straight out misinterpretation.

I will now go through the various speakers. Mr Gentleman started off by suggesting that I should refer to experts. I wish Mr Gentleman had bothered to listen to my speech. If he had, he would have found that I started off by referring to the IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which is a UN set up bunch of experts. I then referred to the *Lancet*. In case Mr Gentleman has not heard of the *Lancet*, let me tell him that the *Lancet* is a very prestigious medical journal. It is an English journal; it has been around for a few hundred years. A whole month of that journal was based on what they called EAT-*Lancet*. I saw a very short part of that, but basically they said that a more plant based diet was what we needed for both human health and planetary health. They were very clear and unambiguous. Mr Gentleman, I am glad you have come back. As I was pointing out, I am referring to experts: the IPCC and the *Lancet*, both experts in their field.

Mr Gentleman went on to say that I was stopping people's religious practices and saying that everyone should be 100 per cent vegan. As I said at the beginning, that is a wilful misinterpretation of my motion. I have not said that anyone has to be 100 per cent vegan. People's religious practices are a matter for them, and I make no further comment on them.

Mr Gentleman went on to point out that we really do not do intensive animal farming, but he did not then go on to point out the corollary: that we import virtually all the animal products that we eat. The fact that in the ACT we have banned intensive animal farming is a very good thing. I am obviously in favour of it. I was one of the many Greens who moved legislation to ban cage eggs, unsuccessfully in my time. I support this, but it is not the most relevant point here, because we import the animal products.

I was quite intrigued by Mrs Jones's speech. She does not seem to realise that there is some local vegie production. I point out to Mrs Jones that the south side markets are on every Sunday at Canberra College. I was going to say Phillip college; I am showing my age here.

Mr Rattenbury: In her electorate.

MS LE COUTEUR: In our mutual electorate. It is a great place and, by definition, all the food there is locally produced. There are a small number of animal products there—some cheese and maybe some smoked meats—but it is largely plant based and it is 100 per cent local by definition.

The thing I found most intriguing in Mrs Jones's speech was that she said that the Greens were virtue signalling. I thought that was really great because at least it means that Mrs Jones sees plant-based food eating and vegetarianism—possibly even veganism—as a virtue. Thank you, Mrs Jones, for saying that. I am very pleased to have this ringing endorsement of my position from Mrs Jones.

Unfortunately, Ms Cody has left. Of course I was not intending to kill her with this motion. Nothing in my motion would, if passed, lead to that. My motion is talking about options; it is not talking about compulsory veganism. As I said, this is wilful misinterpretation on the part of the Labor Party.

I thank Ms Berry for her comments about schools. I put in a number of questions on notice on the subject, and I have talked about it in estimates. As I said in my speech, it is entirely unclear what the situation is in schools. I am aware that, as a practical result of the move to healthier eating, kids are having less meat presented to them at school canteens. That can only be a good thing. I was really pleased to hear her say that she would support a vegetarian meal a week. That is further than I went in my motion, because I was trying to be fairly low key and always ensuring that there were a lot of options. But, Ms Berry, yes, go for it. I look forward to it. You said it, Ms Berry, and I am very pleased to support your idea of a vegetarian meal a week.

Overall, I would have to say that I am not very pleased with this debate. As members have heard me say many times, I stood for election for one reason: because it was getting painfully obvious that climate change, left unabated, would affect us. It is already affecting us now. Certainly it is going to affect my grandchildren. I will not talk about what it is going to mean for my grandchildren, because I am going to try not to start crying, but clearly we have to do a lot more than we are. I quote from the summary of the IPCC's climate change report put out only last week:

Efforts to curb greenhouse-gas emissions and the impacts of global warming will fall significantly short without drastic changes in global land use, agriculture and human diets ...

This is one of the things that we are really talking about.

This reminds me of something else that Mrs Jones said. She thought that we did not have enough space in the world for us to all live on vegetarian diets. Actually, the people who have looked at it have found that it would take 75 per cent less farmland if we lived on plant-based diets. That is because most of the grain and soy produced is fed to animals, which are then fed to humans. This is a very inefficient way of producing food.

This Assembly voted for the proposition that we are in a climate emergency. I am not sure if the Liberal Party voted for that, but the Labor Party did. Moving to a less animal based diet is one of the things it is clear we will need to do. As the report said, we need drastic changes in land use, agriculture and human diets.

I am trying to start this happening more in Canberra. If we are going to make this transition in any way that is going to be at all pleasant for human beings, or any of the other species on this planet, we need to start sooner rather than later. I have suggested a series of very small steps that would make this easier, exposing people to what is a really nice diet. Plant-based food is good and nice to eat. It is, in general, better for human health. If you have nothing else to do, have a look at the *EAT-Lancet* site.

Mr Parton: Give us a recipe.

MS LE COUTEUR: I will send you some recipes, Mr Parton. I have some quotes from the American heart organisation website which I copied this morning. The American heart organisation says:

Whether you're considering eating less meat or giving it up entirely, the benefits are clear: less risk of disease and improved health and well-being. Specifically, less meat decreases the risk of:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Obesity
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Type 2 diabetes
- Many cancers

I could go on and on; I have plenty of time here to go on and on. I am very disappointed at the total lack of support for this in the Assembly.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 2

Ms Le Couteur
Mr Rattenbury

Noes 17

Ms Berry	Mrs Kikkert
Miss C Burch	Mr Milligan
Ms J Burch	Ms Orr
Ms Cheyne	Mr Parton
Mr Coe	Mr Pettersson
Mr Gentleman	Mr Ramsay
Mr Gupta	Mr Steel
Mr Hanson	Mr Wall
Mrs Jones	

Question resolved in the negative.

Drought relief

MR WALL (Brindabella) (4.38): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that severe drought conditions continue throughout NSW and the ACT;
- (b) that, according to the Bureau of Meteorology, the 31 months between January 2017 and July 2019 have been the driest on record for the State of NSW;
- (c) the ACT Government put in place a 50 percent freight transport subsidy scheme for ACT farm businesses based on the NSW model for a 12-month period that ended in July 2019;

- (d) the NSW Government are providing extended drought relief to NSW farm businesses through their Emergency Drought relief Package 2019-2020—this package includes further drought transport subsidies; and
 - (e) that the ACT has a relatively small number of farm businesses operating in comparison to NSW, however, the shared border requires both jurisdictions to operate in the same market; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to extend drought relief to ACT farm businesses in line with the NSW Government and ensure valid applications for any freight subsidy scheme are considered retrospectively from 31 July 2019.

In bringing this motion before the Assembly today, my aim is to highlight the plight of farm businesses in the ACT who are continuing to be impacted by one of the worst droughts in decades. Whilst we do not immediately associate the ACT with being a farming jurisdiction, we are, after all, the bush capital and we are home to farming businesses which collectively manage about 39,000 hectares, which equates to about 15 per cent of the ACT land area.

In 2017-18 the gross value of agricultural production in the ACT was estimated at \$11 million. The most important commodities fostered in the ACT were cattle and calves, at \$2.4 million; followed by wool, at \$1.2 million; and poultry, at \$1.2 million. These commodities contributed 45 per cent of the total value of agricultural production for the region. This is not an insignificant contribution, given not only the size of the ACT as a jurisdiction but the relatively small number of primary producers that we are home to.

While it remains cold and snowy in our town, as it has been over the last couple of weeks, it can be hard for us to remember that we have had little in the way of soaking rain for a very long time. In fact, the recent cold snap brought with it the hope of snowfalls in the mountains and rainfall for our rural areas. Alas, very little was received.

According to the Bureau of Meteorology, the last 31 months have been the driest on record for the state of New South Wales, which, of course, we are located right in the middle of. Using satellite data, the ANU's Research School of Earth Sciences has found that the drought conditions we are experiencing appear to be worse than the millennial drought, which occurred between 2001 and 2009. Locally, we have not received the autumn or winter rainfall that we usually receive, and any rain that does appear gets soaked up by the very dry environment, rather than reaching dams and reservoirs on properties.

These conditions are affecting our farm businesses, and they have been affecting them in a big way for quite some time. Rural leaseholders last year called it when they predicted that the drought conditions were not over—not by any stretch.

Members in this place will be aware of my calls last year for the government to support a package for farmers to assist them through the drought—an assistance package which should have been brought forward then, in line with New South Wales, and the same issue stands now. The New South Wales scheme continues and the

ACT government has, yet again, dropped the ball when it comes to support for our drought-affected farmers.

I was, however, pleased that the package was met last year. Not long after my calls and those of the opposition, the ACT government put in place drought relief measures that included infrastructure assistance as well as a 50 per cent freight subsidy, which was based on the model that was on offer over the border in New South Wales. However, the New South Wales government has continued this subsidy in light of the conditions continuing across the border, yet the ACT scheme lapsed at the beginning of July this year.

It is important that we are in sync with New South Wales on this vitally important assistance package. The ACT Rural Landholders Association called upon the government to ensure that the off-farm assets threshold was increased as part of the previous model and that more access to the subsidies was available for more farmers. This was a welcome move and a necessary one, given the peculiarities of the ACT agricultural sector.

Whilst our farm businesses are small in stature, in the larger marketplace it is even more necessary for them to compete on a level playing field. ACT farmers have to buy and sell in the same marketplace as those being offered support and subsidies in New South Wales, and it is only fair that they compete on a level playing field, particularly as the drought conditions fail to improve and the need for a freight subsidy is becoming ever more prevalent for so many rural leaseholders.

I would like to thank those that have taken the time to speak with me about their experience as they have travelled through the dry period. Many farmers have taken some very drastic decisions to manage both their business and to care for and look after the welfare and best interests of their livestock during this period.

Many properties have had significant destocking of either their cattle or sheep, depending on which area of agriculture they are involved in. I am aware of one property where close to 40 per cent of their stock have been destocked and either sold on to other properties that are in better conditions or sent to market. A number of leaseholders have been fortunate enough to date to have been able to manage their stock loading on their property and avoid the need so far to use the freight subsidy and the need to purchase feedstock from interstate, often from destinations as far away as Victoria or South Australia. As members can imagine, there is a significant cost in transporting that to the ACT and there is also a significant scarcity in being able to find feedstock for purchase.

For those who have had to make the decision, or are facing making this decision in the coming weeks or months, it is important that they can do so assured that there is some assistance on hand from not just the government but the government on behalf of the whole community to help them through this tough period.

It is also important that the subsidy is in line with what is on offer in New South Wales, which is a 50 per cent subsidy of transportation costs, as businesses in the ACT also need to compete with those in New South Wales. They are selling their

stock in the same saleyards as those in New South Wales who are in receipt of the assistance.

Members will note that my motion called on the government to apply the subsidy retrospectively. As I said in my comments earlier, this is as a result of the subsidy lapsing in July this year and there being a gap if it were to be reinstated now, without that retrospectivity. Again, this inoculates ACT farmers against falling through the cracks for any lag between the cessation of the last scheme and the reintroduction of these measures.

My motion today should be taken by the government as a no-brainer. I hope that it enjoys their full support and that we see the reintroduction of this support package for local farmers as a priority. I do not think there is any desire by members of the community to see this lapse. In fact, I think there would be some outrage if they knew that it had currently lapsed and that there was a gap. I look forward to hearing what the government has to say on that, and hope that there is support not only for my motion but for local farmers.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Advanced Technology and Space Industries) (4.45): I thank Mr Wall for this motion today. It is important that we support our local farmers. I have circulated an amendment to the motion, which I now move:

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

(1) notes that:

- (a) severe dry conditions continue throughout NSW and the ACT;
- (b) according to the Bureau of Meteorology, the 31 months between January 2017 and July 2019 have been the driest on record for the ACT since the height of the millennium drought of 1996 to 2010;
- (c) the ACT Government has:
 - (i) put in place a 50 percent freight transport subsidy scheme for ACT farm businesses for a 12-month period that ended in July 2019, based on the NSW model;
 - (ii) provided access to rural resilience grants for rural landholders to support on-farm infrastructure that will build future resilience; and
 - (iii) where possible, has assisted rural leaseholders with short-term leases for drought relief purposes;
- (d) the NSW Government is providing extended drought relief to NSW farm businesses through their Emergency Drought Relief Package 2019-2020, including drought transport subsidies;
- (e) the ACT Government is facilitating the Australian Government’s On-Farm Emergency Stock Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme, which enables ACT rural landholders to seek a 25 percent rebate on expenditure for emergency stock water infrastructure; and

- (f) the ACT has a relatively small number of farm businesses operating in comparison to NSW, however, the shared border requires both jurisdictions to operate in the same market;
- (2) commends the ACT Government for:
- (a) supporting territory farmers, and for its ongoing engagement with this sector during dry conditions; and
 - (b) its commitment to review the appropriate support mechanisms in consultation with relevant farming and environmental groups, with a view to extending the freight subsidy.”.

This amendment clears up some inconsistencies with some of the wording in Mr Wall’s motion. We are not in a drought situation in the ACT; however, we are in extended dry conditions, and I think that is what he means. We did not declare a drought last year. The impact of this drying climate varies in its effects and intensity. The dry conditions have social and financial impacts on farmers and their communities, adverse environmental effects and impacts on vegetation, soil and animal welfare—both farm and native animals—if not managed appropriately.

In comparison to New South Wales, the ACT does not have a large rural industry. However, it is still a significant part of the territory’s character. We are home to 160 mostly family-run farming businesses, which collectively manage 39,000 hectares, or 15 per cent of the ACT. The majority of the ACT’s farming land is managed for sheep, wool and cattle production, horse agistment and other equestrian activities. Other farming activities include poultry and free-range egg production, horticulture and viticulture, truffles and olive production.

In responding to the current climate, the ACT government continues to work closely with New South Wales on dry conditions and land management, including building regional resilience by providing a range of financial and educational support mechanisms.

As the ACT rural sector competes in similar markets to its New South Wales counterpart, financial support mechanisms have generally aligned with those provided by New South Wales and range from subsidies for freight transport to on-farm emergency water infrastructure rebates. These programs have been designed to support farmers in need, to better prepare them for droughts and to reduce the impact of drought events on individual livelihoods and the broader economy.

This follows on from work already done with farmers in recent years to build their resilience to dealing with the increasing likelihood of dry conditions due to climate change. Popular examples are the “top lamb crop” course delivered in conjunction with professional agronomists, which helps producers to maximise their production whilst maintaining ground cover and protecting biodiversity. Climate forums run in conjunction with the Bureau of Meteorology have also assisted our farmers to manage their businesses in a drying seasonal outlook.

I will briefly outline the financial support mechanisms that have been provided by the ACT government. From August 2018 to June 2019 the ACT government offered a

50 per cent freight transport subsidy of up to a total of \$20,000 per business to eligible farmers. Notwithstanding the duration for submission, 12 applications were received. Total transport subsidies paid to date equate to \$39,710 and applicants have mostly been cattle and sheep producers seeking assistance with transporting stock for sale or transport of fodder. This initiative has assisted farmers to manage the welfare of their livestock during drying conditions and manage their businesses accordingly.

Rural resilience grants have also been offered for individuals and groups of rural landholders to implement drought resilience activities and build resilience for the future. Total program funds of \$150,000 were made available for grants, with applications closing in mid-September 2018. Twenty-six projects will be delivered, to a total value of \$141,900.

Funded projects included on-farm infrastructure improvements to supply water for stock, storage of fodder and fencing. These improvements assisted in increasing stock survival rates and wellbeing by facilitating greater access to stock water, improving a farmer's ability to supplementary feed stock in dry times, which takes the pressure off pastures and soils and reduces the total grazing pressure on their farms through the management of competing kangaroo numbers.

The ACT government is administering the national on-farm emergency water infrastructure rebate scheme on behalf of the Australian government. Expenses incurred from 1 July 2018 will be eligible under this subsidy. The program runs from 2018-19 to 2021-22. It enables ACT rural landholders to seek a 25 per cent rebate on expenditure for emergency stock water infrastructure. To date, 10 landholders have successfully sought rebates, to a total value of \$21,454. From 1 July 2019 primary producers who have permanent plantings of horticultural crops, such as grapes, truffles or orchards, are now also eligible to apply for support. This will help these producers to better prepare for a warming climate scenario.

In addition to this assistance, staff from the biosecurity and rural services section of the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate have worked hard to provide rural leaseholders with short-term leases for relief purposes, where possible. As you can see, requests for assistance have not been large in terms of financial contributions, largely due to the smaller size of the ACT rural sector in comparison to New South Wales. However, this support is appreciated, nonetheless, by the sections of the rural community who are meeting the challenges of our current climatic conditions.

The ACT government is also supporting our rural sector by recruiting a regional agricultural Landcare facilitator. This initiative is part of the regional land partnership program, and is a joint ACT and commonwealth initiative. The facilitator will exchange ideas and practices, such as building resilience to significant changes in climate, on-farm biosecurity challenges, chemicals management and promoting innovative agricultural practices. The ACT is continuing to partner with the Australian government to deliver programs aimed at supporting farmers to manage soils and areas of biodiversity and to adapt to climate change under the national Landcare program.

Madam Speaker, I assure you that the ACT government and its staff in EPSDD are working closely with the Rural Landholders Association to explore options around how we can best continue to support the ACT rural sector, and I look forward to continuing our productive partnership. In the interim, the ACT government will continue to support its rural community through administration of the national on-farm emergency water infrastructure rebate scheme, training to maximise production and environmental stewardship of our natural resources, building awareness and providing advice on biosecurity issues, providing support through the ACT environment grants and through the work of the regional agricultural Landcare facilitator.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.53): We welcome the opportunity to have this discussion today and once again recognise the frankly distressing and ongoing impacts that climate change is having on our local primary producers and the environment. I note the comments that Minister Gentleman has just made, which I think are reflected in his amendment. I will be supporting Minister Gentleman's amendment. I will also move an amendment later. From a procedural point of view, I will do that after we have passed Mr Gentleman's amendment. I believe it is easier if we do it that way. I will be seeking leave, but I will make my remarks during the debate.

The realities of today cannot be avoided. Our climate is changing faster than ever before and, as we have discussed in this place many times before, our region is being faced with increasingly hotter and drier weather, as was predicted by scientists decades ago. If you are aged under 20 you have not even been alive in a year where global temperatures were at or below the 20th century average, and this trend continues. We are breaking the wrong types of records nearly every month.

If members have been following these debates and thinking closely, hopefully they will realise that this motion has been partly informed by the Bureau of Meteorology forecasts or the CSIRO climate modelling. This is a matter of scientific fact that should cut through partisan politics, if not on the hill then hopefully at least at a local level, for the benefit of the communities we are all elected to represent.

Climate change is clearly and directly affecting us here in the ACT, and we recognise that, for those who live in the limited farming areas available in the territory, it is hurting. The impacts are hurting their livestock, their produce and their livelihoods. This is a matter of animal welfare, of human wellbeing, of environmental stewardship and of economic importance and while there may be some disagreement on the best course of action you would be hard pressed to find a primary producer in the capital region who has not noticed the long-term trends of reduced rainfall, shorter and warmer winters and longer and hotter summers. If scientists and weather forecasters are correct—which we believe they are because, as touched on earlier, I prefer to believe in science than make things up—these impacts will only get worse.

It is hard not to empathise with rural leaseholders, and the ACT Greens support the government's previous and ongoing offer of reasonable support to get through this difficult dry period but also to adapt to new methods of production wherever possible.

I think it is also, in my portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for Mental Health, important to recognise the impact that these difficult, difficult periods can have on some of our rural leaseholders. There has been a growing awareness nationally of the physical and mental health impacts of climate change, particularly heatwaves and drought. In November last year I launched a report from renowned medical journal the *Lancet* which highlighted a link between climate change and health, including mental health, reinforcing the need to take climate action and declaring that policy inaction on climate change is threatening Australian lives. The *Countdown* report, which was developed by 19 leading scientists from 13 universities and research institutes, was the first report of its kind and tracked progress in health and climate change in Australia. The report was yet another warning that we must take urgent action to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The warning from leading academics and scientists around the world is clear: policy inaction on climate change threatens Australian lives. If we want good health outcomes in Australia we need to address these issues. The report showed that human health in Australia is highly vulnerable to climate change across a wide range of areas. It also showed that climate change negatively affects mental health, with people's mental wellbeing particularly affected by temperature extremes. A warming planet means more hot weather, a known cause of harm to mental health. In Australia hot days have a detrimental effect on population-level mental health, equivalent to that of unemployment, and unfortunately these days also serve as a predictor of hospitalisation for self-harm.

The Greens understand the government's desire to help, and we are happy to support this motion with the amendment. I will later move an amendment to the original motion to ensure that we all acknowledge the role that climate change is having on our rural communities. I acknowledge the work of current and future generation of farmers and rural communities to mitigate climate impacts wherever possible and adapt farming methods to the increasing challenges, as required. Along with farmers, it will also take the concerted effort of governments, scientific bodies and environmentalists to support further shifts in agricultural production methods in adapting to further droughts and extreme weather patterns.

Innovations in farming practice focused on low-volume water use, ground cover planting, erosion control and reforestation are happening now. I do not wish to diminish these efforts, but the old ways simply will not cut it anymore and we will need more of the new way to produce a resilient farming sector in the future. There are lots of innovations underway in many parts of the primary production sector, including some terrific examples right here in our own region, both inside the ACT border and also just outside. Many of these are brought about by a new generation of farmers who can see what the impact of climate change will do to their farms, their inheritances, if they do not adapt methods now.

Natural sequence farming is one of these adaptations that are getting a lot of attention in our region. Developed by Peter Andrews, natural sequence farming primarily works to restore natural water cycles that allow the land to flourish despite drought conditions. This was a fairly controversial technique in the rural community when

first developed, but Peter has since been awarded an Order of Australia and elected to the Carbon Farmers hall of fame as recognition of the importance of his work for farmers and land conservation.

If members are interested in finding out more about this, Mulloon Creek near Bungendore is the closest place to observe this technique in action. They have regular open days where both members and anyone listening to today's debate can find out more about it. They also have information online. Having met people who have been involved in that project, their sense of optimism, of the difference it can make for rural communities, is really inspiring. In the context of Mr Wall's motion on the difficulties that farmers are facing, these sorts of changes are exactly the sorts of things that are going to help farmers in the long term.

I am focused a bit on the long term. We are of course also thinking about the short term today. As I said, I am pleased to hear Minister Gentleman's comments about the government's willingness to work with our rural leaseholders to examine the options that we need going forward, given the continuing dry circumstances. I will seek leave to move my amendment once we have worked through Minister Gentleman's.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (5.00): I will speak very briefly to Mr Gentleman's amendment. It is disappointing that he has come in here with an amendment. I will give him some credit. His amendment to part 1 of my motion adds a little more detail, and that is always welcome.

However, on the second part of it, which was the clause in which I was asking the government to reinstate the freight subsidy, continuing from the previous subsidy opportunity so that there was no opportunity for someone to fall through the cracks, the minister seems to have just come in here again with—and this is typical of this minister—a self-congratulatory: “Aren't we amazing? We are doing all the right things.” It fails to address the crux of my motion, which is to give certainty to those carrying on a rural business in the ACT.

The minister said that there are some semantics, that the ACT has not been drought declared. But it beggars belief, when you have a look at the New South Wales maps, which are far more accurate than anything that is produced for all rural leaseholders locally. Everything to the east of the ACT has been declared drought affected and all property to the north, east and south of the ACT is drought declared. We are an island inside everything that is drought affected in New South Wales. Yet the minister says that we fail to declare a drought currently in the ACT.

It really beggars belief how that can be possible. When you look at the New South Wales maps, which break it down to a parish detail, the Parish of Burra, which is on one side of the Monaro Highway, is categorised as in drought. Yet, just on the opposite side of the road where ACT farming businesses are, it is not. I think that the minister might need to take that back and actually ask some serious questions of his departments why we have an instance where one side of the highway is drought affected or declared in drought yet the other side, in the ACT, inside his patch, has not been. I do not think that is a justification or a fair reason for the subsidies and the assistance that is on offer to have been withheld or cancelled, as it was in July.

The opposition will not be supporting the minister's amendment, as it fails to give the certainty to those rural leaseholders and those rural businesses that they so need and so desire and so deserve.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11		Noes 8	
Ms J Burch	Mr Pettersson	Miss C Burch	Mr Parton
Ms Cheyne	Mr Ramsay	Mr Coe	Mr Wall
Mr Gentleman	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Mr Gupta	Mr Steel	Mrs Jones	
Ms Le Couteur	Ms Stephen-Smith	Mrs Kikkert	
Ms Orr		Mr Milligan	

Amendment agreed to.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.07), by leave: I move:

Insert new paragraphs (1)(g) to (j):

- “(g) the climate modelling that shows that the accumulative impacts of climate change are affecting local weather patterns, resulting in more frequent extreme weather events for the ACT and surrounding region;
- (h) the global scientific consensus is that climate change is occurring due to human made carbon emissions;
- (i) the ACT Legislative Assembly recently acknowledged that we are in a state of climate emergency that requires urgent actions across all levels of Government; and
- (j) primary producers and agriculture businesses on the world's driest continent are being directly impacted by the impacts of climate change and, in coming years, governments will need to continue to support further work to shift some agricultural production methods to adapt to further droughts; and”.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Water—quality

MR WALL (Brindabella) (5.08): I fix the next day of sitting for the moving of this motion, at the request of Ms Lawder and pursuant to standing order 127.

Crime—criminal trespass offences

MR WALL (Brindabella) (5.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT is home to a number of animal related businesses, including primary production, wildlife parks, as well as research facilities such as the CSIRO;
- (b) recent protests around Australia co-ordinated by vegans opposed to all forms of livestock production;
- (c) that up to 100 people at a time have stormed onto family farms, the addresses of which have been published online, with the intention of intimidating, threatening and bullying the owners;
- (d) that these groups oppose many forms of animal related business and research, including wildlife parks;
- (e) the ACT has already experienced agricultural attacks when, in 2011, Greenpeace protesters destroyed genetically modified wheat designed to increase nutrition and bowel health developed by the CSIRO;
- (f) that any potential protests targeting wildlife parks pose a significant biosecurity and quarantine risk to the ACT and the broader Australian community;
- (g) the Commonwealth Government's call for states and territories to strengthen penalties and enforcement of criminal trespass offences for such events if they are carried out in the ACT; and
- (h) that the NSW Government has passed legislation, creating a new offence for those causing a biosecurity risk by trespassing on a farm that incurs on the spot fines of \$1 000 increasing to \$220 000 for breaching farm biosecurity plans; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) commit to developing legislation to strengthen criminal trespass offences in line with the financial penalties recently implemented in NSW;
- (b) ensure legislation in the ACT offers protection to all forms of animal related businesses, including primary production, wildlife parks and research facilities; and
- (c) condemn such offences and commit to actively deterring protests that illegally interfere with the conduct of a business.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring this motion to the Assembly today, taking what the opposition sees as prudent steps in light of extreme activism that has been occurring in other jurisdictions.

Animal activism is not new, but the kind of extreme animal activism that is destroying businesses and posing real threats to our biosecurity at the present time takes so-called activism to a brand-new level. The vandalism and criminal activity that goes with this

activism is destructive and deliberate. We have seen this time and again in recent years.

In Western Australia a how-to guide has been drawn up by animal liberation group Direct Action Everywhere that tells members they should openly enter farms at night, document the conditions and rescue animals. The group calls the tactic “open rescue”, to quote from their website, but what they are describing is illegal trespass on private property and the theft of livestock.

The very well-publicised situation of the Gippy Goat Cafe in Victoria involved constant harassment by abusive vegan activists that resulted in the cafe closing after months and months of unrelenting behaviour from vandals and from trespass. The staff and owners were harassed to such an extent that they feared for their safety and they had no choice but to close the business down. This may well have been seen as a victory in the name of activism, but it was a perpetration of abuse and an illegal activity that should be prohibited under law. Cafes, butcher shops, animal parks—all these types of businesses have been targeted all around the world, and all of this in the name of veganism.

I believe in our fundamental right to protest. However, this behaviour cannot be called protesting if it is flouting the law and destroying people’s livelihoods. All animal-related businesses have the right to feel safe in their businesses and their homes. They should be able to carry out their business without the so-called activists invading their property or stealing their property.

This applies to research facilities as well. A very new threat has emerged recently, providing new tools to these vegan vandals by way of a website called The Aussie Farms Repository. The website publicly lists thousands of legitimate Australian businesses. It lists their details and the names of the proprietors, it contains photos and maps and, yes, ACT businesses currently appear on these pages.

The site itself states that the repository aims to bring all evidence together so that “we can all freely share and use it in our efforts towards a common goal”. The common goal is the extreme activism that wreaks havoc and destruction in a deliberate attempt to derail legitimate and lawful businesses.

I applaud my federal colleagues for taking action in light of these activities and for taking steps to develop new farm trespass laws, strengthen penalties and make a stand against activists who invade farms, damage property and steal animals. The federal rules go even further and target those who incite trespass using a carrier service, a legislative responsibility that exists only for the commonwealth.

It is now crucial that state and territory governments step up and play their part in protecting animal-related businesses and research facilities—and in the ACT’s example maybe also tourism businesses—to prevent risks to our quarantine and biosecurity and to give protection to those who seek to operate a lawful business under the law, something they should rightfully enjoy.

Currently, trespass can be a criminal offence in the ACT. There are several provisions that address criminal trespass and the similar offence of forcible entry in the ACT. However, the penalties are minimal and, I would suspect, could easily be paid for through crowd-sourced funding or other fundraising activities. Simply put, the current deterrent does not deter the crime.

We might think that the ACT is immune from these kinds of extreme activism. However, we must not forget the destruction of a crop of GM-modified wheat by Greenpeace protesters back in 2011. The crop that was destroyed was being developed to help improve nutrition for those suffering from chronic bowel conditions. Years of work, research and investment were lost in one illegal action. More galling than the attack, and to make matters worse, is that a member of this Assembly, and a former Greenpeace activist, endorsed—simply because the protesters deeply believed in their cause—the illegal actions of those protesters who destroyed a reported \$300,000 worth of property at the CSIRO. This may give us an insight into the level of support my motion may receive today from the crossbench members. However, we live in hope.

Today's motion is really just a first step. Just as my motion for the extension of drought relief called for action in line with the New South Wales government's commitment to their farmers, this motion calls for a similar move to mirror, as a minimum, the moves that have been taken in New South Wales in respect of this issue. The New South Wales government has passed legislation creating a new offence for those causing a biosecurity risk by trespassing on a farm. It incurs on-the-spot fines of \$1,000, increasing up to \$220,000 for breaching farm biosecurity plans. What we would like to see is a commitment to match this, and we can go, potentially, even further. My understanding is that the stronger penalties enacted by the New South Wales government, including the \$220,000 penalty for individuals, are on the basis that an intruder or protester contravenes a farm's biosecurity plan.

The ACT is home to a number of wildlife parks, zoos and nature reserves which may fall victim to such attacks as a result of being low-hanging fruit in a jurisdiction that has not yet enacted stronger penalties. As wildlife parks, zoos and other animal businesses do not fall under the farm specific biosecurity plan in New South Wales, we would seek to have those same penalties enacted for those facilities in the ACT, giving them also the cover and protection that the law should afford legal businesses.

The damage to our environment and beyond our borders of such activities on these facilities could be profound and extremely damaging. If the ACT does not increase its penalties for criminal trespass offences for activists targeting animal-related businesses, activists will surely see the ACT as a much softer target than New South Wales. Therefore, it is important that the ACT, as a minimum, matches the penalties that are in place in New South Wales for contravening biosecurity plans but also includes wildlife facilities and research facilities under that umbrella.

The ACT is home to a number of animal-related businesses and activities. I am thinking along the lines of reptile zoos, Tidbinbilla and our National Zoo and Aquarium, one of the most popular tourism destinations locally, and all of the other animal-related businesses in between.

We as an Assembly must act to protect these integral places in our territory. By acting in such a way, as my motion calls for, we would be sending a strong message to vegan vandals that their behaviour is simply not acceptable; there is an expectation in the ACT population that such behaviour will not be tolerated and that those businesses should be able operate under the protection of the law, as they rightly deserve.

I urge members of the government to support this motion and to support those who are investing in our community through these businesses—by creating jobs and providing significant taxation revenue to the territory through the great work that they do—by offering them the protection of the law that they so rightly deserve.

MR RAMSAY (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for the Arts and Cultural Events, Minister for Building Quality Improvement, Minister for Business and Regulatory Services, Minister for Government Services and Procurement and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (5.16): For all of the complaints that we regularly hear in this particular chamber, especially from those opposite, about what is debated, what should not be debated in this place and how important it is for a matter to have strong connections with the ACT, we should be very clear that today's motion by Mr Wall is not about the needs of Canberrans. That is not what it is fundamentally about. What we have here is a motion that is representing a signal by Mr Wall and those opposite to their federal leadership.

As Mr Wall has made clear in his speech, as he says how great the federal conservative government is, this is a way for the Canberra Liberals to let their friends up on the hill know that they do not have to be too upset about the overwhelming rejection of their Liberal Party in the ACT in May. There are, indeed, some politicians that are still around who can voice reactionary, conservative views.

There is no doubt that the federal Liberal Party can rely on the Liberal members in this chamber, as they are the most conservative branch in the country. When they need voices to oppose marriage equality, where do they look? They look to the people in this chamber. When they needed support for rolling back discrimination laws, members opposite were very happy to add their voice to that. And when, today, they need voices to scare hardworking farmers, they can shore up the Liberal-Nationals coalition; the Canberra Liberals will come to the party yet again.

This government is focused on the needs of Canberrans. Voters here have made it abundantly clear that they have no time for the federal Liberal politics of division and fear. This government will oppose today's efforts to make the Assembly into a forum for the conservative Liberal-Nationals agenda. When this debate is over today, and hopefully it will be over soon, we can get right back to the business of supporting Canberrans.

I can say, on behalf of the ACT government, that we recognise the right of people to protest in support of their political views. And when anyone's activity, a protest or not—

Mr Wall interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: You were heard in peace, Mr Wall.

MR RAMSAY: When anyone's activity, protest or not, breaks the laws, we have strong punishments already in place. The ACT has a range of offences which protect people's properties and businesses, in our Criminal Code and in other laws. Whether it is through burglary, unlawful entry, aggravated burglary or a range of offences, there are already very strong penalties in place.

I am delighted to be able to give the Assembly, and Mr Wall in particular, a short overview of some of the laws that we have to prosecute interference with property and business. At the lower end of the scale, there is section 4 of the Enclosed Lands Protection Act 1943, which prohibits a person from entering without lawful excuse onto the enclosed land of any other person without consent. This carries a maximum penalty of five penalty units, which at present, for an individual person, would be a maximum fine of \$800.

At the other end of the scale, the more serious end of the scale, the ACT already has offences of criminal damage and burglary. Damaging property carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment, under section 403 of the Criminal Code 2002. The offence of burglary covers people who enter buildings to commit theft, to cause harm, to threaten to cause harm or to commit other serious offences that cause damage. The maximum penalty for that offence is 14 years imprisonment.

Just to break that down a little so that Mr Wall can understand it, under our existing laws, a person who trespasses on a farm building, a zoo or any building, including the ones around the businesses that Mr Wall referred to in other jurisdictions in his speech, without permission and causes criminal damage would be committing burglary. Equally, if the person threatened to harm a worker in the building they would be committing a burglary.

Then there is the offence of aggravated burglary, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment. Under section 312 of the Criminal Code 2002, if a person commits a burglary in company with one or more people or commits a burglary and has an offensive weapon on them, the offence becomes an aggravated burglary. I am not sure that I would class 14 years imprisonment or 20 years imprisonment as minimal, as Mr Wall suggests today.

The offences that I have mentioned are just some of the offences in the ACT that are already in place. There are other offences which could be prosecuted, depending on the circumstances, such as offences against a person, including common assault or assault occasioning actual bodily harm.

One of the key things for this government is that we undertake evidence-based decision-making. The evidence is clear that our laws are strong and they protect farmers, businesses and people's property from harm. We do not intend to have any new laws to fuel ideological scaremongering. That is something we will leave to the Canberra Liberals to do, as they do so often.

In a thin attempt to make this an ACT issue, Mr Wall has mentioned, both today and in the media leading up to this, an event that took place eight or nine years ago, noting that that had nothing to do with animals. If that is the closest he can come in terms of evidence that requires these new laws in the ACT, it shows that he is simply not driven by evidence.

The federal Liberal Party has been clearly driving a campaign on this issue. The Canberra Liberals are bringing their conservative agenda to this Assembly's program. But this is Canberra. Our voters expect us to listen and to respond to their views. That is why we are a proudly progressive government. We are a government that stands against a national conservative view on marriage equality. We are a government that stands for supporting a community where everyone is valued, where everyone belongs and where everyone can participate. This government is hard at work, delivering reforms that meet the needs of Canberrans.

The resources of our criminal law experts are hard at work delivering nation-leading protections for children. We have created and passed a law that requires all adults to report child sexual abuse. That law makes no exceptions for any religion. We are hard at work developing effective practical tools for our police to stop crime. We are developing unexplained wealth laws and a suite of measures to make Canberra the most inhospitable place in the country for criminal gangs to operate.

Our criminal law reform agenda is ambitious, and it is responsive to the things that Canberrans care about most. There is no place in that agenda for Liberal-Nationals scaremongering. The government cannot and will not justify diverting resources from ACT child protection and ACT crime prevention to work on this narrow, conservative Liberal campaign. We are, and we will remain, a government that gives voice to Canberrans first, in support of equality, in support of social inclusion and in support of evidence-based approaches to criminal justice. I oppose the motion.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (5.24): It will come as no surprise that the Greens do not support Mr Wall's motion. The main point, however, is that there is already a range of laws that respond to instances of trespass and criminal damage, and they impose serious penalties. Mr Wall is advocating for new penalties for people who trespass on farms. His motion mentions those recently introduced in New South Wales. The ABC reports that those laws could see an individual trespasser fined more than \$400,000.

The laws proposed by Mr Wall's federal colleagues, which I gather he also supports, would create a penalty of up to one year in jail for a person who published information online inciting trespass on a farm. A further offence would create a penalty of up to five years in jail for someone who published information online that led to another person causing damage or theft on that farm.

These are extreme penalties, and disproportionately excessive compared to similar offences. It is an unusual and kneejerk reaction to target a particular group of people, a particular type of trespass, and significantly to increase penalties for that group. It seems to me that this is more of a political reaction than good or consistent lawmaking.

That is why groups like the Law Council are criticising the federal government's proposed trespass laws.

These laws are likely to impinge significantly on freedom of speech, something that I did once think that the Liberal Party cherished. As the Law Society points out, the laws could stifle legitimate debate about animal rights and food production. They could limit the work of journalists and scare off whistleblowers. Journalists are understandably concerned about these potential threats to their independence, and journalists are already troubled enough by the federal government's intolerant attitude towards reporting.

I also point out that the whole issue of farm trespass is not particularly relevant to the ACT. As was noted in the earlier debate today about plant-based food, we do not have any intensive farm operations in the ACT, and that is where the farm trespassing has occurred. Of course, I am very pleased that we do not have them. It is because, as I said before, the Greens have campaigned on this for years and years and have passed laws to outlaw those practices. It is a great outcome and something that we are proud of.

There is an actual consequence, as better animal welfare laws help to prevent instances of trespass, because why are the trespassers going there? It is to expose the horrors of intensive farming. It is not for any financial gain or anything like that.

It would be a much more useful and positive response to see politicians focusing on ways to improve farming practices, animal welfare and transparency. This needs improvement. The activists entering farms or abattoirs expose both illegal activities and the horrible realities of intensive farming. They have done the same with the live export industry. Animals Australia discovered disturbing mistreatment of animals that was both shocking and clearly unacceptable to the general Australian public.

These issues are all very troubling, especially considering that the public is actually very interested in animal welfare. I will talk a bit more about that in a moment. I reflect on my own experience as an MLA who has an interest in animal welfare. In the Seventh Assembly, I tried to organise a visit to the battery hen farm operation, because at that time I was contemplating legislation which would have shut down battery cage production in the ACT. However, they refused to let me visit their farm. No-one, of course, has to let me onto their private property—

Mr Wall: But you did not break the law?

MS LE COUTEUR: I did not break the law. I did not visit their farm. No-one has to let me onto their private property, of course, but that episode does give an insight into the secrecy and lack of transparency around intensive farming. It is in these farmers' interests to keep the general public in the dark about what happens on these farms.

The fact that farm trespassing is not occurring in the ACT also raises an interesting question about the Liberal Party's priorities and their apparent desire to further regulate where regulation is in fact not needed. I do recall many protests from Mr Coe and his colleagues about limiting regulation, especially when something is not

happening in the ACT. I recall that this was cited as a reason for him not supporting the Greens' proposal to prohibit intensive pig farming. Now Mr Wall wants more laws to punish farm trespassers, even though laws already exist for this, the practice is not occurring in the ACT and there are no intensive farms or abattoirs in the ACT.

The whole issue is purely a political one, and the federal Liberal Party, mirrored by their ACT counterparts, are proposing disproportionate and draconian laws for a political purpose. It has come up before, of course, when Barnaby Joyce proposed similar laws to prevent protesting about farming practices. At that time the proposal was not supported by the states, territories and COAG.

The issue flared up again prior to the election, a period when political issues are amplified. The Prime Minister gained national attention by labelling vegan protesters "un-Australian". At least no-one called me un-Australian earlier today. When politicians start decreeing what is Australian culture and what Australians apparently believe in, it is a good indication that an issue is becoming politicised.

In fact, according to recent reports from the federal Department of Agriculture, the majority of Australians are concerned about animal welfare on farms. The report was called *Australia's shifting mindset on farm animal welfare*. It included a survey of 1,521 people. Ninety-five per cent of respondents viewed farm animal welfare with concern, and 91 per cent want reform to address this. The report highlights people's concerns over poor animal welfare in both abattoirs and farms. I point out that that report was by the federal Department of Agriculture, not by a fringe animal welfare group. This is a mainstream concern. It is not un-Australian to care about animal welfare on farms.

It is also not un-Australian to engage in protest and civil disobedience. In suggesting that this is dangerous and damaging to the health of our democracy, Australia has a rich history of protest that has advanced many just causes. Civil disobedience typically arises in instances where governments and laws are failing to achieve just outcomes or are actively unjust. The "un-Australian" comment is one you would expect from a Liberal Party leader who has overseen unjust government actions, actions like imprisoning asylum seeker children. Part of the defence in that regard has been to attack and undermine the people who protest.

The whole episode echoes 2014, when the Tasmanian Liberal government introduced laws to target forestry protesters. The protest behaviour was, of course, already covered by existing laws, but the new law would have imposed much higher penalties. Former Greens leader Bob Brown was arrested at a forestry protest and challenged these laws in the High Court. In 2017 the court found the laws to be unconstitutional, as they violated the implied freedom of political communication. This was a very welcome decision as governments around Australia increasingly push for laws that target community protest. Increasingly, they are disregarding civil liberties and protest, and seeking to quash dissenters.

To highlight how this attitude prevails in the federal government, when the High Court recently ruled that it was legal to sack a public servant who anonymously tweeted criticisms of government policy, home affairs minister Peter Dutton said:

If people are employed, particularly in sensitive areas, and they think that they can go off and be sneaky and cute leaking information or publishing information, or tweeting, whatever it might be, it's unacceptable, and we've been very clear about that ...

He went on to say:

We're not going to have people who are involved in running political campaigns whilst they're employed by the Australian taxpayer, campaigns against the government of the day ...

That is just horrific, and it is actually an issue that is worthy of a separate discussion. I do want to note in particular the federal government's attitude of hostility towards anyone who does not support its policies. It does not even support public servants engaging in political activity in their private lives if that activity does not accord with the government's political view.

I note that, apart from earlier this afternoon, there has been a lot of talk about "vegans" in recent months. It seems like every second media headline or political quip is something about vegans. Some commentators and politicians seemed to take a political interest and cynical delight in emphasising that "vegans" were undertaking the recent protests. Even Mr Wall said to the media recently, "There should be no place in the ACT for 'vegan vandals'." It was not about "criminals" or "trespassers", or even just an ordinary, normal, common or garden vandal; it was specifically about "vegan vandals".

I do not really know what more to say, particularly after the earlier debate. But after the earlier debate, I have probably already put on record my support for people who do go to the effort of being vegan, or to the effort of just having one meal that is vegan—eating less animal and more plant-based food. By changing their diets to eliminate meat and other products, vegans are actually doing a good thing.

Shane talked about this, and I talked about it earlier: vegans are people who care about the planet and care about animal welfare. Vegans are opting out of food production that is in many ways exploitative of animals and is failing animal welfare standards. More veganism would also be a great help to the planet, given that human activity is currently steering all of us—not just some of us, all of us—towards a climate change disaster. As Mr Morrison might say it, "How good are vegans?"

I was going to talk about the IPCC report, but we talked about that earlier. Suffice to say that we are going to have to change our land use and our diets if we want to avoid the planet literally cooking.

I will not repeat all of the stuff from earlier today. I will conclude by reiterating that we do not support this motion. It proposes unnecessary, over-the-top laws. Quite frankly, anyone who is concerned about this issue would be better off spending their time working to improve animal welfare laws and transitioning to a more sustainable and humane system of farming. Once that happens, this sort of trespassing will not happen.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (5.37), in reply: The response from the Greens is not even close to surprising, but I did find the comments by the Attorney-General quite interesting. He seemed to want to try to conflate this as a conservative posturing exercise. I think it was remiss of him not to have addressed in his comments the issues that have come out at the COAG level, in which the commonwealth have sent clear intentions to states and territories that they want to see these laws changed at a state or territory jurisdictional level. It seems very clear from the Attorney-General's comments that that is a flat "no" from the ACT in complying with what has been a suggestion put forward at the COAG level.

It is also quite wrong of the attorney to try to suggest that this is about stifling freedom of speech, and suggesting that the opposition seeks to stifle freedom of speech, when in fact the only bastion of fighting for the rights of an individual's freedom of speech that remains in this place is the Canberra Liberals.

This is not about the right to protest; this is more about whether or not those protesters should be able to invade and terrorise on people's private property. In the instances that we have seen over the border, that is exactly what happened, and we are calling for stronger protections against that here in the ACT.

It is worth reminding members that the only gag that exists in the ACT on protest was introduced by the current government, supported by the Greens members on the crossbench. That is what you call stifling of freedom of speech, not insisting that protesters abide by laws and do not invade people's private properties in the act of protest.

The attorney was keen to suggest that stronger penalties and tougher enforcement of laws were a conservative agenda. If a conservative agenda is having laws and punishments that are in line with community expectations then I am proud to be a conservative. It seems that the progressive cause, more and more often than not, is focused on reducing penalties and going soft on crime, as opposed to being tough on crime and sending a deterrent.

We have seen a very clear point of difference between the view of the government and that of the opposition. The opposition's view is shared by many thousands of Canberrans: that there should be stronger laws that prevent these types of crimes from being incited or perpetrated against properties in the ACT.

Currently, we do not have the same protection that is afforded across the border. It is a keen point of difference that the opposition, the Canberra Liberals, are proud to stand by. We think it is in line with the values of the majority of Canberrans who want to see freedom of speech, freedom of protest and freedom of thought, but want to see it expressed in a lawful manner. Where someone steps outside those boundaries and seeks to terrorise someone's property and destroy it, that is not being done in the name of free speech. That is vandalism, plain and simple.

We will continue to advocate for stronger penalties for those who incite and perpetrate these kinds of acts of flagrant vandalism, be they vegan or not. It is simply not

appropriate. Again I commend my motion to the Assembly. I commend the support of my colleagues in supporting me to bring this here today. Those on the other side should hang their heads in shame for not only dropping the ball when it comes to protecting those who enter into businesses in the ACT but also for failing to maintain the legal framework that the Australian community expects to be maintained at the COAG level.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 11

Miss C Burch
Mr Coe
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones
Mrs Kikkert
Mr Milligan

Mr Parton
Mr Wall

Ms J Burch
Ms Cheyne
Mr Gentleman
Mr Gupta
Ms Le Couteur
Ms Orr

Mr Pettersson
Mr Ramsay
Mr Rattenbury
Mr Steel
Ms Stephen-Smith

Question resolved in the negative.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Bees

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (5.46): I rise this evening to talk about the health of bees in the ACT. The health of our bee population reflects the health of the whole ecosystem in which we live. Unfortunately, bees around the Canberra region are not buzzing with as much happiness as we might like.

Our food security depends on the bees which populate two-thirds of our food production. Currently, bee populations right across the world are being threatened due to the overuse of pesticides, herbicides and modern agricultural practices which make them more vulnerable to disease. Human interference is also contributing to their declining habitat and food resources.

Back in June, I met with ACT for Bees, a brilliant local organisation which works with schools, government and community organisations to promote bee conservation in the ACT. We spent our time going over all the work that ACT for Bees does and why they do it. ACT for Bees do too much work for me to list in this speech, but very briefly, at their core, ACT for Bees tell me that they are primarily an education group.

In 2016 ACT for Bees collaborated with Sustain Australia and found that there is a huge gap in students of all ages in understanding where their food comes from. ACT for Bees have since developed the “Love food? Love bees!” curriculum. They regularly attend markets to speak to people about the issue, and campaign around issues regarding the production of food resources free from toxins so that they will not kill the bees. Something they told me during our time together which stood out for me was that the ACT is not where it needs to be in bee-friendly gardens. This evening, I want to talk about the notion of rewilding cities and bee-friendly gardens.

It is key that urban spaces are designed and adjusted to accommodate pollinator cultivation, as species in decline have very close associations with the local indigenous plants of the region and they have co-evolved. What this looks like in practice can be a reduction in pesticide use in public spaces, including schools, parks and roadside plantings, or an increase in planting street trees. I am thrilled that the latter is clearly on this government’s agenda. I am looking forward to seeing more trees begin to pop up in my own electorate of Yerrabi as part of this year’s budget investment for 17,000 new trees in the next four years. I would also like to acknowledge the ACT government’s effort in updating the MIS 25 urban landscape planting list to reflect ACT for Bees’ own additions to the list. This has been a very important step towards ensuring that Canberra is well on its way to becoming a truly bee-friendly city. There has also been some really encouraging work done in Ginninderry between ACT for Bees and the Riverview developers to create a pollinator corridor in the green spaces throughout the development.

However, there is still much more to be done in this area. For instance, there is much more that everyone in this place could be doing to help increase awareness, simply by publicly engaging with events like World Bee Day or organising community planting for bees events in our own electorates.

It is clear to me that more needs to be done in the ACT to facilitate bee-friendly gardens. An idea that could be explored by the ACT government is the potential for an opt-in database for Canberrans with pollinator gardens. Education in all areas of life is also key in creating an environment in which bee populations can flourish.

ACT for Bees excels at providing top quality resources; however, there is a role that we must work to fill as government. ACT for Bees aims to achieve a set of strong goals that we should all work towards, including: promoting bee-friendly practices for the sake of biodiversity, public health, water and soil health; best practice pesticide legislation; having parks and gardens staff using integrated pest management; having clear and accurate labelling of bee-friendly plants which have not been treated with pesticides and promoting bee-friendly practices; and having street plantings chosen for pollinator forage.

All this is just the tip of the iceberg in what we can be doing to ensure the continued health of our local biodiversity and food resources. The health of bee populations in Canberra is critical to our entire health. I hope that, moving into the future, we can look forward to some real movement in this space.

MADAM SPEAKER: Just before I call you, Mrs Kikkert, with the indulgence of the chamber, I want to say hello to a dear friend, Liam, who is watching.

Zonta Club—birthing kits

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (5.50): Madam Speaker, pregnancy and childbirth are inherently risky. Here in Australia, we have, thankfully, done much to reduce the risk, but even a healthy woman who is well prepared for labour and delivery knows that she may be facing complications. The situation is much different in the developing world. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, women in the world’s least developed countries are 300 times more likely to die in childbirth or from pregnancy-related complications than women in developed countries. At the same time, a child born in a developing country is almost 14 times more likely to die during the first month of life than a child born in a developed one. This means that around 300,000 women and three million newborns die each year from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.

The good news is that, in many cases, it takes very little to prevent some of these deaths. The World Health Organisation specifically recommends the use of disposable birthing kits in health facilities that are not adequately equipped with clean supplies as well as in emergency situations or when delivery occurs at home. Strong evidence from around the world shows that these simple kits can prevent many childbirth-related infections.

I rise today to publicly thank the two Zonta clubs in Canberra which annually join together to invite members of the community to assist them in assembling birthing kits to be distributed globally in areas of need, along with training on how to use them. It was my privilege three weeks ago to attend, along with hundreds of my fellow Canberrans, to help with this important endeavour. The Zonta clubs of Canberra are part of Zonta International, a global organisation that seeks to make sure that every woman is able to achieve her full potential and that women have access to all resources.

We volunteers came in shifts to pack the following items into little plastic bags: gauze; a plastic sheet for the woman to lie on so that she does not get dirty; soap; cord ties; gloves; and a sterile blade. These are all simple items, but for women who face delivering children in non-sterile, and often very harsh, environments, these six items can literally mean the difference between life and death. Assembling these very basic birthing kits created a happy opportunity to spend time with friends and strangers, chatting, sharing and getting to know one another. It was easy, to be honest, to forget how important our simple efforts were. And then I would remember delivering my five children safely in hospital before imagining the millions of women who give birth at home, under a tree, in remote villages and so forth.

I am grateful for the privileges that we enjoy in this beautiful nation. I am likewise grateful to the Zonta clubs of Canberra for organising this event and for inviting me to participate, which is something I have done for many years now. I was pleased to see Mr Alistair Coe, Leader of the Opposition, also in attendance, assembling birthing kits alongside the rest of us. This is a good opportunity to point out that one does not need

to be a woman to help empower women. Thank you again to Zonta for the wonderful life-changing work they do.

Reclink Australia football match

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (5.54): I want to make brief mention that the Reclink Community Cup fundraising AFL game is just around the corner. I know you are all excited. I know you are excited, Madam Speaker.

Reclink provides amazing services to those on the edge of homelessness in the inner north. Mark Ransome is their main man, and his work on the ground is just amazing. He has this uncanny ability to patiently engage with those on the margins and get to the bottom of their problems. I am absolutely certain that without the intervention of Reclink, those inner north complexes would be much less hospitable than is currently the case. I say that with a clear understanding that there have been some enormous challenges, but I cannot give enough praise for Mark Ransome and the work that Reclink does.

The Reclink Community Cup sees the media team, “The Noise”, take on the musos, “The Lime Stones”. As a former radio announcer in this town, I have been given honorary entrance to the media team and I will be putting on the white and red jumper for the third year this year. Our team will include a number of the journos whom we see around here very often. Dan Jervis-Bardy and Daniella White from the Canberra Times office will both be playing, along with Emma Groves from WIN TV; Finbar O’Mallon, Andrew Brown, Sally Whyte, Karleen Minney and a bunch of others from the Canberra Times; Brent Ford and Eddie Williams from Capital Radio; Aggie Bradshaw from 9News; and Tom Maddox from the ABC, and a stack of others, many of whom I have left off because I just could not remember.

My understanding is that my Greens colleague Mr Rattenbury will be assisting to umpire the game. I note that an umpire was accidentally struck on the head in an AFL game on the weekend, from an errant elbow from a Dockers player on the way through. They had to go off the ground hurt. But I certainly welcome Mr Rattenbury’s involvement and I am sure that nothing of the sort will happen during this game.

This game is not about the result. It is a fundraiser and it is about bringing the community together. But I am here to tell you that we will get them this year, Madam Speaker. We will get them. In the history of Reclink in Canberra, the media have never, ever won, but as will be the case for this chamber next year, the drought ends this time; I am declaring it.

So come on down; have a watch and a laugh. It is all happening on Sunday, 8 September at Jamison oval at Macquarie. It will be a wonderful family day, with live music and food. I think it is \$10 or \$15 to get in, in terms of the concession and regular prices. And of course, bring a footy down and have a kick at half-time.

Australasian Martial Arts Hall of Fame

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.57): On Saturday night I was lucky enough to be invited to the Australasian Martial Arts Hall of Fame, AMAHOF, awards evening.

This evening celebrated a lifetime of dedication and discipline for the 2019 inductees, as well as those who have gone before them for the previous 26 years that AMAHOF has been running. Having built a greater understanding of and relationship with the local martial arts in Canberra through my consultation on the Controlled Sports Bill, it was great to meet more members of the community, from a national and international perspective, on Saturday night.

Martial arts truly is the best of both worlds in terms of crossing both sport and recreation. It requires athleticism, training, strength and fitness, but it also requires adherence to a particular set of values and a shared culture. The awards evening was a real demonstration of that. Every hall of fame inductee gave thanks to their mentors, their sensei, their dojo members and, of course, their family. All sport requires some level of sacrifice and, in this case, to become a grandmaster and champion like the members of AMAHOF requires a person to dedicate so much time and energy to their respective martial arts.

One of the local inductees I mention is Travis Faure, who was inducted by AMAHOF as instructor of the year. Travis is the chief instructor at the Australian Self Defence Academy, with over 30 years training and study in martial arts. The Australian Self Defence Academy commenced operating in Canberra in 2003, teaching adults and children hapkido self-defence programs. Originally operating in Downer, and then in 2008 moving to Mitchell, the Australian Self Defence Academy is a martial arts centre of excellence. They offer students training in Brazilian jujitsu and floro fighting systems and run specialised self-defence courses for children, teens and females. The mission of the Australian Self Defence Academy is to facilitate positive change and self-development in students' lives, to help them be the best that they can be.

Travis's dedication to his students and his martial arts practice was recognised on Saturday night. I congratulate him, his wife, Liz, and their children, who also train and teach at the Australian Self Defence Academy. I also thank grandmaster Ramon Lawrence OAM, Chairman of AMAHOF; Jimmy Whipp OA, outgoing President of AMAHOF; Edward Sharrer, head of the Canberra event organising committee and now new President of AMAHOF; and other board members of AMAHOF, Frank Hussey and Les Elliott, for hosting me on Saturday and sharing a bit of their story.

As members of the AMAHOF board, they each have reached the height of excellence in their sport. They are also leaders in their community, both in martial arts but also in other pursuits like Rotary, volunteering and Defence Force services. They put on a great event on the weekend, with displays here in Canberra. I wish them every success for the AMAHOF awards in 2020, which are set to be held in Perth in WA.

Canberra Sexual Health Centre

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (6.00): I take this opportunity to put on the record my congratulations and my thanks to the Canberra Sexual Health Centre, which celebrates 40 years of operation today. The Sexual Health Centre began in 1979, before HIV and at a time when the term was STDs not STIs. It began in a corner of the Canberra Hospital's emergency department, led by Dr Gordon White. Eventually

it got its own space and from there has gone from strength to strength to today, where it is under the leadership of Dr Sarah Martin.

I was very pleased to be able to join Minister Stephen-Smith at the celebration lunch today on site with current and former staff, including Dr Gordon White, who just recently was awarded an Order of Australia medal for his service to medicine, particularly sexual health.

I have personal experience with the centre, as I have spoken about before, and I think it is very important to note just how dedicated these staff are. A number of them have careers not just in sexual health but at the centre alone of more than 20 years. I underline my thanks for all that they have done and all that they do: the treatment, the advice, the care and the compassion, and their collective efforts to remove stigma around sexual and reproductive health.

On that, it is certainly important to note that when the Sexual Health Centre began it actually took them several months to fill some major staffing appointments because there was a fear among medical professionals that working in sexual health would ruin their careers. I hope—and I think I can speak on behalf of many, if not all, present today—that that is not the case and that it is a fulfilling and meaningful career and one in which you can tell that genuine pride is taken. There is a lot to be proud about.

Also in attendance were the leaders of the other important parts of our suite of sexual health services in the ACT: Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT or SHFPACT; Hepatitis ACT; and, of course, the AIDS Action Council. As AIDS Action Council Executive Director Philippa Moss said today, these organisations have a long, strong and enduring relationship with the Canberra Sexual Health Centre. They all have a history of not only complementing each other but also working together in ensuring that the ACT and its residents are sexually healthy.

We are very lucky to have had such services and such leadership in this space for such a long time, but, as I have iterated and emphasised in a range of forums, including in this chamber, it does not mean we can be complacent. We know that the number of people presenting to the centre is trending up; the number of STI diagnoses is trending up. We have still got plenty of work to do in the blood-borne virus space, and there is some pretty daunting stuff happening with gonorrhoea and syphilis. There is more work to do, and we need to keep talking about this and taking as many comprehensive actions as we can. But today we can pause and reflect and also be loud and proud about an extraordinary 40 years of the Canberra Sexual Health Centre.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.05 pm.