



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

9 May 2017

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Questions without notice

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—government policy

MR COE: Madam Speaker, my question is for the Chief Minister. Today every member of the Assembly received an email containing a stinging rebuke of your government from the CEO of Winnunga expressing her “frustration and deep disappointment” with your government. She further states: “I expect transparency in my dealings with governments and your officials however I don’t see any signs of that at all and I am becoming more cynical by the day.” Given that Julie Tongs is the leading advocate for Indigenous people in Canberra, her rebuke is a damning indictment of this government’s management of Indigenous affairs. Chief Minister, how is the government going to restore confidence in the Indigenous community?

MR BARR: I, along with other members in this place, have received that email from Ms Tongs. Suffice to say that there are some issues that have been raised in that email that the government will respond to. I do not think that the characterisation from the Leader of the Opposition is a fair one in relation to the range of issues that the government is responding to. On each of the areas of concern to Ms Tongs, the government is responding.

MR COE: Chief Minister, why have successive ministers for Indigenous affairs failed to deliver on the bush healing farm, Boomanulla Oval and adequate accommodation for health and community services across Canberra?

MR BARR: Again, I do not accept the premise of the Leader of the Opposition’s question. There is a range of complex issues being addressed by a range of ministers, not just the minister who has responsibility for Indigenous affairs. The range of issues crosses into a number of other portfolios, and those ministers, together with the minister for Indigenous affairs, are responding to the concerns that have been outlined. Some of those issues are not quickly or easily resolvable.

MR MILLIGAN: Chief Minister, what is the status of the bush healing farm and will it actually be an alcohol and other drug rehabilitation facility?

MR BARR: I am advised that ACT Health hosted a workshop on 8 May with key stakeholders to refine the model of care to ensure that the service meets the needs of residents and is compliant with land use rules. ACT Health acknowledges that there has been some confusion in the community about the role and purpose of the farm and its zoning. There are some differences within the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about what services should be delivered at the bush healing farm. Some stakeholders want a medical model of rehabilitation delivered on the site but the government is committed to delivering the vision of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council to deliver a healing service that works to rebuild a fractured community where recurring drug and alcohol addictions are a barrier to better life.

Mr Hanson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the question from Mr Milligan was quite clear as to whether it would actually be an alcohol and other drug rehab facility. I would ask that the Chief Minister be directly relevant in answer to that question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Chief Minister, do you have anything else to add?

MR BARR: I have completed my answer.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Gugan Gulwan

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for Indigenous affairs. Minister, the offices of Gugan Gulwan are in desperate need of repair, but it turns out that Gugan is required to foot much of the bill for repairs themselves. This includes paying the first \$500 for any maintenance carried out by property group—sometimes up to twice a week with ongoing problems with the building; paying the cost of wiring to replace the lighting because of ongoing issues—a bill in excess of \$6,000; and the cost for graffiti removal as well. There are many additional costs that need to be met by Gugan due to the age and disrepair of the buildings, repairs that should be carried out by property group or that could be remedied by providing them with a new building. These are issues that are not new but which have been going on for some time. Minister, why is it that Gugan is required to pay these additional repair costs, costs traditionally covered by a landlord?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Milligan for his question and for his strong interest in Gugan. I know that he was out there this weekend. I hope he had a good meeting with the community out there. Mr Milligan is correct in stating that Gugan is required to pay the first \$500 of any maintenance costs. The reason for that is that it is part of their lease agreement. They are on a peppercorn lease. While it would normally be the case if you are paying full rent that the landlord would pay for maintenance, the peppercorn lease agreement with Gugan is that they pay the first \$500 of each maintenance cost.

Currently the average yearly maintenance and utility costs for the centre are about \$35,000 of which, as Mr Milligan correctly noted, Gugan pays about \$6,000 and the ACT government pays the remaining \$29,000. Recent work in this area includes a kitchen upgrade, replacement of lighting with energy efficient LED lighting and tree trimming. An electrical and security audit has also been undertaken.

Community Services met again in April as part of a routine service visit. As Mr Milligan has noted, there has been an ongoing discussion with Gugan in an attempt to find new premises for them. I understand that ACT Property Group will be showing Gugan Gulwan a property in Greenway in the coming weeks. The Community Services Directorate has been working in an ongoing way with Gugan Gulwan to ensure that they understand the requirements of property group in this process.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why has it taken so long for the property group to get on top of the many repairs and issues at the Gugan Gulwan premises?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Milligan for his supplementary question. I have asked the same question myself. I met with Gugan in December last year and I have had an ongoing conversation with the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. The office met with ACT Property Group on 6 March to discuss maintenance and accommodation issues on the current site. It was noted at that meeting that ACT Property Group regularly meets with Gugan staff and that all maintenance issues highlighted in the letter that this meeting responded to—they are historical—have already been addressed.

I have sought from property group a detailed breakdown of when issues were raised and the response time to those. I am happy to share some of that information when I receive it. My understanding is that as issues are raised they are addressed.

MR WALL: Minister, if the Greenway property that will be displayed for Gugan is not fit for purpose and fails to meet their requirements, what steps will you and the department be taking to prioritise adequate accommodation for Gugan?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you for the supplementary question. I hope that the Greenway property will be appropriate. There have been a number of discussions between Gugan and the property group over the past few years about different properties that did not meet Gugan's needs, unfortunately. We will, obviously, continue to make this a priority and continue to have those conversations if the Greenway property is not suitable.

Economy—performance

MS ORR: My question is to the Chief Minister. The most important factor for creating and maintaining good, secure jobs is a strong economy. What does the recent data show about the ACT's economic performance?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for the question. I am pleased to be able to advise the Assembly that recent data shows that the territory economy continues to gather strength, at a time when other state and territory economies around the country are slowing or even going backwards. State final demand in the territory grew by 7.3 per cent over the course of 2016. That was the second strongest growth rate of any jurisdiction in the country. I am pleased that unemployment is low, at 3.7 per cent, the second lowest rate of any jurisdiction in the country and well below the national average of 5.9 per cent.

Jobs growth was 1.9 per cent in the year to March, well above the national average, meaning that an additional 4,100 fellow Canberrans were employed through jobs growth creation in that period. Jobs are, of course, a key indicator, and the strength of the labour market is a key indicator, of how our economy is performing. But there are other indicators, such as business confidence. The latest figures show that territory

businesses were the most confident in the country, with the share of businesses with a positive outlook leaping from 40 per cent to 64 percent over the year to March.

Commencements of new dwellings have more than doubled over the course of 2016, obviously contributing to economic activity, but also increasing supply to assist with housing affordability. Much of the strengthening of the economy has been visible in the private sector, including our rapidly expanding university sector, construction and retail trade—retail trade figures, again, very positive today—strongly supported, of course, by the territory government’s record \$2.9 billion investment in infrastructure.

Our focus will remain on creating and maintaining good jobs for Canberrans. It is at the heart of the government’s agenda, and it is why we will continue to work to strengthen and diversify the economy. *(Time expired.)*

MS ORR: Are there any risks to the ACT’s strong economic performance?

MR BARR: Certainly there is reason to be concerned about some elements of the federal budget that will be delivered tonight, particularly the National Party’s decentralisation agenda, which has been passively supported by the Prime Minister, who is not in a strong enough position, it would seem, within the joint party room to respond to the outrageous pork-barrelling demands of the National Party.

There are approximately 58,000 Canberrans currently working in Australian public service agencies across the territory. This represents more than a quarter of all employment in this city. If you were to start relocating entire agencies from Canberra, obviously those jobs would be directly lost to Canberra. That is to say nothing of the near \$37 billion that the commonwealth contributes to the territory economy. Taking even a fraction of that spending out of Canberra would, of course, be a major blow to the near 26,000 businesses in this city and put their profitability at risk. That would jeopardise local jobs.

Tonight’s commonwealth budget is a major source of risk. We already know that it will include big cuts to the higher education sector, the ACT’s strongest export, which contributes over \$2.6 billion annually to our local economy and supports 16,000 jobs in our city.

What else lies in store will be revealed tonight, but we have seen a very worrying trend. At budget time each year, the decisions that are taken by the federal government, particularly decisions to relocate agencies out of Canberra, have a very significant impact on the territory economy.

MS CODY: Chief Minister, how has the ACT government worked to insulate the territory’s economy from external shocks and risks in the past to protect local jobs; and how can the government continue to do so in the future?

MR BARR: We have taken a very active approach to utilising fiscal policy in the territory’s balance sheet to support our economy through difficult times. We

understand that the number one priority for Canberrans is to keep them in work. It is the only way to avoid a deeper downturn. That is why the fact that our unemployment rate is as low as it is now is testimony to a number years of extreme focus on jobs, jobs being the number one priority for the government. This is critical to the territory's population because there is a very strong correlation between the strength of our labour market and how our city grows.

My government will always put jobs first. That is why we will continue to grow the ACT public sector in our budget next month and why we will continue to invest in transformative infrastructure for our city, utilising the territory budget to support good projects that deliver better outcomes for Canberrans and create jobs. That will be our focus in this term of government and you will see a first down payment on that in the territory budget next month.

Transport—light rail

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services and relates to the current consultation on route options and stops for stage 2, light rail, city to Woden. Minister, how would the stage 2 option to terminate at the hospital impact on future stages to Mawson and Tuggeranong, given that the network planned for Woden town centre to Tuggeranong settled on Athllon Drive alignment via Mawson?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question and her ongoing support for an integrated transport system, notably, of course, a light rail network. Certainly it was very pleasing to start the work of consulting with the community on stage 2 of light rail with stage 1 so well underway. It was very pleasing that on the back of last year's decisive election win and decisive support for light rail in Canberra that we have been able to go out to the community with some proposed future routes.

There is, as Ms Le Couteur notes, within the two options an option to also extend from the Woden town centre to Canberra Hospital. There is an ongoing and long period of time with a number of pieces of work that involve community consultation, technical advice and technical expertise. That is well underway also through Transport Canberra and City Services. Before we determine the final route we will continue to talk with the community about the stage 2 route as well as implement over the longer term the full light rail network plan.

Some of the questions which are being asked today are, of course, questions worth asking, but we are not able to answer all questions related not only to stage 2 but also to the entire light rail network right now, but we will continue to have discussions with the community.

MS LE COUTEUR: How much longer will it take the light rail service to get from the city to Woden, or vice versa, if the Barton option—National Circuit, Barton—goes ahead?

MS FITZHARRIS: In relation to the package of works that was announced in the context of the midyear review—the \$7 million which was allocated earlier this year—there are nine packages of work underway. All nine of those tenderers have been appointed. Work is underway to determine patronage and travel time, in addition to other work as part of that \$7 million package which will include engineering advice, community consultation and engagement advice, as well as costing models and some preliminary procurement advice, all of which will be part of the input into the business case that the government develops.

MR STEEL: Minister, what has the response been from the community in relation to consultation on stage 2?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Steel for the supplementary. The response has been extraordinary and very supportive. We were very pleased to launch this consultation last week. We are very pleased with the feedback from the community and very pleased with the very high level of engagement, not only from those people who live along the stage 2 route but also from those people who work along the stage 2 route, because we know how many people in the future will live, work and study along the stage 2 route from Civic right through to Woden.

The range of community engagement activities is extensive. It involves multiple market stalls and multiple visits to community council meetings right across the Woden, Molonglo Valley and Weston Creek communities and also a stall at the Canberra Hospital. Of course, this is about an integrated transport network for the whole city; so the Transport Canberra team will also be talking to residents and workers in Tuggeranong, in Belconnen, in Gungahlin and also in the city.

There are lots of ways that people can have their say on their views of basically two proposed alternative routes. There are lots of ways that the community can get involved. They can attend a meeting. They can attend a shopping centre and talk to Transport Canberra staff. They can post online. They can take a video. They can map online locations of interest for them along the route and give us lots of feedback in lots of different ways about their preferred model for the route.

We are really pleased to get this consultation underway. There has been considerable input already and we look forward to continuing this conversation with the community.

Canberra Hospital—electrical systems

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to a statement by Mr Mick Koppie of the Electrical Trades Union in the *Canberra Times* of 25 April 2017. Mr Koppie was quoted as saying:

There's certainly been improvements or work that could have been done over the last ten years, that if it had been completed, I believe the switchboard would not have had this problem.

Minister, why hasn't ACT Health made improvements or carried out necessary works on the Canberra Hospital electrical system until recently when the problem has been known about for at least 10 years?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. I recall the article and those quotes in that *Canberra Times* article. I do not know what particular works were being referred to but what I can tell the Assembly, as I outlined in my statement this morning, is that there has been funding for infrastructure upgrades at Canberra Hospital and across ACT Health facilities in all budgets that I am aware of. That includes electrical work. There was some work on electrical distribution boards. As I also outlined this morning, it was funded through the 2014-15 budget.

There was also a significant infrastructure upgrade across ACT Health assets of \$90 million in last year's budget, \$23 million of which was to upgrade electrical networks throughout the hospital, notably of course the electrical switchboard. Some of that work got underway. Further work will continue until mid 2018 for one of the buildings and, beyond the main electrical switchboard, for another building till early 2019. If that work had not got underway we would have seen a potentially more serious incident at the Canberra Hospital than the one we had in April, as I also outlined in my statement this morning.

There has been considerable investment in upgrading infrastructure not only at Canberra Hospital but across all ACT Health facilities—in last year's budget alone, \$23 million.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why hadn't the switchboard in building 2 at the hospital been replaced between 1973 and 2017?

MS FITZHARRIS: It is being upgraded as we speak; some of the work will be completed in mid-2018 and subsequent to that further work will be undertaken to be completed in early 2019.

Mr Coe: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order, Mr Coe.

Mr Coe: Madam Speaker, with regard to the relevance of the minister's answer, the question was specifically about why it hadn't been replaced between 1973 and 2017, as opposed to the work that is now underway.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister, you can continue.

MS FITZHARRIS: I cannot comment on all the work undertaken since 1975, but what I can tell you is that work is underway now to replace that main switchboard.

MRS JONES: Minister, why has the series of faults in the Canberra Hospital electrical system not been fixed until recently?

MS FITZHARRIS: Faults have been fixed as ACT Health has been made aware of them.

Canberra Hospital—electrical systems

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the estimates committee *Hansard* of 29 June 2016, where a senior official from ACT Health said:

The key issues in terms of the extreme and the high risk largely relate to the electrical systems and the main switchboard of the hospital.

How long has ACT Health known that there were extreme and high risks associated with the electrical systems and the main switchboard at the Canberra Hospital?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Lee for the question. The particular commentary in last year's estimates hearings relate to a piece of work that was undertaken, I believe, in late 2015, which was an assessment of infrastructure at Canberra Hospital. That work then informed the subsequent budget initiative in last year's budget to upgrade and replace the main electrical switchboard at Canberra Hospital, the \$23 million project which I outlined this morning and was referenced in my previous answer. That work has subsequently gotten underway and will continue until mid-2019.

MS LEE: Minister, were you and/or your predecessor, Mr Corbell, briefed about the extreme and high risks associated with the electrical systems and the main switchboard at the Canberra Hospital?

MS FITZHARRIS: I cannot speak for former Minister Corbell other than to note, of course, that he was the minister responsible for bringing forward and announcing the \$23 million upgrade to electrical systems at the hospital, which was part of a broader \$90 million health infrastructure upgrade that was funded in last year's budget.

Subsequent to that there has been ongoing work to implement that \$90 million initiative and the \$23 million for upgrading the electrical switchboard system. That work initially went out to tender in September last year. The tender was then subsequently signed in April this year. There have also been a design consultant and a head contractor appointed in April this year.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why did ACT Health take so long to act on the problems with the Canberra Hospital's electrical system and switchboard?

MS FITZHARRIS: I do not believe they did take that long.

Education—vocational

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Higher Education, Research and Training.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Wait a minute. Can members please be quiet so the minister can hear Ms Cody.

MS CODY: Can the minister outline the steps the government is taking to improve access to the vocational education and training sector?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Cody very much for her question and for her deep and longstanding interest in the vocational education and training sector. The government is proud of the quality of our vocational education and training sector here in Canberra. We recognise in particular the central role played by the Canberra Institute of Technology and the reform program currently underway at the CIT.

There are a number of steps the government is taking to strengthen our VET sector and improve access to the quality courses on offer. We are committed to keeping CIT in public hands and to maintaining a level of public funding for the institute to ensure that it continues to offer the range of courses that our city needs now and into the future.

Members will note that in other jurisdictions a combination of deregulation and privatisation in the VET sector led to many students being left with high debts for courses that were never delivered. This government has taken steps to improve access to VET for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

I have previously outlined measures that the government has taken to attract students from a wider range of refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds. Permanent humanitarian visa holders have been able to access apprenticeships, traineeships and Skilled Capital courses since January last year. From 1 January this year, eligibility has been extended to refugees and asylum seekers who hold temporary and bridging visas that also grant working rights. Studies have shown that a majority of refugees quickly become productive members of the community. Giving these people more training opportunities is also good for our economy.

The government is also taking steps to get more women into trades traditionally dominated by men. At the last election we committed \$1 million over four years and we are also committed to assisting mature-aged workers to re-skill and adapt to changing labour market conditions.

This Labor government will always support a properly funded VET sector that supports a wide range of students. Whether it is refugees looking to contribute to our community, women looking to get into trades or mature-aged students looking to re-skill, we will support them through our VET sector.

MS CODY: Can the minister outline what action is being taken to encourage women to take up a career in the trades?

MS FITZHARRIS: In recent years there has been a significant increase in women's participation in vocational education and training. The ACT benefits from the skills many young women bring to our community and our economy when they graduate. But this strong participation rate masks a serious under-representation of women in traditional trade apprenticeships. In 2015 the proportion of women who commenced a traditional trade apprenticeship was just three per cent. Promoting women's participation in traditionally male-dominated trades will improve workplace equity and strengthen different industries through greater female representation.

Of course, if we want to grow our economy, improve productivity and keep people in jobs, we need to attract more women into traditional trades. The building and construction industry presents one of the best opportunities to attract and retain more women looking for a career in the trades. In particular, trades such as carpentry, painting and decorating, wall and floor tiling, electrical, horticulture and cabinet making all present great opportunities for women who wish to pursue a career in the industry.

Our challenge, though, is to raise awareness of these opportunities and help break down community perceptions that women are not suited to these roles. That is why, during the last campaign, Labor committed \$1 million in new funding over four years to support outreach programs to get more women into male-dominated trades. The government will work with industry, unions and other training experts to design these programs. I was thrilled yesterday to meet Lucy Costa, a 21-year-old third-year apprentice cabinetmaker at Designcraft, with Ms Cody, to announce that these will be funded in next month's budget.

I should also point out that the building and construction industry has already made a start in attracting more women to take up a trade in their industry. The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority provides additional support to employers to encourage the employment of women in the trades. The authority has a website dedicated to tradeswomen in the industry, with a wide range of resource materials available. We are excited about continuing to build on and support this work.

MR STEEL: Minister, what measures are being taken to improve access to training for mature age workers?

MS FITZHARRIS: The 2016 Australian Human Rights Commission report entitled *Willing to Work*—a national inquiry into employment discrimination—noted that older Australians faced difficulties in accessing the training system. The ACT government recognises the employment challenges mature age workers often face. That is why our active ageing plan supports mature age workers by ensuring they enjoy the same opportunities for recruitment, employment and training as their younger colleagues.

I have already outlined new measures that the government will take to encourage more women in trades, but we are also committed to supporting mature age workers who often need assistance in accessing training places as well. Providing the

ACT community with access to training places helps them re-skill for new opportunities and adjust to changing labour market conditions. This is good for employees and employers and is an important driver of productivity in our economy.

Part of the \$1 million funding commitment that the government has made to getting more women into traditional trades will be allocated also to help raise awareness among mature age workers of the training opportunities on offer here in the ACT. The funding will give us the ability to conduct outreach to this part of our community and support older workers who wish to re-skill into new careers or to up-skill into new jobs.

In addition to this new funding to be delivered in next month's budget, the government is taking action now to improve training opportunities for mature age workers. Last month Minister Ramsay and I announced the removal of the restriction on the number of funded training courses a person can complete over their lifetime.

We took this action to provide better employment and careers prospects for all Canberrans, but particularly for mature age workers. For example, these changes will allow a tradesperson with two apprenticeship qualifications at certificate III and IV level to upskill through a funded traineeship to a diploma level qualification.

This change, along with new funds to support outreach, meets the ACT government's 2016 election commitment to support mature age workers as they prepare for a new job or plan for a new career.

Canberra Hospital—electrical systems

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the fire in an electrical switchboard at the Canberra Hospital on 5 April 2017 that resulted in the cancellation of elective surgery the following day, the discharge of 60 patients and cancellation of outpatient clinics the following day. Were there any adverse clinical outcomes as a result of the cancellation of elective surgery on 6 April?

MS FITZHARRIS: Certainly not to my knowledge. Although it was regrettable that certain procedures had to be cancelled, it was for one day. All patients have since been contacted to reschedule their previous appointment.

MRS KIKKERT: Were there any adverse clinical outcomes as a result of the discharge of 60 patients?

MS FITZHARRIS: Not that I am aware of, no.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, has there been or will there be a clinical review of all the cancellations and discharges?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take that question on notice.

Canberra Hospital—electrical systems

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, when were you first briefed about the electrical systems at the Canberra Hospital being at high and extreme risk?

MS FITZHARRIS: In terms of the specific date, I will have to take that question on notice and get back to Mr Wall. But as I outlined, I was obviously in the Assembly during last year's budget and noted that there was a \$23 million investment in upgrading electrical systems at the Canberra Hospital. Therefore, that work has been underway since last year's budget.

MR WALL: Minister, did your incoming minister's brief contain information about the electrical system at the Canberra Hospital being at high and extreme risk; and, for the purposes of this question, ministerial briefs as both assistant minister and minister?

MS FITZHARRIS: Certainly to my knowledge, I do not recall. As Assistant Minister for Health I was not responsible for the Canberra Hospital. With reference to the incoming minister's brief, I was certainly given briefings on the ongoing implementation of budget initiatives which included a \$23 million upgrade to the electrical systems at Canberra Hospital. But I will take on notice the specifics of the question.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, were your predecessors, Mr Corbell and Ms Gallagher, warned about the electrical systems at the Canberra Hospital being at high and extreme risk?

MS FITZHARRIS: I cannot speak for what previous ministers were briefed on.

Education—policy

MR STEEL: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Can the minister please update members on work towards a strategy for the future of education in the ACT?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Steel for his question on education in the ACT. As members know, in February this year I outlined in a ministerial statement the start of work on a strategy for the future of education in the ACT. Equity is at the core of the work in developing that strategy. Members might like to take a moment to reflect on what equity means.

We all know about equality: the idea that everybody gets the same. By contrast, equity is about fairness and justice. It is about recognising that, no matter what we do, everyone will not always get the same and, more importantly, everybody does not need the same. Differences in background, circumstance and characteristics should not limit the opportunity each of us has in life; and our schools must recognise and support diversity in our community to make sure that this is the case.

So in kicking off work on the strategy I have established a core group of community partners to help the government stay true to this value. I am grateful to have Susan Helyar, the Director of the ACT Council of Social Service, Dr John Hattie, Professor of Education at the University of Melbourne, Dr Chris Sarra, founder and Chairman of the Stronger Smarter Institute and Professor of Education at the University of Canberra—and a highly recognised education leader focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students—Cathy Hudson, a board member of the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, and Dr John Falzon, the national CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society—one of Australia’s most respected voices on social justice and equity. I was happy to convene the first meeting on the future of education with these community partners a few weeks ago.

MR STEEL: Minister, how can education stakeholders get involved in this conversation?

MS BERRY: I value the knowledge and experience of people with a particular interest in education as part of this conversation. The education symposium a few weeks ago involved a broad invitation to groups, which included the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT, the Catholic Education Office, Board of Senior Secondary Studies, ACT Teacher Quality Institute, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools, ACT Principals Association, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Group, Australian Education Union, Independent Education Union, United Voice, Canberra Business Chamber, ACT Council of Social Service, Families ACT, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Health Care Consumers Association and Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. As members can see, this is an extensive list, but it is not exhaustive, and I welcome the views of others who have an interest.

The Education Directorate has already kicked off their work in the ACT government schools with a discussion with school principals and leaders. I enjoyed being part of the leaders’ forum and hearing from teachers about how they would engage with their schools and what their needs will be. I look forward to a similar process occurring in the Catholic system and throughout independent schools. I am looking forward to taking part in that when I can.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how are children and parents being involved in this conversation?

MS BERRY: As I have said, I am keen to hear from students and parents about the future of our system as we continue to improve on equity. Representative bodies like the parents and citizens association have important roles in discussing the issues with their members and providing feedback to the government. But I also want to hear firsthand from students and parents.

Last Friday I attended a student congress meeting—I know that you have attended a number yourself, Madam Speaker—with student representatives from ACT government schools. We had some really great conversations about the

importance of equity and shared some ideas about how diversity can be acknowledged and supported so that kids get a great education and the chance of a good life which flows from it.

The congress workshopped some initial ideas and was tasked with some of the out-of-session work to go back to their local school or college and involve their peers in a conversation. I look forward to the congress reporting back on their findings in the coming months.

The government will also give parents the chance to share their views. I know it is hard for parents to juggle work, family and the rest of life; so the education directorate is looking for different ways that parents can get involved without too much of an effort. Many parents are very keen in school networks on social media because of how easy it is to check in, get information and provide views late in the evening after the kids have had dinner and gone to bed.

The government is going to be using some of these methods to bring the conversation to parents to make it easier for them to be involved. I am keen to see if social media can give parents easier interaction with some stimulus materials, including different formats that can capture their reactions and comments. I was excited to get help from the student congress with this task. At their meeting last week they presented me with the hash tag for our social media activity, education for the next generation, which will soon start emerging online.

Planning—public housing

MR PARTON: My question is directed to the Minister for Planning and Land Management and is in relation to the public housing developments announced on 15 March. Minister, section 87 of the Planning and Development Act 2007 outlines that a technical amendment is allowed if it is a variation to clarify the language in the territory plan if it does not change the substance of the plan. Minister, given that the public housing renewal task force knew they could not put public housing on community facility zoned land without amending the territory plan, what advice did you receive in relation to section 87 of the Planning and Development Act?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Parton for his question. Technical amendments have two functions. One is for administration; the other one is to make changes to the territory plan which supports changes in this regard to the technical amendment for supportive housing.

The inclusion of social housing under some common terminology for supportive housing was put forward in December 2015. It originated in March 2008 when that part of the territory plan came into operation containing supportive housing as permitted use in CFZ areas. The technical amendment to clarify social housing as a common term was notified on the legislation register, as I mentioned, in December 2015. The technical amendment underwent public notification for 20 days.

In this case the inclusion of social housing under some common terminology for supportive housing means the use of land for residential accommodation for persons in need of support, which is—

Ms Lawder: On a point of order as to relevance, Madam Speaker, the question specifically asked what advice the minister received relating to section 87.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister, I think, is getting to use and the technical amendment, which was also a key part of the question.

Mrs Dunne: On the point of order, there was stuff in the preamble but the question was direct. It said, “What advice did the minister receive?” The standing orders require him to be directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister has some time to come to the end of the answer.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you Madam Speaker. At the time, of course, when the amendment was going through in an omnibus bill there was an explanation clearly setting out the process for that technical amendment. The question here today is about advice that I received from the directorate in regard to that, and that was that we needed to clarify the supportive housing terminology for the territory plan.

As I said, supportive housing means the use of land for residential accommodation for persons in need of support. It is managed by a territory approved organisation that provides a range of supported services such as counselling, domestic assistance or personal care for residents as required. Although all those services must be able to be delivered on site, management preparation may be carried out off site. (*Time expired.*)

MR PARTON: Minister, would you agree that the inclusion of public housing, or initially social housing, in the definition of supportive housing is something far more substantial than a “variation to change the language”?

MR GENTLEMAN: It was put forward to clarify the situation for supportive housing, as I mentioned earlier. Some of the common terminology for that would be aged-persons units, community housing—and this is specified in the change—older persons units, a rooming house or a university college. So inclusion of the term “social housing” in the common terminology for supportive housing is in recognition that the term “social housing” is an umbrella term encompassing generally low cost housing provided by either a public or a community provider for people on low or moderate incomes.

MS LAWDER: Minister, did you receive any advice that this change may not be consistent with the definition or that the change may be problematic or high risk?

MR GENTLEMAN: I cannot recall in the advice whether it was problematic or high risk, but, as I mentioned, it was to clarify the term for supportive housing, and that is why it was put forward.

Planning—public housing

MS LAWDER: My question is directed to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, in relation to the public housing developments announced on 15 March. Minister, in April 2015 the Public Housing Renewal Steering Committee noted that the use of community facility zoned land for public housing would require the planning directorate to support a Territory Plan variation and, if this strategy were supported, then construction could commence. Minister, when did you or your office become aware of the need to change the Territory Plan before public housing developments could proceed on land zoned for community facilities?

MS BERRY: I will take the question on notice.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what directions or guidance did you or your office or your directorate give in relation to the need to change the Territory Plan before you could proceed with the public housing developments?

MS BERRY: I will take the question on notice.

MR HANSON: I am guessing what the answer is going to be, but, minister, what discussions did you or your office or your directorate have with the minister for planning or his office or directorate in relation to the need to change the Territory Plan, and what was the time frame of those discussions?

MS BERRY: I will take the question on notice.

Public housing—Wright

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, I refer to documents obtained under FOI that show that sites for Holder, Chapman, Mawson and Wright were under active consideration for redevelopment as public housing from 6 November 2014. It is noted that in the suburb of Wright there was community land of 9,191 square metres and that “half would be required for public housing”. Minister, why did you not inform the residents of Wright who were purchasing land in that location in 2014, 2015 and 2016 that half of the community land adjacent to their respective properties would be required for public housing?

MS BERRY: As Mr Hanson has identified in his question, those sites were being considered at that time and there had been no decision made at that time about whether or not they would be suitable for public housing as part of the public housing renewal program.

MR HANSON: Minister, why didn't you tell the residents in Holder, Chapman, Mawson or Monash equally that public housing was being planned for their suburbs as early as 2014?

MS BERRY: Public housing is planned for every suburb in this city, as part of the ACT government's salt-and-pepper approach to making sure that we have public housing across every suburb in the ACT. It has been part of the government's conversation for some time now. Particularly, since the most recent election, in October last year, the ACT Labor Party, along with the Greens, came up with an agreement which also has public housing renewal mentioned in it. It is very important to the Labor Party, with the support of the Greens, to ensure that our public housing tenants get the best possible housing so that they can live decent and happy lives and have the same goals and aspirations as the rest of us.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Gentlemen, the minister is answering—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

Mr Barr interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, Chief Minister, can we allow the minister to answer.

MS BERRY: What a shame that we had comments from Mr Hanson in the paper recently saying, "Not in our suburb. Bugger off, we're full." It sounds—

Mrs Dunne: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, I expect I know what the point of order is.

Mrs Dunne: I draw your attention to unparliamentary language and ask the minister to withdraw.

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes. Can you please withdraw.

MS BERRY: I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

Mr Hanson: Tell the truth, Yvette.

Mr Parton: A supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am considering Mr Hanson's interjection. I ask people to be very mindful of language, whether you are on your feet or sitting on your rear end, not to impugn the reputation of members in this place. You were very close to it then, Mr Hanson.

Mr Hanson: Well, she should tell the truth, Madam Speaker.

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, a point of order. You might not have heard, because of all the interjections, but Mr Hanson did accuse me of lying previously. I know you have drawn attention to it, but now he is also saying that I should tell the truth. I said “things like”. I did not quote him verbatim, and that is not lying.

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, I am sorry—

MADAM SPEAKER: On the point of order, Mr Hanson?

Mr Hanson: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, saying in this place that Mr Hanson has been saying “Bugger off, we don’t want you in Chapman” is clearly not true, Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, can you resume your seat.

Mr Hanson: and you called it as such.

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you sit down. If you used the word “lie”, you will withdraw; unconditionally you will withdraw.

Mr Hanson: I withdraw. Am I withdrawing “lie” or “untruth”, though?

MADAM SPEAKER: You can put both on the table to withdraw, and you can sit yourself down now.

MR PARTON: Minister, is a four-week discussion period after the election sufficient consultation when you have known about this redevelopment for two years before the election?

MS BERRY: The conversation about public housing renewal has been going on for many years now. Leading up to the October election, we were absolutely firm on our commitment to ensure that those people in our community who need additional support, who need decent housing, are not in high density housing which provides them with fewer opportunities and chances than the rest of us have. That is why we have a public housing policy where we are renewing over 11 per cent of our public housing. That is the biggest renewal program that this city has ever seen. It is something that every single one of us should be proud of, not just those on this side of the chamber. Every single one of us in this chamber should be proud of the fact that we are trying to give a hand up to those people who most need it, and not to further—

Members interjecting—

MS BERRY: It is a shame it has got to this. I encourage members opposite not to say things that are going to inflame this conversation, which they have. And they do not deny it. We have seen it on Facebook and we have seen it in the *Canberra Times*. It sends a very clear message to the public housing tenants in this town that they are not welcome. From the Labor Party’s point of view and from the Greens party’s point of view, they absolutely are welcome in every single—

Members interjecting—

MS BERRY: We have an agreement that commits to public housing renewal and commits to a salt and pepper approach to public housing in every suburb across this city.

Community sector—government relationships

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion. Minister, what is this government doing to support the ACT community sector to deliver programs and services more effectively and efficiently?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. We all know, in this chamber, that the community sector is very important to the lives of many Canberrans. The sector provides services that range from emergency financial relief and food aid to Canberrans dealing with hardship in their lives, to support services for newly arrived Canberrans and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, to young Canberrans, to older Canberrans and to everyone in between.

This government has a strong record of red tape reduction for the community services sector, streamlining funding arrangements including transferring service funding agreements to grants and, as appropriate, extending a number of contracts from three to five years, as well as providing access to a new on-line business tool, breaking new ground, to support compliance and reduce reporting costs.

Just recently, the government's community support and infrastructure grants program opened. It enables community organisations to apply for a total of \$220,000 in funding to fulfil some of the administrative, capital and program needs that every organisation has. This is an increase of \$20,000 on the previous year's funding.

Community organisations may apply for a grant under four project categories: community support and capacity, such as partnerships or training; non-fixed infrastructure and equipment including furniture, storage, work safety equipment; minor capital works and fixed infrastructure; and community support for those in care including cultural, social or sporting opportunities for children and young people in care.

Applications for these grants close at midnight on 28 May and I look forward to announcing the successful applicants at a later date. I encourage all members of the Assembly to get the word out there about these grants and to encourage the community organisations in their own electorates to apply for these grants.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what is the government doing to support organisations to engage more broadly with the community?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for his supplementary. The ACT government understands, of course, that for many community organisations, new forms of outreach and engagement have their own particular costs and challenges. That is why we also have a participation (digital communities) grants program, offering community organisations the opportunity to apply for a grant of up to \$5,000 to build their expertise or capacity in using digital technology. The total amount of funding available under this grants program is \$125,000. Again, the program recently opened for funding applications. Funds under this program can be used to establish or enhance an organisation's online presence, to purchase software or hardware, to promote digital literacy among the Canberra community or to translate and provide online information for members of an organisation; or, indeed, for volunteers.

Yesterday, we saw some of the great use of online applications. Just last night, Orange Sky Laundry was recognised as the ACT innovation award winner in the volunteers of the year awards, recognised in part for its innovative approach to both management and engagement with donors and supporters through its appropriate, which logs all washes that Orange Sky's homeless friends use. Once a shift is finished, it emails donors to let them know that they have just paid for a wash for a friend. This is the kind of innovation that we want to see across our community sector, but it requires support for organisations to understand, and volunteers to be able to use, digital technologies better.

I recognise the importance of ensuring that our diverse and sometimes disadvantaged communities can be empowered through their online voice and assisted to speak up and speak out on the issues which affect them, and that the volunteers who support them can be supported to understand better how to use online technology. (*Time expired.*)

MS LAWDER: Minister, how much of the money collected under the community sector reform levy has been spent? What data do you have as to return on the investment or the effectiveness of the expenditure of that money?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lawder for her supplementary question. Of course, we know that the community co-contribution levy, which was equal to 0.34 per cent of total funding from 2012, has supported a range of community sector reforms. Some of the red tape reductions that I referred to in my earlier answer are among those activities.

I have recently submitted responses to a number of questions on notice through the annual report hearings process that go specifically to the return on those things. As I have said, the levy has been largely returned to the sector through the sector development program.

Our current estimate is that there is about \$740,000 in funding available in 2016-17. It will be used to support priorities identified under the community sector industry strategy, which is being developed by the joint community-government sector industry reference group. That community-industry strategy was released last year.

There is currently work going on to develop priorities for how the sector levy should be spent under that funding. But the priority will be on workforce development. That is the priority that has been identified by the community sector through that strategy. Of course, the levy will end on the 30 June 2017.

Public housing—Holder

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, I refer to documents obtained under FOI that show that the redevelopment of the site that was occupied by the Post and Antenatal Depression Support and Information group was being considered strongly from 6 November 2014. The document states, “Building on part of the preferred site is currently occupied by PANDSI. Property group are able to find an alternative location. However, consultation has not yet occurred.” Minister, I wrote to the government on 17 March 2016, after surveyors had been to the site, and received letters from the government on 13 May 2016 and again on 6 September 2016 stating that “the government has no intention to redevelop at this time.” Minister, why were those letters sent in 2016 when the site had clearly been planned for development since at least 2014?

MS BERRY: I am not the minister responsible for property group. With regard to the consideration of sites in the ACT for public housing renewal, there were some questions earlier which I have taken on notice. In addition to that, the decision on these sites was part of the cabinet process as well. That was an ongoing process within cabinet which could not have been identified to the community at the time.

MRS JONES: Minister, were there surveyors on that site prior to the letters being sent to me?

MS BERRY: I would have to take that question on notice.

MR HANSON: Minister, why wasn’t PANDSI consulted earlier when documents obtained through FOI and other sources show that planning had been occurring since 2014?

MS BERRY: There was no intention to mislead anybody. Of course, when the government gives consideration to all sorts of different planning across the city—development, where they are going to put speed humps or any other sort of work that the government does across the city—not all of it is identified straightaway, because it is under consideration. They are going through a process, and once they have completed that process then we can start the conversation.

It is important that we continue this conversation right now. I know that everybody is trying to find every excuse under the sun to try to stop this renewal program; but it is not the case that I am hearing the same kinds of things, particularly from residents of Holder, who are keen to find ways to get this renewal program working, so that people who are now residing in public housing that is unsuitable can be welcomed

into a new community amongst the Holder residents; they can be supported there and the space that is there can be used by everybody, and we can build a really strong, inclusive community.

Access Canberra—service delivery

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services. What does the recent survey on Access Canberra show about how satisfied Canberrans are with the services provided by Access Canberra?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for her question and for her ongoing interest in the quality of services that are provided to the people of Canberra, both residential and business services. Access Canberra recently ran a survey about Canberrans' awareness of and interaction with the agency. I am happy to report that not only is community awareness and use of Access Canberra's client services on the increase but so too is satisfaction with each of its services.

This shows the hard work of the staff at Access Canberra to promote their services as well as the work that is being done to make these services more accessible and easy to deal with. This hard work is reflected in the survey findings, with 77 per cent of Canberrans surveyed in 2017 reporting that they knew about Access Canberra and its services, compared to 51 per cent in 2016.

Customer satisfaction statistics show that the community is happy with the service they get from Access Canberra. Ninety-seven per cent of people who visited a service centre in 2017 said that they were satisfied with their experience. That is an increase from 94 per cent in 2016.

Satisfaction with the contact centre is also up, with 91 per cent of people satisfied with their experience, which is up from 87 per cent in the previous year. Continual improvements to Access Canberra's website have also paid off, with the satisfaction of users increasing to 83 per cent in 2017 from 77 per cent in 2016.

Access Canberra has been working hard to improve its services, including expanding the number of services that can be lodged online, improving web content and design, and even redesigning the layout of our new service centres to ensure that the government is delivering its services in a way that is easy and convenient to access.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, how did we go about gathering these results, and were there any noticeable changes in the types of inquiries Canberrans are seeking answers to?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary. People were selected for the survey from randomly selected landlines and also from mobile numbers that were collected via in-person approaches in public spaces. This allows the broadest possible community views to be heard and captures younger people who tend to be excluded in landline-only surveys. As in previous years, the survey responses were then weighted to reflect the census profile of Canberra and to ensure that the survey results are truly representative of the Canberra community.

As for changes to the types of inquiries that Access Canberra are receiving, the survey showed that there has been a statistically significant increase in the number of calls that have been related to businesses as opposed to personal interactions. These calls are much more complex to deal with but, despite the increasing complexity of the inquiries they receive, satisfaction with call centres also rose. It is no doubt a reflection of the breadth of knowledge and the level of hard work that our Access Canberra employees put in day to day to help our citizens from all corners of the ACT on a huge range of issues.

MS ORR: Minister, what do Canberrans see as the most important contributor to a positive interaction with Access Canberra?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary. When it comes to what drives people's satisfaction with phone and in-person services of Access Canberra, the survey shows overwhelmingly that there are two main factors that have the largest impact on an interaction.

The first of these was how polite and willing to help the staff were during the interaction, including how thorough and fair the staff were in engaging with the customer. The second factor was the quality of the information being conveyed, such as how clear and concise the explanation was, and how easy it was to understand. Interestingly, the length of time they spent initially waiting to speak to someone was the least important indicator regarding customer satisfaction for those calling the contract centre and the second least important for those coming into a service centre.

Given the high levels of satisfaction with our contact and service centres, it is clear that the staff of Access Canberra are providing a high value, thorough and knowledgeable service to the community in Canberra. Access Canberra will continue to look at ways it can improve services so it can continue to improve for our citizens.

The survey provides some useful insights into what is working well and where it could improve. Using the information gathered, we can improve our services and provide easy to access options for those seeking to interact with government. I look forward to releasing the full survey report in the near future.

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